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The sociality of enskilment

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ABSTRACT: This article uses a reflection on the quality of the time of enskilment as a way of addressing the relationship between sociality and enskilment. I look at key moments from my field research and learning experience in the workshop of a Taiwanese craftsman. The analysis of these moments reveals the complex, multimodal nature of the interactions between mentor and learner. I use the concept of enchronic time (Enfield) to trace these interactions as they unfold in the situated time of learning. In such contexts, I argue that there is no qualitative shift between sociality and enskilment, and we should thus conceptualise social interactions as being an integral part of the resulting technical skills, dispositions and work ethics of the learner.

KEYWORDS: Enskilment, time, sociality, learning, craft

The sociality of enskilment

How do skills accrue? Bourdieu used the image of sedimentation to describe the accruing of *habitus* in the body, an image borrowed from Merleau-Ponty (Csordas 1993, 62–64; Herzfeld 2004, 37) that implies incrementation and historicity. In the same way, in activity theory, an activity contains the sediments of past activities (Engeström 1993). Grasseni (2004, 45) uses this same image of sedimentation to speak more specifically about skills, in her case 'skilled vision' (c.f. Knappett 2011). Clearly, it takes time to acquire skills; anthropologists have described the apparently endless repetitiveness of tasks and procedures that are part of an apprenticeship (e.g. Wacquant 2005; Gowlland 2012), procedures that are at first awkward and eventually become second nature. But what kind of time is this? What is the quality of the time of enskilment? A motif that appears in the literature on enskilment is that skills do not develop linearly, there is a shift in the quality of one's engagement in a skilled practice (e.g. Ingold 2000, 406–19; Marchand 2007; O'Connor 2006). At one moment it feels awkward, and then it becomes natural; we practice over and over the same routines, and suddenly things click into place, and we 'get it'. The unfolding time of enskilment is not linear, at moments it accelerates and at other moments it seems to drag on, mirrored by the boredom one might feel during endless repetitive practice. This unfolding, non-linear, time of enskilment is not only of a skill becoming engrained, accrued, in our muscles and minds, it is also unfolding social time, time spent not necessarily alone, or necessarily not always alone. Practice in a workshop involves solitary practice, but also interaction with more experienced practitioners, with peers and those in a more novice position. This is not only the time of instruction and explicit directives, but the time of interruptions, conversations, exchanges of jokes and gossip, or visits of peers from other workshops. For Lave and Wenger (1991), becoming proficient is part and parcel of developing an identity as a practitioner. Trevor Marchand (2008) has in the same way noted how the knowledge gained by an apprentice is only in part made up of skills and procedural knowledge – it is also about the shaping of worldviews, and the carving of a social position within a community of practitioners.

The point I will be making in this article is not simply that the origin of skills is social – this is a point that has been made repeatedly before in the anthropological literature on learning (e.g. Pálsson 1994; Marchand 2008, 2007; Downey 2008; Lave and Wenger 1991; Ingold 2001). Rather, I build on this assumption and previous literature, and argue that there is scope to expand on our understanding of how, and in what ways, social processes shape the process of enskilment – and vice-versa. I suggest novel ways of understanding the relationship between practical knowledge and the social life that surrounds its acquisition, by broadening the scope of what we consider relevant forms of interaction in learning. Social interactions take particular forms in the context of a workshop, if only because practice, working with tools and engagements with materials, are co-occuring with such sociality. I use the term sociality to highlight the processes and particulars of social interactions, and borrow insights from the sociolinguistics scholarship to make sense of some of the forms of sociality I encountered during my field research in Taiwan, learning ceramics in the workshop of a master. Returning from the field and looking through my audio-visual recordings and field notes of my experiences, I was struck by the complexity and layered nature of exchanges with my master. Existing theories of enskilment accounted for much, but not all, of what is happening in these interactions. Wanting to understand their complexity led me to look towards the sociolinguistics literature to find clues as to what might be happening in the exchanges that surround and accompany learning. I will suggest in this article an analytic framework that can direct our attention to elements in an interaction that might otherwise be overlooked, and remove some of the filters we might bring to the analysis by treating all the aspects of interaction, apparently relevant or not to the development of skills, on an equal footing. Beyond 'filling the gaps' in our accounts of interactions in learning, this perspective can also, I argue, lead us to view the process of enskilment in a different light, and see elements of the relations between people, including misunderstandings, trust, social positions, and ideas about the person, as intrinsic to the resulting acquired procedural knowledge, rather than simply a necessary frame for its development.

In anthropology, there has been a resurgence of interest in sociality, with several recent major publications on the topic (Long and Moore 2013; Duranti 1997; Monaghan 2011; Remme and Sillander 2017), as well as other endeavours in sociolinguistics and in interdisciplinary collaborations (Enfield 2009; Enfield and Levinson 2006;

Streeck, Goodwin, and LeBaron 2011; Brassac et al. 2008; Goodwin 2007). Interest in sociality stems from a need to understand how mundane interactions and conversations leads to the co-creation of meaning, and the co-becoming of persons. As Toren puts it, ‘in the case of human beings and other social animals, the self-creating process (which ends only with death) is embedded in close and continuing relations with conspecifics. In other words, I can become myself only in relations with other humans who are also becoming who they are’ (2009, 136). Long and Moore (2013, 2) point out in the introduction to their anthology on the theory of sociality in anthropology that what distinguishes sociality as a concept from the static notion of ‘the social’ is the processual nature of sociality: whilst ‘the social’ implies a space that is separate from the content of social interactions, sociality does not ‘precede’ its articulations, but is rather co-extensive with them.

Enskilment is in the same way processual, and processes of enskilment co-occur with forms of sociality, whether directly geared towards the progress of the student or not. The scholarship on sociality provides us with tools to identify and make sense of what happens in such interactions. However, seldom have sociolinguistic approaches been applied to contexts of practice-based learning (notable exceptions include Filliettaz et al. 2008; Weddle and Hollan 2010). Doing so provides at least two interesting perspectives for scholars of enskilment. First, it can provide tools to fully account for the complexity and richness of interactions in the workshop. Second, adapting theories of conversational sociality to the specific case of interactions in practice-based learning can provide a framework of analysis that encompasses both sociality and the engagement with tools, materials and procedures that are part of an apprenticeship. This single framework can open up for new analytical perspectives that ultimately further blur the distinctions between the parallel processes of shaping of persons and the development of skills.

In this article, I borrow from the literature on sociality Nick Enfield’s concepts of enchrony and enchronic time (2009, 2013, 2011). Adapted to sociality in the workshop, these provide a frame of reference to observe, examine and make sense of the complexity of the relationship between sociality and enskilment. Enchrony is a ‘causal-temporal frame’ (2013, 1), the ‘primal driving force for the ever-forward progression of social interaction’ (2011, 285): ‘An enchronic perspective on human communication focuses on sequences of interlocking or interdependent communicative moves that are taken to be co-relevant, and causally-conditionally related' (2011, 287). In a conversation for instance, verbal statements and gestures might combine to create meaning, which the interlocutor takes to be meant to be co-relevant. Enchrony identifies the causal-condition framework of a conversation, in which each communicative act, be it words or gestures, refer both to what precedes them and what will follow, each communicative act being potentially the source of the following one, driving the conversation further. The enchronic frame encompasses the heterogeneity of elements that are part of a conversation, where a word might be accompanied by a gesture, pointing, changing the direction of one's gaze, etc., and importantly for Enfield, there need not be a hierarchy between these elements. A conversation takes place in time, but in its own particular enchronic time, unfolding time which is not linear but, as characterised by Enfield, granular, as elements in a conversation are attended to at times in sequence, at times synchronously.

Three aspects of the enchronic framework make it in my view a powerful one to approach the sociality of enskilment. First, it acknowledges, and provides ways to comprehend, the multimodal nature of interactions in a workshop. Words, pointing and other gestures, demonstrations, eye-contact, all are part of the interactions of a mentor and student. In the specific context of learning, practice can itself be a form of communication: a learner practising a procedure is both becoming enskilled, and communicating their dedication to a mentor which might in turn lead the mentor to change their directives. Second, enchrony is a framework to address the back and forth movement of attention in a conversation. Interlocutors are shifting their focus from words to gestures, from new knowledge to established knowledge, in the process of co-creation of meaning. In the workshop, focus is also shifting back and forth, between the words or presence of a mentor, and the work at hand. What happens in these shifts in focus, and what do they tell us about the process of learning? Thirdly, applying the enchronic frame to situations of learning enables the establishment of relationships between elements in the co-occurrence of sociality and enskilment, and the blurring of boundaries between the two processes of social interactions and enskilment. This will lead me to consider, for instance, how learning emerges from social positionings, how words as well as hands might shape clay, and trust in another person might be part and parcel of acquired procedural knowledge.

‘Listen to the Sound’

I turn now to a description of a short scene that happened during my field research, during which I learnt pottery-making in the workshop of master Chan Kuo-hsiang[1] in Yingge, the main centre of ceramics production in Taiwan. I happen to have filmed this particular scene, which has enabled me to return and analyse what happened, and compare with my fieldnotes. What follows in the next few paragraphs is a brief description of the scene, captured on about 15 minutes of video footage. In this sequence, it is possible to see the changing understanding of a particular operation that I experience as ethnographer-apprentice. In further sections of the article, I will show the complex relationships between mentor and student that develops around this and other apparently simple moments during an apprenticeship, involving not simply a process of enskilment, but glimpses of a changing relationship between mentor and student. I describe relevant contextual information about the apprenticeship throughout the text.

Ten half-finished large porcelain pots, 80cm in diameter, are standing on the floor of the workshop, partly wrapped with blue plastic bags. These are made by shaping the lower two-thirds of the pot on the electric potter’s wheel, and after the pot has been allowed to dry slightly, more clay is coiled around the edges to make the walls of the pot taller. Pots of that size require this dual operation because the quantity of clay used means that the pot would collapse under its own weight if shaped in one go on the wheel. Chan has made these pots now standing on the floor, and invites me to carry out an operation that consists in beating the walls of the clay pot with two different tools held in either hand, a pounding tool in the left hand and a wooden paddle in the right hand – an operation I am not familiar with. This operation straightens the walls of the pot at the joint where clay was coiled onto the wheel-shaped pot. The action resembles clapping one’s hands, so that both tools slam – quite a bit of force is involved – onto the clay at the same time on both sides of the wall of the pot.

Chan wants me to learn and practice this operation, which is carried out by walking around the pot bending down, tools in hand, and beating the clay rhythmically. The learning process captured in this video footage starts with the classic moment of demonstration, yet Chan actually does not signal that a demonstration has started, he just appears to work normally after I have helped him move the pots across the floor. It is understood by both that there is something to be learnt, and I am seen in the film looking intently at what he is doing. After a couple of minutes he hands me the tools, points to where I am to hit the clay, and to the part of the tools that will come into contact with the clay. As soon as I start I realise that the apparently easy operation is trickier than I thought. The first issue I encounter is that I lack synchronisation in the movements, the two tools do not land on the clay at the same time. This worries me (as I note in my fieldnotes of the day), because I fear ruining the pot by hitting one side first with too much force. Done properly, both tools landing on either side of the wall prevent the clay from moving inwards or outwards. Yet despite this apparent risk of breakage, my teacher verbally instructs me to hit the clay harder.

Soon after I started, Chan takes the tools from my hands to demonstrate again, but before starting he points to his ear and says 'listen to the sound' (in Mandarin Chinese *ting shenying*). It soon becomes clear to me that what he means is that I should not simply be attentive to his actions in the demonstration, but to the sounds that result from them. Without having to be explicit, I understand that this refers to two things. First, the loudness with which the tools are hitting the clay: the slapping sound of the tools are giving an indication as to how hard they are hitting the clay. The second is rhythm – listening to the sound means that I get a sense of the natural rhythm with which I should beat the clay. When I return to practice (as apparent in the video footage, and confirmed in field notes), it is apparent that the way I work has changed. My focus has changed, or rather has expanded, to include attention to the sound, I am trying to match the pitch of the sound my teacher was making moments ago. My focus has changed, not away from the hands, but has expanded to encompass both hands and sounds. Being attentive to sound has changed the force I exert with my hands, because I am anticipating a certain pitch, and correct the force of my movements when I do not hear what I anticipated.

A subsequent moment of instruction involves my teacher directing my attention to the movement of the feet, and how to walk around the pot. Again, this expands the focus of attention – it is a process of 'education of attention' (Goodwin 2007; Ingold 2001; see also Duranti 2009; Ingold 2000, 37; Gibson 1979; Araujo and Davids 2011; Grasseni 2007; Young 2004), to use a key concept of ecological psychology. After that instruction, I am not only focussed on the hands, and the sounds, but also the whole body as it (or rather 'I') moves around the pot. I should note that at this point I am not particularly aware of what is happening with the clay, the changes in the clay are quite subtle, and there is too much to pay attention to before I can also be attentive to how my actions are actually shaping the material.

In these two moments of education of attention, my teacher has brought me to shift my attention away from the work of the hands and of the sole sense of vision. I am brought to include other senses in guiding the way I become enskilled, and to be aware of proprioception of my whole body, not just the action of the hands but of the feet, as well as posture – though the video clip reveals something that I did not understand on the moment, that my teacher is bending his knees much more than I am, though Chan is not commenting on this.

As I continue practising, I hear further advice from my teacher. At first, I briefly interrupt my work to look up at him and figure out what is being said. But as I progress, I continue practising whilst my teacher is talking to me – the words seem to be more immediately relevant to the action. After a while, another interesting moment of instruction takes place. As I continue to work, my teacher, sitting against the wall, starts clapping his hands to encourage me to both hit harder and in rhythm, chanting 'one two one two'. As I work (I do not stop at this point – this observation is important for my later discussion), these words and rhythm visibly have an effect on my movements, and the sounds I produce become louder and more regular.

I am fascinated by the complexity of these multimodal interactions (Goodwin and Heritage 1990; Enfield 2009). encompassing words, gestures, pointing, and gaze directing. As a learner, I am at times observing, then I perform, then I interrupt again to follow instructions. During other moments, I am concentrated on my work, and sometimes Chan calls for my attention and interrupts me. At yet other times, interaction and practice happen at the same time. One aspect that is not apparent on film, but appears in my recollections of the event as well as in my fieldnotes, is that I am always aware of the presence of my teacher, and aware of his gaze. I am even aware of his hearing – after he brings my attention to the sound of the tools, I become aware that he is evaluating my performance in part by the sounds I am producing. So my focus of attention not only encompasses clay, tools, hands, sounds and whole body, but also another person, and his own senses. This is not only an awareness of another person's movements (see Marchand 2007), but an awareness of another person's subjectivity (see Downey 2008; Gieser 2008). This attention to another is itself particularly complex: it is an attention to someone else, and it doubles up into another kind of attention to myself, a self-consciousness of how someone else is seeing and hearing me, which leads me to move and perform as I want to be seen and heard performing.

The attention to the other person is also, in a strange way, part of the attention to the clay. I am 'leaning onto' the presence of my teacher, since I would not be beating the clay with such force were I not receiving encouraging signs that this force was appropriate (notably, my teacher's '*one two, one two*'), and not wanting to perform in a way that would satisfy my teacher's auditory expectations of the sound of the tools. I started out afraid that I might break the pot (I was probably anticipating the sense of guilt were this to happen – my fear was also part of the sociality with my teacher), but trust in words were quite literally adding to the force of the blow. Trust brought my actions beyond the ego to encompass another person.[2] I trusted my teacher because in this interaction, I believed that he had authoritative knowledge about working with clay. This recognition of his status (see Enfield 2011) formed not only the basis for our relationship as mentor and student, but also had consequences on what I was willing to do and risk with the procedure. Ethics, how I am to behave in the presence of a social other, was part of my way of practising the procedure; I return to the notion of ethics in the following section.

Clearly, the process of learning is an education of attention, my attention was being brought to different aspects of the complex action of beating the clay. In this case, this expansion of the field of attention happens through the intervention of another person, the teacher, though it can also take place during solitary practice. Tim Ingold (2000, 37) explains education of attention as a process in which a mentor teaches not through explicit directives, but by pointing out what is worthy of attention. In this respect then, an apprenticeship is not simply about an engagement of the learner with tools, materials, and gestures, it is also engagement with a social other. An apprentice also learns to be attentive to other persons, their bodies (as they demonstrate what it to be learnt), and their words.

In my discussion of the interactions above, interactions feel elastic, at times they are in the form of call and response, at times interactions are part of the performance, simultaneous to the process of enskilment, as in the example of my teacher's 'one two, one two'. Sometimes things go smoothly, sometimes things go wrong and the work of the learner needs to be interrupted. As in many contexts of learning, there is an alternance between moments of demonstration and moments of practice, but these two moments are not always distinct, and actually become blurred, superimposed, and entangled. The comments of the teacher spoken at the same time as the learner is practising changes the movements and attention of the learner. In these complex exchanges, sociality is not unidirectional (directives of the mentor resulting in something practised by the learner) nor even simply bi-directional (the mentor gains feedback from the performance of the student). Sociality folds onto itself, each party being aware that the other is aware of the other. This involuted awareness of another person was driving my practice as much, and *at the same time*, as my attention to tools, materials and posture. The fact that these two aspects of practice are co-occuring should lead us to reflect on how they work together to shape enskilment. Education of attention is certainly relevant to start explaining how learners use the attention directing devices of mentors to change the way they attend to their practice, but the approach to the sociality of learning afforded by the notion of enchrony and enchronic time brings us to reflect further on the dynamic, back and forth movement of attention between another person's presence and practice.

Conversational Enskilment

Scholars working on apprenticeship and practice-based learning have repeatedly pointed out that words have a minor role to play in such contexts (Herzfeld 2004; Marchand 2003; O'Connor 2006; Downey 2005). Instruction takes place most often without words, and indeed masters might be too busy in their own work to provide much instruction in the first place. In the phenomenological and ecological tradition, Tim Ingold and others (2001, 2000; Pálsson 1994; Harris 2005) have insisted that the kind of knowledge derived from an apprenticeship does not even resemble linguistic knowledge – learning is a process of enskilment rather than enculturation. Apprentices learn not from deciphering the verbal instructions of their teachers, but by trying things out for themselves. Enskilment is an attuning to the world around us, including, in the case of craft, to the materials, tools, the object in formation, and our own hands and bodies.

But we should be careful to not dismiss the significance of words. I entirely agree that skills involve an attuning to the world around us, but the same might be said of verbal conversations. As many socio-linguists have argued, conversations are also situated (Enfield and Levinson 2006; Streeck, Goodwin, and LeBaron 2011). Communication is not the deciphering of meaning between interacting parties, but co-creation of meaning, a constantly evolving process of situating the other, and situating the self with reference to the other. In now three instances and field sites in which I have studies apprenticeship and practice-based learning, I have found that words hold a more important role in crafts learning than appears in the literature, at least in the specific situations I have encountered. How do words 'work' in a craft learning setting? I offer a brief reflection on this as it is important for my arguments.

In the video footage discussed above, words are actually not solely communicating meaning. When my teacher repeats over and over two words 'one two one two', he wants me to get a sense of the rhythm of work. Words can be more complex, and actually include meaning at the same time as they convey rhythm. I learnt another form of ceramics in China, in the Jiangsu province (2012, 2009b, 2009a) as part of a different ethnographic project. There, my teacher Zhao Jianghua would use descriptions of the actions I was learning whilst conveying rhythm and a sense of process. One such sentence was 'make high, push down, make high push down' (*nong gao, ya xia qu, nong gao, ya xiaqu*). Chinese is a tonal language, and the tones give another dimensions to the instructions, another sense of rhythm. Apprenticeship is composed of processes of meaning making and of embodied practice, and the same utterances might be part of both processes. Words in this context can be interpreted as kinds of affordances (Weddle and Hollan 2010), despite being words that also, and at the same time, convey meaning. Is it meaning that spurs action, or is meaning a useful by-product of utterances that are otherwise about action? In the frame of enchronic time, words can be both at the same time, and there need not be a hierarchy between what a word means, and what it does. With the concept of enchronic time, Enfield is wanting to capture the unfolding of the not-quite linear time of a conversation. Enchrony is neither synchrony –

two things happening at the same time – nor diachrony – things happening in succession. Enchrony is both synchrony and diachrony, it is the time of the conversation where time expands and contracts. In a conversation, meaning is not created by decoding the sentences of the other, but through a to and fro movement between the participants where each party is attentive not only to creating meaningful speech, but seeking out clues that the other party is understanding what is being said. Likewise, one's attention to utterances in the context of practice-based learning might shift between their different qualities, as sounds that convey meaningful instructions, and that convey rhythm.

In this respect, the notion of enchronic time is useful in tackling an apparent dichotomy that has been created in the literature between discursive and embodied knowledge (see Zlatev 2007; Sinding-Larsen 2008). A result of this state of affairs in current anthropological scholarship has been the downplaying of the role of communication in processes of learning. Some scholars in anthropology and social psychology suggest however that one reconsider the place of communication in embodied learning, and expand its definition to take into account emotions (Nishizaka 2000), motor-based representations of the observed movements of others (Marchand 2010, 2007), and empathy (Gieser 2008).

What does it mean to say that words can be affordances? They enable action, and yet they also mean certain things. One can shift one's attention from one to the other, understanding the meaning of the term 'make high, push down', then using this to engage with the rhythm of the operation which consists in lifting and pushing down the clay alternately. The meaning is not the affordance, rather there are several things one can do with words, either simultaneously or in sequence, or enchronically, through expansion and homing in of attention. These are not qualitatively different kinds of knowledge (see Marchand 2007). Interactions between a learner and a mentor involve the back and forth movement of comprehension and production of utterances, deictics such as gestures and eye contact, and actions on materials. These occur in the granular enchronic time of the conversation, focus and attention of both parties shift from meaning to practice, from the other person to a procedure. Enskilment and communication are integral to mentor-student sociality, and it would be artificial to attempt to pry them apart.

My case might be unlike others described in the literature, insofar as my teacher in Taiwan (and also my teacher in China) was relatively talkative. What about cases, such as the one Singleton (1989) describes for Japanese pottery, where a teacher not only refuses to explain or give demonstrations, but insists on apprentices working on their own in a corner of the workshop? I would argue that sociality is not completely absent, and in similar ways shapes enskilment – in the next section I turn to a case where the sociality between learner and mentor shapes enskilment, not through explicit instructions but by provoking an ethical positioning on the part of the learner.

‘No Progress’

The attention of the learner is not limited to learning techniques. Attention can expand, beyond hands and tools and the meaning of works, to include attitudes and ethics. Another episode from my period of learning in the workshop of Chan Kuo-hsiang can serve to illustrate this point. This relates to a moment relatively early on when I was learning to throw pots on the electric wheel. I had been practising the first stages of making vases on the wheel, when my teacher decided that I could move on to learning to make a simple bowl, which involves a somewhat different approach. This started with a demonstration of the new technique: sitting opposite me and on the other side of the wheel, Chan showed me in a few quick movements how a bowl is made, commenting on what he was doing with words that related to the process: ‘then you do this … and this …’. At the end of this quick demonstration, I waited, expecting a breakdown of the technique, but was taken by surprise when my teacher told me to go ahead and imitate him, as if the complex gestures he had just demonstrated would be straightforward to reproduce for a novice. I was not even sure where to begin, as my memory of what I had seen was confused. Even more frustrating was the fact that my initial failed attempts were met with growing expressions of impatience and anger. My teacher scolded me for doing things wrong, and even on a few occasions came close to slapping my hands. Only after these expressions of impatience would he start breaking down the procedure, still expressing his disappointment that I was not learning fast enough. Little by little, and with more explicit instructions, my hands and fingers fell into correct position and found their way. When I had understood the basics, my teacher left me to practice alone, and went back to his work on another potter’s wheel a couple of metres away. Over the next hour or so, he would regularly observe me, without offering any further guidance but rather commenting occasionally that I was making 'no progress' (*mei you jinbu)*, or shaking his head disapprovingly because of my badly centred clay was 'dancing' around the wheel. After an hour or two of practice and concentrated effort, I became aware that Chan was looking intently at me from behind his own wheel. I looked up and saw that he was grinning and nodding approvingly.

My fieldnotes comment on my frustration after this episode (similar ones would follow), and my initial conclusion was that Chan was simply a bad teacher, who was incapable of creating what theorists of learning call 'scaffolding', in other words, making complex procedures more accessible by breaking them down, simplifying, or accompanying the student's gestures (Downey 2008; Bruner, Wood, and Ross 1976). Scholars have reflected on the skills of the teacher developing at the same time as the skills of the learner (Dalidowicz 2015). But at the time, I was reflecting that scholars have actually not paid attention to teachers who are simply bad teachers, who are not able to convey procedures that appear obvious to them but are not for a novice. With hindsight, I came to re-evaluate this unfair initial reaction. An apprenticeship is not only about learning techniques, but an attitude, a way of working, a way of relating to others in the profession. Famously, Lave and Wenger (1991) have suggested that learning occurs almost as a by-product of the growing sense of identity of the learner, apprentices are legitimate peripheral participants who learn to fit in to a community of practice by adopting ways of doing, thinking, and speaking – in short, they develop an identity as a practitioner. As I see it now, my teacher was not merely communicating instructions about how the hands should move and what they should do, but also shaping and defining a relationship, between master and teacher, in our interactions, and bringing me not only to learn technical procedures, but to be a certain kind of learner.

This is where the more conventional kind of data of the ethnographic field research is useful, and serves to cast light, to help in the interpretation of those episodes that initially left me so puzzled – in particular, life histories and cultural ideas and values. I can relate to my ethnographic fieldwork to connect interactions with my teacher to understandings of relations between generations, the work ethics of artisans, or Taiwanese understandings of the figure of the master. For instance, I made sense of my teacher's way of relating during this confusing moment of instruction with his ideas about dedication and hard work, character traits that he repeatedly insisted the younger generation in Taiwan lacked. He, and others in the community of artisans of Yingge and in Taiwan in general, referred for instance to the generation born as of the 1980s as the ‘strawberry generation’, young people who have grown up in the comforts afforded by Taiwan’s economic boom, and who are more interested in playing computer games and chatting with friends on their smart phones than dedicating themselves to hard work.

My teacher was shaping our relationship and our relative roles, at the same time as I was shaping the clay. The shifting focus from shaping clay to shaping a relationship were part of the same granular enchronic time of learning. In the interaction of teacher and student on opposite sides of a potter’s wheel, elements of techniques are acquired along with ideas about dedicated work, work ethics, negotiation of a relationship between a master and an apprentice. These are not explicit of course, but in the frustrating experience of this moment, my attention had been brought beyond the immediate ‘how do I do this?’ to ‘how do I act in response to this person’s attitude and expectations’. How I responded to this was part of the process of enskilment: my dedication to the task was as much about learning how to make a clay bowl as it was about demonstrating to my teacher that I was dedicated to learning how to make a clay bowl, and as part of this, that I was worthy of being his apprentice, that I respected his authority as a master, that I respected him as a member of a generation that had to work hard to make a living. Had I not demonstrated this, he might well have given up on me, and indeed he would at other moments tell me of several students he no longer taught because they had behaved in ways that Chan claimed failed to recognise his authority as a master.

The result is enskilment. After the demonstration, and after practising, I am able to make a clay bowl. But this process of enskilment is part of sociality, and encompasses the development of an ethics. These are not quite the same processes, but are woven together in the time of sociality and practice of an apprenticeship; there is no moment when one starts and the other stops. One might say also, as in the example above where trust in the words of my teacher brought me to beat the clay beyond what I would otherwise be comfortable about, here the dedication that I want my teacher to perceive is what is driving the practice, and bringing my hands to respond to the clay in an increasingly skilled way. Not just the hands, but awareness of another person's gaze shapes the clay. And beyond gaze, ethics and political negotiation of values between persons. My growing awareness of what it means to be a good apprentice, my growing sense of an ethics, are part of the process of enskilment that is gradually transforming me into a skilled potter.

The frame of enchronic time helps to think about the relationship between the enskilling of the hands, and the process of sociality that is co-occuring with enskilment. These two processes – the making of persons who have certain values and motivations, and the process of becoming a skilled artisan – do not simply develop in parallel, they take place in the causal-conditional frame of enchrony that drives interactions forward. The development of an ethics drives practice, and is also communication of that ethics through practice, which in turn calls for an ethical response from the other party. Both processes feed onto each other in a sequence that as a whole makes up the sociality of enskilment.

Beyond learning

What happens to the sociality of learning after something has been learnt, when the interactions are no longer necessary for performance? Is it a stretch to suggest that the sociality that is part of learning becomes part of enskilment in a fundamental way? Christina Toren (e.g. 1999, 2012, 2001) has repeatedly insisted that humans are social 'from the start', that ontogeny is social and we are the result of microhistories of interactions with other people. My arguments take a more speculative turn here, but it can be interesting to think about how the focus on sociality might transform the way we think about expertise and mastery.

In a discussion on communication of skilled-based knowledge, Trevor Marchand (2007) draws from the neurolinguistic scholarship to argue that there are no fundamental qualitative differences between embodied knowledge and propositional or conceptual knowledge. Understanding sentences, and a novice learning a new gesture by observing their mentor, both rely on the parsing of information that is received in the form of words or gestures. This is what enables people to finish each other's sentences, a novice to learn a given procedure, a seasoned practitioner to pick up work where another person has left it, or two practitioners to coordinate their movement in collaborative work. The gestures of another person in those instances are both practice and communication. My discussion has been inspired by Marchand's arguments and his focus on communication in the context of practice-based learning, but I have brought a different perspective on these ideas. This is derived in part from my reliance on sociolinguistic, as opposed to Marchand's neurolinguistically informed arguments, and my attempt to integrate the shaping of persons in the same framework as the development of skilled-based knowledge as part of the interactions of learning. Following on Marchand, my material can bring us to further break down the distinction between the practice of the novice and of the seasoned practitioners, who for Marchand are both engaged in similar action, namely to make sense, to parse, the perceived actions of others. In the theories of scaffolding and education of attention, the sociality that accompanies learning eventually needs to be dispensed with for a student to be an independent practitioner. But following Marchand, I want to ask whether there is such a qualitative shift between the practice of the novice, and the practice of the seasoned practitioner. Is the sociality of enskilment merely scaffolding, or is it intrinsic part of the skilled-based knowledge of the practitioner? I have discussed some of the intricate relationships between people during learning, which combine with intricate ways of relating with tools, materials and procedures. The force of the thrust of a tool might be the result of developing feeling for tools and materials, but also trust in the words of the mentor. Does this trust ever disappear? At least, there does not seem to be a precise moment when the learner lets go of this trust. It is what gets the learner to perform 'correctly', but once performing correctly, the same trust might well be upheld in one's handling of the clay.

Where would we find evidence that the sociality of learning continues to be part of the enskilled person? I would point, quite simply, to the ability of the now enskilled learner to facilitate the learning of a novice. As Dalidowicz (2015) mentions quite rightly, anthropologists have not sufficiently been concerned with the learning process of the teacher. Scaffolding is not translation of one type of knowledge (enskilled) into another (social, communicative), there is no qualitative shift form being enskilled to being a teacher, from practising alone to showing another person how to practice in the same way, nor is there a radical distinction to be made between the skills of practice and of sociality. And the ability to teach or demonstrate is not limited to simple technical knowledge: when my teacher's attitude became strict in some of those moments of learning, I had a strong sense of being in the presence of his father. Chan's attitudes created a similar frame of sociality that could afford enskilment.

Conclusion

As I mentioned in the introduction, my interest in the sociolinguistic scholarship stemmed from the need to make sense of the complex and rich data that I derived from my fieldwork. The fact that this data included video recordings might not be fortuitous: the recorded image does not filter out elements that do not fit our initial interpretations, in contrast notably to the ethnographer's field notes which might leave out details that did not sufficiently capture our attention in the moment. In a recorded image, all elements are there to see, which allows for more than one attempt at filtering, making different kinds of connections at the later stage of analysis. Watching the video footage, the notions of education of attention, or scaffolding, were relevant to my understanding of what was happening, I could identify moments when my master was making me aware of sounds and posture, and appreciate how he was gradually introducing new elements to be learnt to not overwhelm me with information. But there was obviously so much more going on, as revealed in particular in the 'no progress' episode. This has brought me to look for more encompassing theories of sociality that could account for these interactions in relation to the parallel process of enskilment. An adapted version of enchrony, I have attempted to show, is a relevant and useful framework for such an exercise.

What have we gained by applying the analytical framework of enchrony to the sociality of enskilment? I would highlight two points I have made in the text, before thinking about some of the limits of the framework, and necessity for a complementary ethnographic perspective on enskilment, ethics and personhood. First, approaching social interactions through the lens of enchrony opens up for a new methodological approach to the study of apprenticeship. At least one of the interests of sociolinguistics for anthropologists is that, unlike the neurosciences and their extensive reliance on brain scans as source of data, a sociolinguistic analysis relies on observations in the context of natural speech. Sociality, the unfolding mutual understanding in a conversation, is made of words and gestures that are at least to a large extent observable, and might be captured on film. This point has broader implications that simple methodological ones, since observations of interactions are observations of the human mind at work. One might think that enskilment is a private process, yet changes in my posture or gestures and attitudes towards my mentor are visible in the video footage, and indicative of the process of enskilment. The use of audio-visual recordings appears to be particularly suited in the context of such a study, and it is routinely used in sociolinguistic research. Video cameras have become discreet, and able to take hours of footage thanks to larger memory capacities, which mean they can be left in a corner and forgotten about during long and repetitive processes of learning.

Second, the enchronic frame, adapted to the study of enskilment, considers in a single frame and on equal footing the heterogeneous elements of communication and of practice that are part of enskilment. In this respect, enchrony flattens hierarchies and removes strict distinctions between communication and practice; both feed into each other, each generates communicative and practised responses. As part of an enchronic frame, we can address bodily engagement and mentor-student interactions as co-relevant, each gesture or communicative act having the potential to drive the interaction forward towards the creation of both, and at the same time, meaning and enskilment. When it comes to the analysis of the rich data one can derive from recordings and observations in the field, the enchronic frame can handle the complexity of sociality, notably addressing on an equal footing distinctions between elements of a conversation so that we are attentive to occurrences that might not have been originally deemed relevant, and finding new relations between them.

There are limits to how the literature on sociolinguistics addresses interactions that are part of learning, and interactions around objects. A relevant notion in the sociolinguistic literature is that of joint attention, used to describe interactions that take place around artefacts (e.g. Goodwin 2007). Thinking about the development of enskilment brings the discussion beyond the things that are the focus of attention, to the bodily engagement with these things that take place as part of interactions. For scholars who have studied and theorised skilled practice, the notion of joint attention might appear limited to understand how people together engage with tools and materials. When we are engaged with tools, materials and procedures, our mind extends into the environment. The notion of enskilment addresses these moments of engagement with things as bodily attuning with the environment, tools and materials. Thus theories of enskilment can in turn inform what happens in situations where sociality include such bodily engagements. An ethnographic approach can in addition provide elements to understand sociality beyond the specific temporal framework of the conversation. Insights we derive from ethnographic research provide hints at the broader socio-cultural worlds which shape, and are shaped by, socialities of enskilment. This might bring us to reflect about situated and culturally specific dimensions of multimodal interactions in an apprenticeship, including for instance ideas about the person and the mind, 'proper' ways of learning, implicit pedagogies, value judgements and inter-generational relations.

NOTES

1. I use his real name in this article. Not only is Mr Chan a public figure, but this also serves as recognition for his willingness to teach me his craft, and extensive help during my fieldwork. Another name that appears in the text, Zhao Jianghua, is also a real name, used for the same reasons.

2. I am grateful to Jacqui Ennis Cole for her comments on a conference paper version of this article and her suggestion to think about issues of trust and ego.

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