

OF WORK AND WORDS: CRAFT AS A WAY OF TELLING*

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Resumo: Este capítulo levanta o problema posto pela noção de conhecimento incorporado, concentrando-se no hábito — o hábito de artesãos, músicos e investigadores. O que nele se expõe tem duas componentes. A primeira é a de mostrar que os hábitos que permitem aos praticantes de qualquer atividade prosseguir na realização das suas tarefas não são tácitos nem estão sedimentados no corpo, mas são gerados e postos em prática em correspondência atenta e cinestésica com os utensílios, os materiais e o ambiente. Essa correspondência não é silenciosa e parada, mas barulhenta e turbulenta, aberta e viva em relação ao mundo. Para descrever essa realidade, adotamos a noção de hapticalidade. No âmbito da hapticalidade, o pensamento é a agitação de uma mente que se move e é movida pelos sons e pelos sentimentos do ambiente. É por isso que a ação habitual é também ponderada, caracterizada por uma consciência que não é tanto cognitiva quanto

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«concentrative». Isso conduz à segunda parte do que é exposto, e que mostra que as palavras também são coisas vivas, imersas nas correntes da hapticalidade. Assim, refuta-se a oposição, que se incorporou na própria constituição da academia, entre verbalização e incorporação. Trabalho e palavras, insistimos nesse ponto, são animados. Ambos se desdobram no hábito e possibilitam os diversos modos de contar, de dizer.

Palavras-chave: concentração; artesanato; incorporação; explicação; hábito; hapticalidade; silêncio; conhecimento tácito; contar/dizer; verbalização.

Abstract: This chapter takes issue with the notion of embodied knowledge by focusing on habit — the habit of craftsmen, artisans, musicians and scholars. The argument has two components. The first is to show that the habits that enable practitioners to move on in the accomplishment of their tasks are neither tacit nor sedimented in the body but generated and enacted in an attentive and kinaesthetic correspondence with tools, materials and environment. This correspondence is not silent and still but noisy and turbulent, open and alive to the world. To describe it, we adopt the notion of *hapticality*. In the domain of hapticality, thinking is the churn of a mind that stirs and is stirred by the sounds and feelings of the milieu. This is why habitual action is also thoughtful, characterised by an awareness that is not so much cognitive as concentrative. This leads to the second part of the argument, which is to show that words, too, are living things, immersed in the currents of hapticality. Thus we refute the opposition, built into the constitution of the academy, between verbalisation and embodiment. Work and words, we insist, are animate. They both unfold in habit and afford ways of telling.

Keywords: concentration; craft; embodiment; explication; habit; hapticality; silence; tacit knowledge; telling; verbalisation.

PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE *HABITUS*

The greater part of what we know, we cannot explain. This is *savoir-faire*, or know-how. The philosopher Michael Polanyi¹ called it «personal knowledge» — knowledge that adheres so closely to the person of the practitioner that it cannot be held up to scrutiny or posited as an object of reflection or analysis. Without it, Polanyi argued, nothing could be practicably accomplished. We could not tie our shoelaces, beat an egg, hold a pen, or ride a bicycle. But nor, for that matter, could we design a building, solve an equation, or compose a symphony. In these as in countless other tasks, we «feel our way forward», as Polanyi put it², following a trail and relaying it as we go instead of executing a predetermined and fully articulated programme of explicit rules or representations. It is not that there are no rules at all. But rather than furnishing the pegs that underpin the landscape of action, they more resemble signposts in the landscape itself, which point us in the direction we need to go. They are what we call rules of thumb, offering guidance without specification. In practice, they are more ostensive than prescriptive. Once set upon a course, we rely upon the reservoir of personal knowledge to carry on. To reveal this repertoire, according to Polanyi, it is necessary to strip away the veneer of articulate representations, and thereby to «lay bare the inarticulate manifestations of intelligence

¹ POLANYI, 1958.

² POLANYI, 1958, 62.

by which we know things in a purely personal manner». It is to open up «an immense mental domain, not only of knowledge but of manners, of laws and of the many different arts by which man knows how to use, comply with, enjoy or live by, without specifiably knowing their contents»³.

Now here as elsewhere, Polanyi could hardly have been more emphatic that what his inquiries had disclosed was a realm of *mind* — a «mental domain» — the existence of which had been previously unacknowledged, or that until then, had not been accorded its due. Yet his discovery was destined to suffer an ignominious fate at the hands of subsequent social theory which had, albeit belatedly, realised that human beings are only present in the world because they have, or rather *are*, their bodies. This realisation is commonly traced back to an influential essay on «Techniques of the body», penned by the ethnologist Marcel Mauss in 1934⁴. Drawing attention to the sheer diversity of postures and gestures involved in such everyday tasks as walking, carrying loads, eating and sleeping, Mauss realised that there is more to this than the kind of idiosyncratic variation that marks one individual from another and that in French would be called *habitude*. It is not just a matter of what you might happen to pick up or, conversely, of what you might improvise for yourself. Some children, Mauss noted, are more inclined than others to imitate the behaviour they observe around them, yet both weak and strong imitators, if they belong to the same society, are similarly educated by example and correction into forms of bodily comportment deemed proper to their age and status. To denote these forms, socially imposed rather than individually acquired, attributable to education rather than imitation, and thus enshrined in a tradition, Mauss co-opted the Latin term *habitus*⁵.

Mauss's prospectus for a comparative ethnology of techniques of the body was sketchy at best, and was soon forgotten by the anthropology of the time. With its fragmentary catalogue of apparently miscellaneous customs from around the world, the essay was so anachronistic in its formulation, and yet so far ahead of its time in terms of the questions it opened up, that it largely fell on deaf ears. Thus when some forty years later, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu⁶ reintroduced the *habitus* as the centrepiece of a theory of practice centred upon the dispositions of the body, few recalled that he was following the precedent set by Mauss — nor did Bourdieu go out of his way to acknowledge the fact. Perhaps it was as well that he did not, since he took the term in a quite different sense. By *habitus*, Bourdieu means a kind of practical mastery — a capacity to improvise conduct strategically attuned to the conditions of its production — that is neither picked up haphazardly, as one might pick up an infection, simply through personal contact,

³ POLANYI, 1958: 65-67.

⁴ MAUSS, 1973.

⁵ MAUSS, 1973: 73.

⁶ BOURDIEU, 1977.

nor deliberately inculcated through precept and prescription. «Every society», Bourdieu writes, «provides for *structural exercises* tending to transmit this or that form of practical mastery»⁷. They are exercises in which a body participates not as an instrumental means for the implementation or expression of a moral tradition but as a productive agent in its own right. Its postures and gestures, far from merely expressing thoughts and feelings already imparted through an education into societal values, are in themselves ways of thinking and feeling, through which these values are continually re-produced.

Now crucially, according to Bourdieu, the principles of mastery that are passed on by way of these exercises never rise to what he calls «the level of discourse»⁸. Psychologically, they remain underground, beyond the reach of consciousness. They cannot be articulated, or rendered explicit. Ineffable, incommunicable and therefore inimitable by any conscious effort, these principles are given body, made body, or literally *embodied*, as Bourdieu puts it, «by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy»⁹. So far as I know, Bourdieu makes no reference to the work of Polanyi: he may not even have read it. There are however uncanny parallels between Polanyi's notion of personal knowledge and the particular construction that Bourdieu places upon the *habitus*. The claim Polanyi makes for personal knowledge, that it cannot be articulated or specified, that it is non-propositional and non-declarative, that it is acquired and deployed without conscious awareness — or, in a word, that it is *tacit* — but that it subtends and makes possible everything we think and do, is precisely the claim that Bourdieu makes for the *habitus*. It is not surprising, therefore, that for the generation of social scientists brought up on Bourdieu — and I am one of them — the temptation is to look back at Polanyi through Bourdieuvian spectacles, and to jump to the conclusion that by personal or tacit knowledge, he meant a knowledge whose proper domain is the body. Indeed Polanyi has even been criticised, in his insistence on the division between tacit and explicit knowledge, for reproducing a Cartesian dualism of body and mind! In the vocabulary of many analysts, «tacit» and «embodied» have come to mean the same thing. Yet nothing could have been further from Polanyi's intention. For as I have already noted, he was emphatic in his verdict that personal knowledge inhabits the mind. If there is a division between the explicit and the tacit, it is between two regions of the mind, not between mind and body.

THE SILENCE OF EXPLICATION

In this chapter I want to take issue with the notion of embodied knowledge, by focusing on what I shall call *habit* – the habit of craftsmen, artisans, musicians and scholars. My argument has two components. The first is to show that the habits that enable practitioners to move on in the accomplishment of their tasks are not so much

⁷ BOURDIEU, 1977: 88.

⁸ BOURDIEU, 1977: 87.

⁹ BOURDIEU, 1977: 94.

sedimented in the body as generated and enacted in an attentive and kinaesthetic correspondence with tools, materials and environment. And the second is to insist that this is as true of working with words as it is of working with non-verbal materials. To reach the domain of habitual practice, then, does not mean giving up on words, or probing beneath them. But it does mean giving up on the techniques of intellectual distillation that allow words to float to the top, and habits to sink to the bottom, of some imaginary column of consciousness (see Figure 1). And these techniques, I contend, are themselves sustained and reproduced in the practices of the academy. For who, other than academics, would be so pompous as to exclude from discourse anything that cannot be expressed in formal, propositional terms? Who else would dismiss as inarticulate, or even sub-linguistic, any expressions that do not conform to standards of logical rigour? It is in their minds, and theirs alone, that the myth persists of the silent craftsman, apparently struck dumb when challenged to tell of what he does or how he does it. True, he may not be able to spell it out in explicit detail. But this does not mean he is lost for words. It is one thing to argue that habits resist explication; quite another that they resist verbalisation. That the two have become confused owes much to ambiguities inherent in the notion of the tacit, and it is to these that I turn first of all.

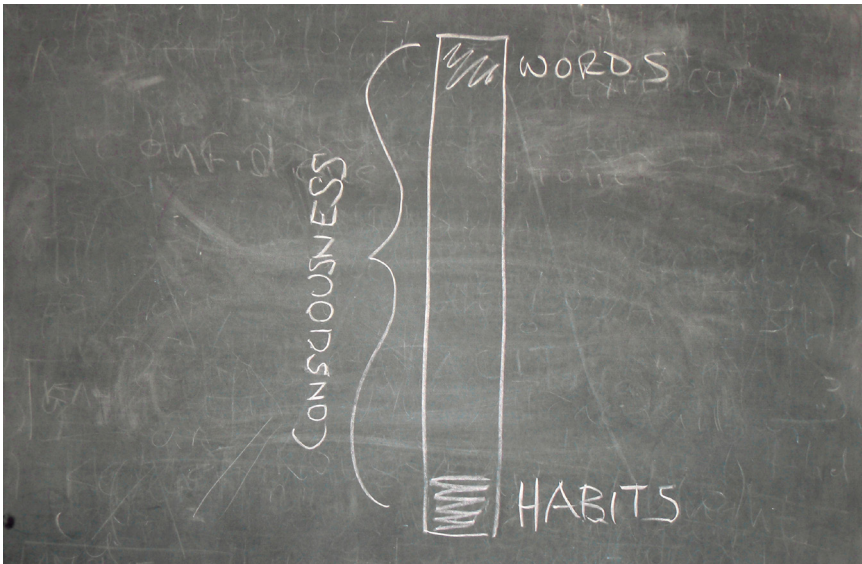


Figure 1.

«Whereof one cannot speak», concluded Ludwig Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, «thereof one must be silent»¹⁰. Taken literally, this austere

¹⁰ WITTGENSTEIN, 1922: 90.

pronouncement would consign to an ocean of silence all ways of knowing and doing, all wisdom and experience, save that which can be expressed, linguistically or mathematically, in the form of logically interconnected propositions. Now it was Polanyi's contention, of course, that these expressions amounted to no more than the tip of an iceberg, the overwhelming mass of which lay submerged beneath the waves (see Figure 2). His purpose was not to denigrate this submarine dimension but to highlight its contribution to thought and practice. The things of which we cannot speak, he would say, are also things without which we cannot do. Or as he put it, introducing a set of lectures entitled *The Tacit Dimension*, «we can know more than we can tell»¹¹. But why did he choose the word «tacit» to refer to this untold and untellable residue? The word itself is tantalisingly vague. Derived from the Latin *tacere*, «to be silent», it refers in the first place to that which remains unvoiced. Yet voiced sounds need not be verbal, and verbal utterances need have no explicit propositional content. What are we to make, for example, of a song without words? And what of an utterance the force of which illocutionary — such as a warning, a greeting or a direction? Conversely, of many things that could be stated explicitly we may prefer to keep our mouths shut, for reasons of discretion or security. As philosopher of science Harry Collins explains, in an extended commentary on the tacit/explicit distinction, whether a matter is voiced or even verbal is not really the issue for Polanyi. The tacit, for him is not so much the opposite of «explicit» as of «explicable». It consists of things that cannot, by their very nature, be explicated¹².

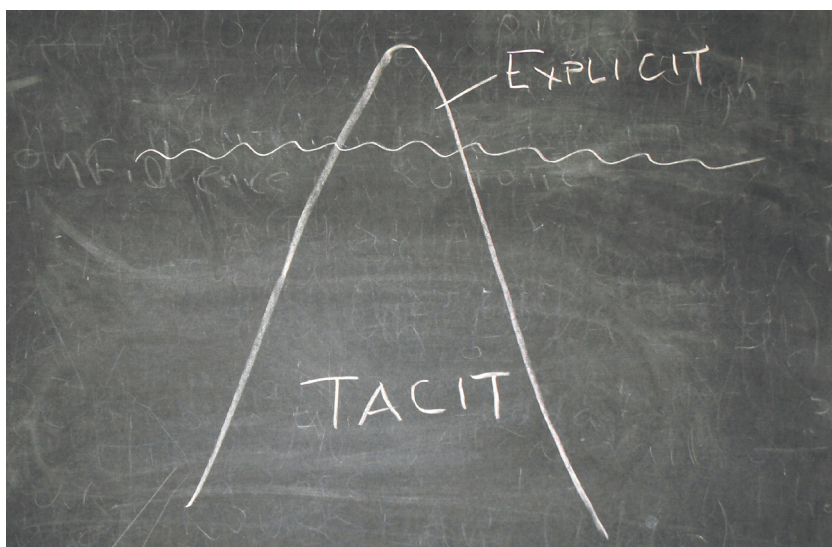


Figure 2.

¹¹ POLANYI, 1966: 4.

¹² COLLINS, 2010: 4.

So what does Polanyi mean by explication? Two terms keep cropping up in his account of what it entails, namely, specification and articulation¹³. To specify means to pin things down to fixed coordinates of reference; to articulate means to join them up into a complete structure. Thus we specify when we plot dots on a graph, enter values in an equation, or type words on a page; we articulate when we join them up: dots with lines, values with plus or minus signs, words with spaces. As these examples indicate, explication is not limited to verbal forms; it may also be algebraic or mathematical, or expressed in the peculiar language of symbolic logic. And it may also occur in the conventions of musical notation, where each note is specified by a dot, and where the dots are joined into phrases by ligatures. What do the graph, the mathematical equation, the written sentence and the scored phrase have in common? They are all absolutely silent. Where everything is pinned down and joined up, nothing can move. And without movement there can be no sound. Specification and articulation, while they may be the keys to logical explication, lock the doors to movement, to sound and to feeling. They stop it up. This brings us, however, to a rather surprising result. It is that nothing so effectively silences the world than rendering it in explicit, propositional terms. Indeed *it is the explicit that is tacit*, not the reservoir of habit or know-how for which Polanyi reserved the term. Habit, on the other hand, is turbulent and sometimes noisy. It swirls around in between the points that explicit knowledge joins up, like waters flowing around and between the islands of an archipelago¹⁴.



Figure 3.

¹³ See, for example, POLANYI, 1958: 88.

¹⁴ INGOLD, 2013: 111, see Figure 3.

We have been persistently misled, I think, by the analogy of the iceberg, with the picture it presents of explicit knowledge at the tip and the mass of inexplicable know-how below. For far from having come to rest, frozen in submarine psycho-corporeal depths, know-how is restless, fluid and dynamic. Above all, it is not deposited as a stable substrate, housed in lower levels of consciousness, but is fundamentally animate — immanent in the sensuousness of a body that is mobile, alive and open to the world. Such a body, unified not anatomically but in its affective resonances, far from retreating into silence, dwells in sound. Habits, in short, are not embodied; rather the body — in its habitation of a world — is ensounded. Consider what happens, for example, when I play a single note on an open string of my cello. On the score the note is specified by a dot, crossed by a stave line. There it is, silent, lifeless and inert. But as soon as I begin to play, it erupts into sound, into life. The notated point becomes a sustained and vibrant line. This is no simple matter, and to succeed in it my body must be finely balanced and tensed throughout, with an acute awareness of its immediate environs, while my right arm, elbow and wrist undergo a controlled movement to ensure that the position where the bow touches the string, between bridge and fingerboard, remains more or less constant. The sound arises from this complex choreography of highly attentive, mutually attuned movements. It is not possible to play without also feeling, without continually attending and responding both to one's own movements and to those going on in one's surroundings. Indeed in bowing a note on the cello as in any other task, as even Polanyi acknowledged¹⁵, we «feel our way forward». Yet in the appeal to the tacit this entire domain of feeling is blanked out; silenced and stilled.

TELLING IN THE ZONE OF HAPTICALITY

Tacit, in short, is a misnomer for the dimension of habitual practice. By what better term, then, should it be known? I would like to borrow a concept from educational theorist Stefano Harney and literary scholar Fred Moten, namely *hapticality*. It lies, in their words, in «a feel for feeling others feeling you»¹⁶. In effect, hapticality fills the void of the tacit. Where the tacit is silent, the haptic is noisy; where the tacit is embodied, the haptic is animate; where the tacit is sunk into the depths of being, the haptic is open and alive to others and to the world. With this, we can return to Wittgenstein's injunction from the *Tractatus*. The composer John Cage began his *Lecture on Nothing*, presented in New York in 1949, by declaring: «I have nothing to say and I am saying it»¹⁷. Behind the play on words, Cage was being deeply serious. We could read his declaration as a forthright rebuke to the author of the *Tractatus*. For Cage refuses to be silenced. His words may have no object, no referent, no matter to convey, yet he has a voice and will speak!

¹⁵ POLANYI, 1958: 62.

¹⁶ HARNEY & MOTEN, 2013: 98.

¹⁷ CAGE, 2011: 109.

And it behoves us to listen. For by speaking we humans make ourselves present in the world, and by listening we pay attention and respond. Cage wanted to awaken in his listeners their sense of what he called «response ability»¹⁸. Nor need this be limited to the sphere of human relations. Other kinds of beings, or other phenomena, make their presence felt in manifold ways, and we should attend to them too. We hear the calls of birds, the rustling of wind in the trees, the sound of a waterfall, and we can tell much from them — whether the birds are calm or agitated, whether the wind is gentle or strong, whether the river is dry or in spate. Neither the birds, nor the trees, nor the water have anything to say. But there they are, saying it, pronouncing their very existence in the world.

Does hapticality, then, lie on the far side of speaking, of telling? Only if, with Wittgenstein, we limit speaking to logical expression or, with Polanyi, limit telling to literate articulation. Yet in truth, no words could be spoken, nor could any story be told, without feeling. Both speaking and telling have another side, a side that — just as in playing the cello — is enacted in performance, at the moment when connected points give way to swirling lines. At this stage of my argument I want to focus on telling, and will return to speaking in due course, when I move on from works to words. Recall that for Polanyi, we can know more than we can tell. I want to argue, to the contrary, that we can tell all we know, but only because there is more to telling than articulation¹⁹. «To tell» is one of those ancient verbs that comes to us already densely packed with multiple layers of meaning. Originally, it was to count or to reckon, as does the teller who tots up the bill, whose modern representative is the accountant. An account rendered in words rather than numbers, however, is a narrative, a story. What, then is the difference between the accountant and the storyteller? One adds up, assembling in rows or columns initially separate, point-specific entries. This, as we have seen, is the work of articulation. But the other goes along, finding a way between and through the accountant's entry points. Storytellers are wayfarers²⁰. And like all wayfarers, they need to attend to things as they go, to recognise subtle cues in the environment and to respond to them with judgement and precision. They need to be able to tell, for example, where animals have been from their tracks, how the weather is about to change, how the river runs. That is the sense of telling I invoked a moment ago, in relation to the birds, the wind and the waterfall. And it is precisely what Cage meant by response ability.

Each of these two latter ways of telling, evinced respectively in storytelling and in response ability, entails the other. For it is through having their stories told that novices learn to attend to things, and to what they afford, in the situations of their current practice. Contrariwise, it is because of the resulting feel for things — a kind of intimacy that

¹⁸ CAGE, 2011: 10.

¹⁹ INGOLD, 2013: 111.

²⁰ INGOLD, 2007: 90-92.

comes from sharing a life together — that experienced practitioners can tell their stories. The capacity to tell, in these twinned senses, is critical to the practice of any craft, and it is perhaps the principal criterion by which the master can be distinguished from the novice. On the one hand, stories allow practitioners to tell of what they know without specifying it. They carry no information in themselves, no coded messages or representations. They rather offer guidance or directions which listeners, finding themselves in a situation similar to that related in the story, can recognise and follow. On the other hand, response ability allows practitioners to tune their movements to the ever-varying conditions of the task as it unfolds. This, and not in the practised ability to execute standardised movements with greater speed or ergonomic efficiency, is where real skill resides. In both senses, then, craft is a way of telling. It is a way, however, that abhors explication. It sets down nothing in advance, nor does it project a future outcome in the present. What it does do is offer an itinerary, a path to follow, along which one can keep on going. It is about feeling forward, about anticipation rather than prediction.

In the zone of hapticality, then, telling proceeds not by integration but by differentiation, not by adding or joining up what began as discrete, pre-specified entries in the book of accounts, but by finding a way through the interstices of a field of practice. It means joining with others, including the materials with which one works, along with other people and things in the environment, feeling them as they are feeling you, while at the same time distinguishing your own line from theirs. In short, haptic telling is a process of what I have elsewhere called «interstitial differentiation»²¹. It is a differentiation that proceeds along the way, in a cycle of attention and response. In wayfaring, in playing a musical instrument, in the practice of any craft, decisions have continually to be made: one decides to veer in this direction or that. But while every decision entails a cut, this cut goes along the grain of action rather than across it, splitting it like an axe through timber. This is what skill is about: not imposing form on matter but finding the grain of things and bending it to an evolving purpose²². It is no accident that the word «skill» has its roots in the Middle Low German *schillen*, «to make a difference», and in the Old Norse *skilja*, «to divide, separate, distinguish, decide»; nor that it shares an etymological affinity with the word «shell», a casing that is opened up by splitting or cleaving along the grain. Every split amounts to what philosopher Erin Manning²³ calls an inflection, not a movement in itself, but a variation in the way movement moves. In music, for example, a simple two note phrase, which in notation appears as two discrete dots articulated by a line, emerges in performance as a linear movement that bends at a point of inflection, where one pitch transitions into the other (see Figure 4). What on the score is exterior articulation, in performance is interstitial differentiation.

²¹ INGOLD, 2015: 23.

²² INGOLD, 2011: 211.

²³ MANNING, 2016: 118.

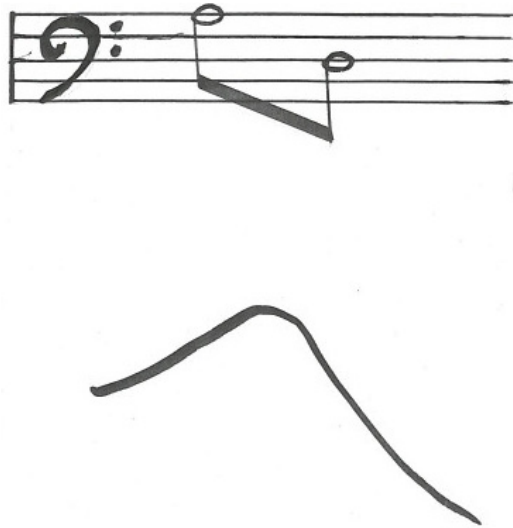


Figure 4.

VORTICES OF THINKING AND OF SOUND

All this attention and response, all these decisions, are surely proof that craft practitioners are thinking. Indeed it has become almost a cliché to say that musicians or crafts people think with their fingers, with their hands, their wrists, lungs and trunk, indeed with the whole body. But have you ever wondered why we should think that thinking should be silent? Or that it should be invisible? Surely, if thinking is not tacit but as haptic as feeling is, if it is not buried in the body but overflows into the environment, if it unfolds in the telling, then it can be just as noisy. And we can watch it too. By what curious logic are we led to suppose that while we can watch the gestures of the potter as they caress the clay on the wheel, or hear the bowing of the cellist on the strings, the thought of both cellist and potter remains both invisible and inaudible? This logic is perhaps the legacy of a Cartesian division between cognition and action that continues to plague much theorising on these matters. For with this division, every deliberate action must be preceded by a thought which it serves to execute. Inevitably, then, thought breaks into action, interrupts it, gets in the way. It can even be said to paralyse action, as in the apocryphal story of the millipede which, when asked how it managed to co-ordinate the movement of its thousand legs, never moved again. Yet manifestly, craftspeople are not paralysed by thought. For they are perfectly capable of thinking, even of reflecting on what they are doing and of assessing their work, without ever breaking away from performance. «Reflection», as anthropologist Anna Portisch writes, «is a constitutive aspect of all levels of practice»²⁴.

²⁴ PORTISCH, 2010: 69.

Portisch pitches her critique against many students of craft practice, myself included²⁵, who have argued that the frequent need to reflect on progress, or to stop-and-check, is typical of novice practitioners, giving their work a jerky or stop-go character which gradually disappears with increasing mastery of the craft. In this view, the more fluent the practitioner, the less reflective the practice. But from her own study of women's crafts in Mongolia, Portisch concludes, to the contrary, that reflection and assessment are integral to the practices of novices and accomplished craftswomen alike. Learning a craft, she argues, is at every level a process that is both dynamic and responsive, involving a continual dialogue with one's environment²⁶. I am persuaded by her argument, but I still wonder whether reflection and assessment mean quite the same thing for the novice as for the old hand. It seems to me that the difference lies in the extent to which the practitioner has incorporated the tools and materials of her trade, as well as other salient constituents of the environment, into the dialogue itself. True, the old-hand is as thoughtful, as meditative and reflective, as the novice, if not more so. But perhaps she is thinking with things more than she is thinking about them, letting them in as accessory to her own reflections. Perhaps her thinking is that of a mind that is not confined within the body but that extends outwards to include tools, materials and surrounding conditions, or what philosopher of cognition Andy Clark²⁷ calls its «wideware». Could the measure of enskilment lie in the distal extension of the mind, radiating outwards from its seat in the body? The answer depends on how we choose to describe the mind.

For Clark, the mind is essentially a computational device that works to produce solutions to problems posed by the environment, on the basis of information received. But this device may include extra-somatic components. A mathematician, for example, may use pencil and notepad to perform a calculation, and a navigator takes up ruler and compass to plot a course. Thus pencil and paper in the one case, and ruler and compass in the other, are integral to the «extended mind» of mathematician and navigator respectively. To explain what he means by the extended mind, and by way of analogy, Clark asks us to consider the prodigious talents of a fish, the bluefin tuna. Why, Clark asks, can the tuna swim so fast? The answer is that it couples its own bodily energies to the fluid dynamics of the water through which it swims, setting up eddies and vortices through the swishing of its tail and fins which themselves exert a propulsive momentum beyond any muscular force of which the fish alone is capable. Swimming, then, is not an achievement of the fish alone but of what Clark calls a swimming machine, comprised by «the fish in its proper context: the fish plus the surrounding structures and vortices that it actively creates and then maximally exploits»²⁸. Thus, strictly speaking,

²⁵ INGOLD, 2000: 415.

²⁶ PORTISCH, 2010: 71-73.

²⁷ CLARK, 1998.

²⁸ CLARK, 1998: 272.

it is not the fish that swims, but the fish-in-the-water. And it is just the same, he suggests, with the mathematician and the navigator. If the totality «fish-plus-eddies-plus-vortices» comprises a mechanism for swimming, so the totality «mathematician-plus-pencil-plus-notepad» or «navigator-plus-ruler-plus-compass» comprises a mechanism for computation. The cognitive machine, in the human case, is extended in just the way that the swimming machine is for the fish.

Or is it? I am not so sure that swimming can be understood in such mechanical terms. After all, eddies and vortices cannot exactly be connected up like the wheels, cranks and pistons of an engine, in such a way as to deliver propulsion as a motor effect. They are energetic movements in themselves, as indeed is the fish. To borrow an expression from philosopher Stanley Cavell, the fish-in-the-water – like every other living being in its proper medium – is a «whirl»²⁹. It is not an object that moves but the emergent form of a movement. Might the fish, then, offer a better analogy for why the thinking that goes into craft practice cannot be understood in computational terms? Perhaps we could say of this thinking, too, that it is a churning of the mind, as it stirs up and is in turn stirred by the sounds and feelings of its milieu. The mind, then, is not so much a computational device as a vortex in the mix. How else can a player armed only with a cello make such an immense and variable sound? How can a potter armed only with a wheel turn clay into the myriad forms of jugs and vessels? How can the scribe, armed only with a pen, turn parchment into text? Not, surely, because the practitioner's brain, body and instrument, joined together, make up a machine, whether for playing, potting or writing.

The fact is that I do not take up my cello and bow, as I might a notepad and pencil, or ruler and compass, in order to achieve results that I could not accomplish unaided. For I am not chained anatomically to the instrument; rather my breath, touch, manual gesture and spinal posture join in unison with wood, hair and metal. It is the same for the potter, whose hands join with the clay, in the rotation of the wheel, in such a way as to give form to the contours of feeling. And it is the same for the scribe, whose every gesture leaves its mark, by way of the pen, on the writing surface. In every case, the anatomical unity of practitioner plus instrument gives way to a hapticality of sensory awareness and vital materials. It is for this reason that I believe we should resist the temptation to describe mind, body and world as overlapping circles which, in their enlargement, are inclined to encroach upon or even encompass each other's domains. The mind is not «taken into» the body, as conventional appeals to the concept of embodiment tend to imply, nor does it «take up» the world, as implied by the theory of its extension. The fish-in-the-water gives us a better picture, in my view, of a whirligig world of spiralling movements that run into one another: of thinking spiralling into vortices of sound, into

²⁹ CAVELL, 1969: 52.

rounded vessels of clay, into the oscillations of the scribal letter-line, all of them dynamically sustained formations in the current of life (see Figure 5).

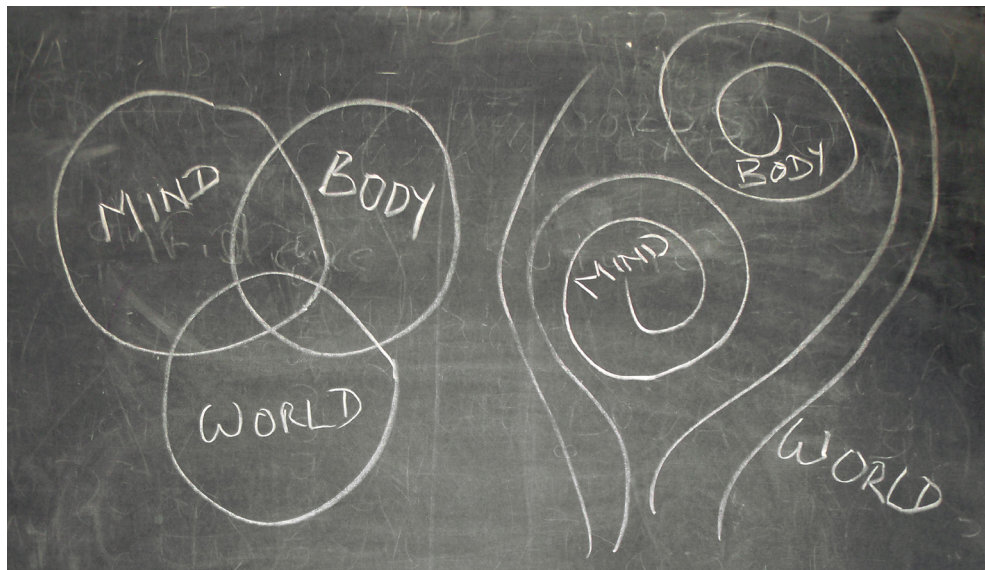


Figure 5.

THE PRINCIPLE OF HABIT

We have come a long way from Bourdieu, and from his understanding of the *habitus* as a set of dispositions that both generate the mastery of the skilled practitioner, and are in turn generated by it, all beneath the radar of conscious awareness. For what we have discovered, on the other side of explicit logical articulation, is not a lack of awareness but an awareness of a different kind. It is the awareness of feeling others feeling you — or in a word, it is hapticality. This explains why craftspeople, absorbed into their tasks, by their own report tend to experience their own presence and movement, and the presence and movement of the persons and things with whom and with which they engage, with heightened rather than diminished intensity. Colloquially, the word we use for this is concentration. By this, we don't mean the kind of cognitive processing that delivers solutions for implementation. It is not the operation of a joined-up computational mechanism, whether inside the head or extending beyond it. Concentration lies rather in the affective unison of haptic and kinaesthetic awareness with the movement and vitality of materials. The recognition of this other form of awareness, concentrative rather than cognitive, haptic rather than explicit, allows us at last to resolve a question to which the answer has long eluded us. For there is no doubt that many things we routinely do involve no concentration at all. We are often scarcely aware we are doing

them. With these operations, the more practised we are at them, the less thought and attention they demand of us. They are markedly unresponsive to surrounding conditions, to the extent that if conditions change they can break down or lead us astray. They seem virtually automatic. In principle, automatic operations could just as well be done by machine, and indeed in the history of technology they have often been among the first to be mechanised. The question is: how are we to distinguish such automatisms from the practised mastery of a craft?

If no other awareness were possible save that which reflects and reports on practice from the outside, which intrudes into it and holds it to account, then we would risk reducing craft practice to the level of bodily automatism. It would be negatively characterised by the absence of conscious deliberation. And to an extent, this is precisely what has happened in social scientific writing on embodiment and the tacit dimension. You would think, from reading much of this literature, that there is not much difference between touch-typing and performing a Rachmaninov piano concerto. It may be that the latter is a lot more difficult, and takes a great deal of practice that none but the most dedicated musician would willingly endure. In both cases, however, we are led to believe that it is all a matter of leaving the fingers to take care of themselves, freeing the mind for higher things. But if the pianist is truly thinking with his fingers, if his thought flies with the sounds of the keys, if he feels the presence of listeners whose ears stretch to catch every passing sound, and if he and they are truly moved by the experience, then there is all the difference in the world between his performance and — say — that of a player-piano that has been mechanically programmed to reproduce the same piece. And the difference is simply this: the master-pianist's performance unfolds along a way of telling, the machine performance does not. The pianist, as Cage would put it, has nothing to tell, but is telling it. All true craft, as I have endeavoured to show, is a way of telling.

The ossification of telling in the language of embodiment, its reduction to a kind of sediment, has its parallel in the way we tend to speak of habit. It has become common to treat as habits the things we do unthinkingly, and without consideration. They are often regarded as the unwanted detritus of ordinary activity, behaviours that have fallen out of active commerce with the world and become stuck in repetitive patterns that may have meant something once but no longer have significance today. They do not require to be learned so much as unlearned. Usually they are judged to be bad. When did you last hear anyone talking about their «good habits»? But I believe there is more to habit than this, for it is a word that speaks more affirmatively of custom, of use, of dress, and even of care. I would like to think of habit, like craft, as a way of telling. And what is most particular to it is the way the practitioner is inside the action. The difficulty with the concept of habit has always been to decide where to place the doer³⁰. Are we, so to speak, in front of our

³⁰ See CARLISLE, 2014.

habits or behind them? Do we make our habits or do our habits make us? The problem arises so long as we are forced to choose between the active and the passive voice of the verb, that is, between what we do and what we undergo. But in his reflections on Art as Experience, philosopher John Dewey argued that we would do better to understand habit in terms of the relation between the two. Neither in front of what we do nor behind it, we are in the midst: our doing is also our undergoing, what we do is also done in us. In our intercourse with the world, Dewey explained, we also inhabit the world³¹. Or in a word, we dwell in habit. This, perhaps, is as good a definition as any of what it means to practise a craft. A way of telling is also a way of dwelling, of inhabiting. Moreover, it is also a way of using. To use something, after all, is to draw it into your habitual, or usual, pattern of activity. Both you and it become brothers-in-arms, working together to joint effect. And conversely, to be used to a thing is to accept it into your life as part of your custom. When what we use is words, ways of telling become ways of speaking. And this brings me to the final part of my argument, in which I shift my focus from works to words.

BEYOND VERBALISATION AND EMBODIMENT

For most of us, as we go about our lives, words furnish our principal means of telling. With them, we invite others to gather round, converse with them, join our own life-stories with theirs, attend and respond to what they say and do. Enriched by the patina of everyday use, ever-varying in texture, they rise up in the gestures of the mouth and lips in speech, or spill out onto the page in the traces of the writer's hand. They can be noisy or quiet, turbulent or serene. Words, spoken or handwritten, echo to the pulse of things. They are conducive to rumination and enliven the spirit, which responds in kind. They can caress, startle, enchant, repel. As philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty once put it³², they are so many ways we have of singing the world and its praises. We could say that words mediate a poetics of habitation. Yet as we look around, it seems that something has gone seriously wrong in our relations with words. It is as though they have turned against us, or we against them. We routinely hold them to blame for the suppression of feeling, or for failing to account for the authenticity of experience. To get to what it really feels like, we insist, we have to get beneath the words, or behind them. Words, it seems, are no longer our habit, our custom or our dress. Rather, they have become the means by which we dress things up, coating them with a gloss that obscures the truth these things might otherwise tell if left to be themselves. Of course there are still people who use words to plumb the depths of human feeling. But they have become the purveyors of a specialist, and for many an arcane, craft. Instead of inhabiting the world poetically, we have created a little niche in the inhabited world for poets³³.

³¹ DEWEY, 1987: 109; cf. INGOLD, 2018: 21-22.

³² MERLEAU-PONTY, 1962: 187.

³³ GELL, 1979: 61.

Perhaps no contemporary community has developed more of an antipathy towards words than that which principally works with them. I mean the community of scholars, and above all, those scholars who would regard themselves as academics. Scholars are people who study; academic scholars, however, think of study in a particular way. For far from studying with the world, or allowing themselves to be taught by it, they make studies of the world, claiming in so doing to have reached heights of intellectual superiority from which things are revealed with a clarity and a definition denied to ordinary folk. In their discourse, wholly given over to projects of explication, words have been stripped of their power to move, to affect or to evoke. They are drained of feeling, and barred from contact with the things of which they speak. Rather like the instruments of the surgeon, they are kept immaculately clean to prevent any risk of infection. Once infected, a word should immediately be sterilised, lest it should pollute other things with it might come into contact. If a word too closely associated with one thing is applied to another, then the division between them might become blurred, heralding cognitive dissonance. In the surgery of academic thought, dedicated to the repair of such dissonances, it is essential that categorical boundaries are maintained, and it is the job of words to do so: to put things at a distance, to pin them down, to impose a discipline, and to hold an otherwise unruly world to account. This sovereign perspective requires of academics that they keep their distance from the matters of their concern, and do not get their hands dirty by mingling with them. This is what they mean by objectivity, and words are the means by which they achieve it.

This is why academic words so often sound neutered, their force annulled by a triple lock of suffixes: -ise, -ate, and -ion. Thus does «use», for example, become «utilisation». As I have already mentioned, to use something, and be used to it, is to draw it into your custom. Not so, however, with utilisation. For to utilise an object is to turn it to one's benefit while holding it at a remove. It is to deny any affective involvement, or common feeling. The same goes for many other weapons of the academics' armoury. If they never use anything if not to «utilise»; then nor do they say anything if not to «articulate», mean anything if not to «signify», tell anything if not to «explicate». The academic does not feel words welling up in his mouth as he speaks or in his hand as he writes. They do not form as affectations of the soul, nor do they take shape in the inflections of vocal or manual gesture. Words for him are objects, to be arranged and rearranged like building blocks, in different combinations and permutations, to form sentences. In short, the academic is an articulator of verbal compositions. To articulate, as we have already seen, is to join things up, not to join with them. That is why the idea of word-processing, anathema to the writer's craft, found such a warm reception in the land of academia. If words are objects, to be arranged at will, what could be more natural than serving them to a machine for processing? The combination of keyboard, screen and printer — the typical

apparatus of the academic writer — allows for verbal composition without any sentient involvement on the part of those who «write» with it.

The appeal to signification, likewise, is a way of holding the world at a distance. To find what things mean, you only have to work with them. But in a world of signs we never touch anything directly; feeling is interrupted. Signification breaks the link of direct perception, just as articulation breaks the link between hand and word. If meaning is hands-on; signification is hands-off. So it is, too, with explication. It is not enough for the academic to tell of what he knows. It must be explicated, spelled out in a joined-up sequence. Every such sequence is a sentence. But «sentence» has a double meaning: it is also a term of incarceration imposed by a judge. As the criminal is sentenced in the court of law, so words are sentenced in the court of explication³⁴. Here in this court, academics are both judge and jury, both author and reviewers. Between them, they conspire to hold all words captive, and to prevent their escape into sentient life. Yet ironically, the very word «sentence» comes from the same root as «sentience», and has acquired its current meanings — in the fields of both language and law — from the repression of feeling. It is a repression, clearly, for which most academics feel a shadow of guilt. Their tendency, however, is to shift the guilt onto their accessories, onto the words themselves. For having first used words to put things at a distance they then accuse not just their words but all words of setting up obstacles, of getting in the way of the unmediated relation with lived experience for which they yearn. Having thus rendered this experience wordless, and thus tacit, it is left to sink into the inaccessible depths of the body.

The result is the opposition between verbalisation and embodiment, the one allegedly explicit, the other tacit, that so much academic analysis has taken as its starting point. My objective, to the contrary, has been to restore both words and habits, ways of speaking and ways of telling, to hapticality. Habits are no more sedimented in the body than words liberated from it; rather, both words and habits are animate. They are ways of being alive. Let's not be afraid, then, to meet the world with words. Other creatures do it differently, but verbal intercourse has always been our human way, and our entitlement. Words are human things. But let these be words of greeting, not of confrontation, of questioning, not of interrogation or interview, of response, not of representation, of anticipation, not of prediction. This is not to say that we should all become poets or novelists, let alone that we should seek to emulate philosophers who, when it comes to their worldly involvements, have signally failed to practice what they preach, and for whom neither coherence of thought nor clarity of expression has ever been among their strongest suits. But it does mean that we scholars should work our words as craftspeople work their materials, in ways that testify, in their inscriptive traces, to the labour of their production, and that offer these inscriptions as things of beauty in themselves.

³⁴ INGOLD, 2018: 51.

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