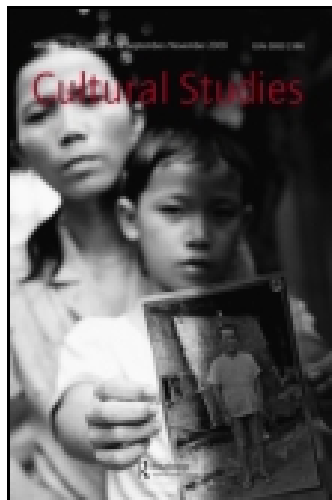


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SO, HOW DID BOURDIEU LEARN TO PLAY TENNIS? HABITUS, CONSCIOUSNESS AND HABITUATION

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Greg Noble and Megan Watkins

SO, HOW DID BOURDIEU LEARN TO PLAY TENNIS? HABITUS, CONSCIOUSNESS AND HABITUATION

Abstract

Bourdieu's development of the notion of 'habitus' has proved a rich vein for cultural theory. Habitus has been useful, with the growing interest in processes of embodiment, in countering the cognitive and representational bias in much cultural analysis, and in providing a basis for avoiding the dualisms – of mind and body, structure and agency – that trouble social theory. However, in stressing the unconscious nature of embodiment, and refusing to engage with the question of consciousness, an implicit form of mechanistic determinism has crept into Bourdieu's implementation of habitus. By returning to the Spinozan monism that informs Bourdieu's work, this paper elaborates a productive conceptualization of habitus that attends to the various intensities of consciousness, the relations between multiple mind-bodies and processes of habituation through a focus on the literature of sports training.

Keywords

habitus; consciousness; Bourdieu; body

BOURDIEU'S DEVELOPMENT of the notion of 'habitus' as the system of bodily dispositions has become an increasingly important contribution to the analysis of embodied practices. It is a useful tool for thinking, on the one hand, how social relations are internalized and experienced as 'natural', and how social position is expressed through our accumulated cultural capital. On the

other hand, Bourdieu posits a mechanism through which the principles of social organization are embodied such that humans are capable of spontaneously generating an infinite array of appropriate actions. However, habitus also has its limitations, given that it has been deployed to deal with certain kinds of analytical concerns.

As Bourdieu suggests, a concept is designed to be put to work empirically (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 96). It is, then, only as good as the uses to which it is put. Habitus has been deployed to analyse some aspects of embodiment, but not others. Think of this example: Bourdieu was quite a keen tennis player. We could use his analysis to suggest that in playing tennis he accumulated and displayed a certain cultural and bodily capital profitable for a middle-class academic – just as he implies in the case of the (then) French president, Giscard d'Estaing. Tennis, he suggests (while acknowledging the complex divisions even within such a practice), is a 'bourgeois sport' that conveys an 'aristocratic image', a conception of human dignity expressive of the bourgeois relation to the body (1986: 209–19). For Bourdieu, this was an 'acquired capital', in contrast to 'inherited capital' (1986: 80). But how did the son of a postman in a remote peasant village in southern France – the first in his family to finish secondary school – acquire this capital? In Bourdieu's analysis, this is not entirely clear, even though the accumulation of capital is a central aspect of his framework.

To elaborate a more productive concept of habitus we use examples from sport, in which Bourdieu had more than a passing interest, and especially from sports training, which is central to modern sport, but to which he gave little attention. We suggest that Bourdieu, in arguing against what he saw as a cognitive bias in social theory, and by emphasizing the unconscious nature of the habitus, largely abandons the important question of consciousness. This is ironic because he consequently replicates the Cartesian mind/body dualism of which he is critical. By restoring a Spinozan monism at the heart of Bourdieu's work, we want to rehabilitate the notion of habitus. We do this by: emphasizing the dynamism of the habitus and not just its inertia; demonstrating the importance of forms of consciousness – of the athlete and of others – in contemporary sports training; and by arguing that a concept of *habituatio* is needed to make sense of the acquisition of habitus. We need to begin addressing these processes for, without them, how could Bourdieu have learnt to play tennis?

Bourdieu's body

Amidst all the current theorizing around the body, Bourdieu's work on habitus stands out because of the sophistication it provides in dealing with complex processes of embodiment. Bourdieu was not the first to use the concept – it is found in Mauss and others – but Bourdieu's work is the most sustained theoretical development of the idea. At its most formal, habitus is defined as 'systems

of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations' (1990: 53). The notion of habitus – more simply understood as the dispositions that internalize our social location and which orient our actions – offers an invaluable tool for exploring the interdependence of social determination and human agency, the structured and generative capacity of human action. Bourdieu develops the notion of habitus specifically to overcome the binaries of much social theory – between objectivism and subjectivism, structure and agency, mind and body (Wacquant, 1992: 3). He positions himself against both structuralist approaches that fall into a mechanical determinism, and subjectivist approaches that presuppose a calculating actor, as in rational action theory (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 129). To do this, he emphasizes both the objective structuring of habitus and its function as a system of dispositions that have generative capacities in specific fields.

He argues that our being-in-the-world is largely a practical mastery of the implicit principles of the social world, not the symbolic mastery of explicit, consciously recognized rules (1990: 12, 74). He calls this *le sens pratique* and likens this to a 'feel for the game'. Because our practice is always socially situated, this practical sense is specific to the field in which we are acting at that moment. Bourdieu defines field as a relatively autonomous network of objective relations between positions; as a particular social space of institutions and forces (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97). The logic of our practice is embedded in the requirements of the field, practically mastered by its participants. This is as true of a field of sporting practice as it is of the field of higher education. But habitus is also the embodiment of our social location – class, gender, ethnicity, and so on. This habitus is manifest in our actions, our modes of appearance and through a bodily *hexis* or bodily bearing – posture, manners, ways of speaking – that is among the 'outward signs expressing social position' (1991: 86–9, 12). The hexis revealed in the way we play tennis, for example, articulates a style which has meaning within the array of styles available within the tennis world, but it also expresses class, gender, and so on. The ways our bodies act and look, our physical properties, embody the capital – economic, social, cultural – we possess. While this is true of sporting practice, it does not explain everything about how we become sporting bodies.

From embodied capital to bodily capital

Sporting practice functions in Bourdieu's work not just as metaphor – 'a feel for the game', field, strategy – but in the extended discussions of sport used in his analyses. Against an approach that sees sport as a natural activity, Bourdieu stresses its socio-historical specificity, arguing that modern sport is a supply

intended to meet a social demand, becoming a relatively autonomous field with a complex system of institutions and agents (associations, producers and vendors of goods and services). He suggests that this leads to two types of questions: about its existence as an area of production with its own logic, and about the conditions of possibility of the appropriation of those goods and services (1993: 340–1). Crucial to the emergence of the field is ‘the need for the specialized executive personnel and scientific management techniques that can rationally organize the training and upkeep of the physical capital of the professional players’ (1993: 347–8) – but this comment is bracketed in Bourdieu’s article and the processes of producing players are not elaborated. Rather, Bourdieu’s attention shifts to the symbolic functions of sporting practice – to values of asceticism and hedonism (1993: 345) – and to the reproductive functions of sport – in controlling adolescents (1993: 348) – especially in relation to class. When dispositions are mentioned, it is in the way bodily hexis symbolizes character and virtues that represent class habitus (1993: 351, 354).

In *Distinction*, the focus is even more clearly on ‘the class distribution of the various sports’: the symbolic function of sport and its translation of social differences into the logic of the field, and its expression of cultural values – manliness, self-control, etc. Sport is viewed as forms of capital that yield ‘gains in distinction’ (1984: 20, 211, 213). These are, of course, legitimate questions, but by no means all that can be said of habitus. In *Distinction*, and later in *The State Nobility*, it is physical properties as embodied capital – or bodily hexis as a physiognomy of signs that express social status and power to be recognized or misrecognized (1996: 180) – that occupies Bourdieu, not the formation of bodily capital in and of itself. As a result, little is said about how the accumulation of bodily capital occurs: learning is reduced to ‘the imposition and methodical inculcation of the schemes of perception and action which, in practice, organize the practices’, with little detail of *how* this happens (1984: 212, 217).

Wacquant’s analysis of the ‘pugilistic field’ extends Bourdieu’s insights, and emphasizes habitus as ‘bodily capital’ that is accumulated and cultivated. Wacquant shifts the focus to ‘actual living bodies’ in his analysis of how boxers, operating in a field that values force and prowess, care for their bodies as a form of capital (1995: 65). Following Bourdieu, he conceives this ‘bodily capital’ as accumulated labour – ‘the somatized product’ of past training – which enables agents to function within the field of boxing when converted into ‘pugilistic capital’ (1995: 66–7). Wacquant gives more attention to the process of acquisition than Bourdieu and has rich empirical material that provides insights into boxing as an embodied practice in which bodily capital is developed.

Wacquant emphasizes the ability of the body to be ‘retooled’ through training (1995: 70) and describes the continuous ‘body work’ performed by the boxer and his trainer: a form of practical labour ‘that transforms the fighter’s “body-sense”, the consciousness he has of his organism’. The aim of this ‘body work’ is ‘to imprint into the bodily schema of the fighter postural sets, patterns

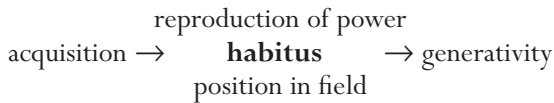
of movement, and subjective emotional-cognitive states' that make him a competent boxer (1995: 73). Like Bourdieu, Wacquant emphasizes the unconscious nature of the habitus: he argues that the transformation into a successful boxer 'cannot be effected by an act of will or a conscious transfer of information'; the 'imperceptible embodiment of the mental and corporeal schemata immanent in pugilistic practice . . . admits of no discursive mediation or systematisation' (1995: 72).

The trouble with habitus

Several scholars have criticized Bourdieu's conception of habitus. We do not want to go over that ground again in order to dismiss the concept; rather, we want to highlight and address a few problems as a way of rehabilitating a useful analytical tool.

The first problem is that habitus tends to be deterministic. Despite his emphasis on the generative capacity of habitus, it is its *structured* and reproductive nature – as the objectification of culture – that is significant for Bourdieu (1990: 76). In emphasizing the 'ontological complicity' of position within a field and one's dispositions, agency becomes simply an effect of structure: he describes will as 'a product of the field' (1981: 306–7). While Bourdieu often frames habitus as 'regulated improvisations' (1990: 57), it is the functionalism of habitus as 'structured structure' or 'necessity internalised' (1984: 170) that predominates (Jenkins, 1992). Bourdieu asserts that habitus is not fate, but an open system of dispositions that shape and are shaped by experience, but focuses on its inert and conservative nature (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 133; Bourdieu, 1988: 150). Part of the reason for this is context: Bourdieu aims to counter the dominance of the rational subject in liberal theory with an emphasis on the reproduction of power relations. As in *Distinction*, what interests him is the deployment of bodily capacity as classed expressions of capital – and the way we use this to position ourselves within a field – not its nature as bodily capital per se. He makes it clear that his interest lies in habitus as a way of explaining the reproduction of class relations and not with the dynamics of specific 'organisms' (1977: 85–6). For Bourdieu, persons are personifications of the requirements of the field (1996: 314–5).

The second, consequent problem is that habitus tends to be a static entity, which undermines his theorization of practice as interactive, strategic and relational (Bennett *et al.*, 1999: 12). As Bourdieu says, he is eager to explain the inertia of habitus, its hysteresis (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 130) – not its dynamism. As a consequence, Bourdieu does not make use of the fullness of the concept of habitus. While habitus must be seen in terms of reproduction and position-taking, it needs also to be seen in terms of acquisition and generativity. These are the four dimensions of habitus:



Central to Bourdieu's work, as Butler (1999: 25) points out, is an emphasis on the spatial dimensions of social practice, such that temporality – and with it change – disappears. It is ironic that Bourdieu emphasizes habitus as embodied history (1981: 305), because there is little sense of the acquisition of habitus, which is construed as transmission, internalization, inculcation and conditioning. These are unhelpful terms because they denote a passive process that captures nothing of the development of generative capacity.

A third problem is the removal of consciousness from the development of habitus. For Bourdieu, 'the process of acquisition [is] a practical *mimesis* (or mimeticism) which implies an overall relation of identification and has nothing in common with an *imitation* that would presuppose a conscious effort to reproduce a gesture, an utterance or an object explicitly constituted as a model' – a process that takes place 'below the level of consciousness' (1990: 73).

Underlying these problems is Bourdieu's ambiguous relation with Spinozan monism. Bourdieu owed an immense debt to Spinoza: the latter's notion of *conatus* – the principle that each thing strives to persevere in its being and to increase its power of action (1677/1994: III, 6, 12) – underlies Bourdieu's conception of the habitus and the accumulation of capital (1996: 2). Spinoza's mind-body monism also informs Bourdieu's critique of Cartesian dualisms (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 122), especially a mind/body dualism which privileges consciousness and produces an idealist conception of reality (1990: 40–1).¹ Against Descartes' view of the mind and body as two distinct substances – with the mind holding the privileged position in his conception of the cogito – Spinoza was a monist. He rejected the duality of substance and understood mind and body as being attributes of a single substance. This philosophical distinction is significant in that it provides a theoretical foundation for contemporary theorizing of the role of the body in the formation of subjectivity. To Spinoza, the mind is an idea of the body. This is not to be understood as a materialist inversion of the Cartesian mind/body relationship. For Spinoza, the impetus to act is based on how we are affected by other bodies. As Allison (1987: 107) suggests, 'the key implication of this principle is that the human body provides the focal point from, and through, which alone the human mind can perceive its world'. In contrast to Descartes, Spinoza never views the order of understanding proceeding from mind to body. Yet this does not mean the body is sole arbiter of action. Spinozan thought is based on a parallelism whereby 'the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things' (1677/1994: II, 7). The mind and the body act in concert. Our desires are causally related to bodily affects. While there is a distinct corporeality immanent to Spinozan thought, Spinoza was undeniably a rationalist. While bodily affects

are constitutive of subjectivity the mind is not a passive receptor. Through reason, we can try to understand our actions and act accordingly. Similarly, the body is central to consciousness, not just because minds are 'in' bodies, but also because body experience is central to thinking: while not all consciousness is consciousness about the body, all consciousness begins in the experience of the body (Searle, 1997: 185).

There are clear links between Spinozan thought and the elaboration of Bourdieu's notion of habitus. But Bourdieu emphasizes the inertia of the habitus over its dynamism and uses the critique of mind/body dualism to insist that habitus is unconscious. Ironically, this returns an inverted mind/body dualism to his thought – he reduces consciousness to a process of bringing to the conscious level things which the habitus carries out in its own way (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 131) – a dualism which is at odds with the theoretical arguments he makes against the divisions between objectivist and subjectivist thought. He argues clearly, for example, that 'practical belief' is not a state of mind, but a state of the body (1990: 68).

A Spinozan reading of Bourdieu's habitus is useful in overcoming the constraining conceptualization of habitus. From a Spinozan perspective, the habitus appears as an accumulation of bodily affects that over time sediment into dispositions. Unlike Bourdieu, Spinoza's understanding of the mind–body relationship allows for an embodied notion of subjectivity that possesses a reflexive capacity that can impact upon these dispositions. Conscious reworking of the dispositions within the habitus allows for the possibility of change equipping the habitus with a far greater agentic function. The recognition of the role of consciousness does not create a differential imbalance in favour of agency as opposed to structure. The dispositions within the habitus are durable or 'inert' and as such they are not easily susceptible to change, but without the condition for this possibility the habitus seems a particularly passive construct.

These criticisms do not empty the concept of habitus of its usefulness; however, they do require that we renovate the term to be more productive. Bourdieu had specific uses for the term and specific theoretical enemies in mind, but this does not mean we can't rehabilitate the concept for other uses. By shifting attention to the acquisition of sporting habitus, we can begin to capture the dynamic nature of embodiment and the functions of different modalities of consciousness.

Body work

Building on Bourdieu and Wacquant, and by focusing on the processes of training, we can shift the focus from habitus as embodied capital to bodily capital, and to the body work required to produce bodies with capacities. The metaphor of the game that gives Bourdieu's analysis power does not quite capture the

phenomenological fullness of sporting embodiment; the 'feel for the game' is never just a feel for 'the game', but a feel for the ball, the pitch, the uniform, the other players, the coach, the referee, the spectators, the temporality of the game and not just its spatial qualities. It misses the point that no player plays without spending more time training than actually playing; no-one begins as a masterful player. The 'feel for the game' is developed over time, and is only acquired through enormous application. In other words, Bourdieu chooses that part of sport – its experience during a game as second nature – to enhance his argument about the practical sense of everyday life, and conveniently forgets the tedious processes of learning that second nature. The consciousness involved in playing a game, however, is not the same as the consciousness involved in learning it.

Bourdieu makes brief reference to the conditions in which habitus can change – he talks about how there can be discordance between disposition and position, mismatches and misfires – and accepts that habitus has degrees of integration and changes in response to our experience (2000: 157, 160–1), but he never engages with the formative capacity of the habitus, its temporal dimension (Butler, 1999: 116–18). He falls back on the concept of 'alchemy' to describe the 'dialectic of conditions and habitus' – the very processes which need examination (1984: 172). Rather than construe habitus simply as constraint, we need to think of habitus as also entailing capacitation. Body work involves a regimen in which the habitus is worked upon to extend bodily capacities through routine adjustments or calibrations necessary to refining repeated actions (Bateson, 1985: 211–12).

This requires making a distinction between habitus, or what the body is disposed to do, and bodily capacity, or what the body could do under different circumstances. Bourdieu comes close to thinking this through – shifting from his usual description of practical sense as that which allows one to act as one 'should', he also describes habitus as potentiality, the 'power-to-be', the 'can-be' of the body, but 'should' and 'can-be' are not the same (2000: 139, 217). This potential space (Winnicott, 1971) provides room in which human practice can extend and project the subject into something slightly different – a becoming that is shaped by the situation but not determined by it.

The training regimen in a sport such as tennis typically involves a pedagogy in which re-calibration of the body occurs through the presentation of good technique and the 'correction' of poor technique. In *Master Tennis – Forehands* (1992), a coaching video, Tony Roche, the former Australian champion, goes through the various aspects of technique – the grip, footwork, and so on – and then different types of shots (flat, spin, slice, lob, volley). With each shot, he describes the grip, stance, position of racquet and movement of the shot, and the purpose of each shot and how each element contributes to it. He then models the shot silently, and then models it again describing the elements as he plays it. When he models it, he adds that 'this is what it should look like, remember you've got to feel light on your feet'.

Bourdieu argues that the body cannot be taught via 'theoretical discourse'. In making a case for the 'learned ignorance' of practical mastery, Bourdieu depicts the discourse of the speaker as 'misleading', a 'native theory' that conceals the 'true nature' of that mastery (1977: 19). He argues that sports trainers bypass scholastic understanding to speak directly to the body (2000: 144). While trainers do find ways of speaking to the body, the dismissal of any discursive dimension to sports training does not cohere with practice. In training pedagogy, there are two movements. The first is between demonstrating and explaining. This pedagogy is spelt out in the video *The Coach in Action*: it is a 'learning process' of explanation, demonstration, practice, feedback and extension exercises (Australian Coaching Council, 1993). This movement between doing-practice and theoretical practice involves both putting the lesson into action and putting it into discourse.

The second movement then is between deconstructing and reconstructing technique: breaking technique down into its key elements so that these can be practised and mastered, and then synthesizing them into a larger movement which is put into operation in the playing of a game. Theoretical discourse is needed to analyse technique; while synthesis of technique into competent play that exhibits a 'feel for the game' lies largely in the realm of doing-practice, involving the feel and look of movement, as Roche suggests. *The Coach in Action* talks about two kinds of feedback, for example: the largely spoken feedback from the coach and the kinaesthetic feedback from the athlete's own body, which is crucial in turning the analysis of the action and its components into the action itself. As Wacquant shows, in retooling the pugilist, 'the boxer must constantly monitor every part of his body and synchronize a large number of movements' (1995: 3). These insights require that we address the functions and forms of consciousness in the acquisition of bodily capacities.

Smart tennis – the modalities and intensities of consciousness

The claim here is not that you can learn tennis by simply being told how to play, but that the parallelism of doing and theory, body and mind, provides a space of awareness for the objectification and analysis of technique, which provides a key source for the potential space in the formation of embodied subjectivity. Training, as a specific example of this process, involves both speaking to the body and speaking about the body. Sometimes this is done through direct access to the body, circumventing the consciousness of the athlete, but, at other times, it is not. As Murray argues in *Smart Tennis* (1999: 6–8), successful tennis requires a 'whole person approach', which employs 'mind-body techniques' that address not just technical skills, but mental ones: perceptions, thoughts, feelings, tactics. Bourdieu loses this parallelism by devaluing the modalities and intensities of consciousness.

In defining habitus as unconscious dispositions, Bourdieu is arguing against a cognitive bias in social theory. He allows conscious deliberation a role when pressed – for example in ‘times of crisis’ – but dismisses this as calculation. Importantly, he does not allow for it in ‘routine adjustments’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 131). He rightly criticizes the intellectualist fallacy of assuming ordinary people think like philosophers (1981: 310), but philosophizing does not exhaust the idea of consciousness. As well as dismissing conscious calculation, he empties ordinary cognition of its conscious elements: in making the valuable argument that belief is corporeal, he overstates his case to argue that cognitive structures are not forms of consciousness but dispositions of the body (1998: 54–5). Bourdieu tends to define consciousness as meta-consciousness; and he conflates habitus with embodied practice, leading to a confusion of the argument that practice is largely habituated and unconscious with the claim that practice is only unconscious. This remains as a contradiction within his analysis: while he stresses ‘a spontaneity without consciousness or will’ (1990: 56), he also concedes that the improvisations of the gymnast ‘are never performed without a certain presence of mind’ (2000: 162).

Wacquant’s research demonstrates this contradiction: he argues that the transformation into a successful boxer cannot be effected by a conscious transfer of information, but acknowledges the necessity of monitoring, and the knowledge the boxer and his trainer must have of the boxer’s body and abilities to succeed (1995: 67–70). This contradiction is shown when, after quoting one interviewee who admits he thinks of death when he goes out to fight, Wacquant then argues that ‘the pragmatics of the fight itself strongly militate against them entertaining a sharp consciousness of the dangers of pugilism’ and that fighters invest in the *collusio* (collective illusion) that they will not experience serious injury (1995: 84–5). While we would not argue against this as a tendency, the boxers’ articulate self-reflection that Wacquant uses throughout this study testifies that even boxers have moments of insight into the nature of their practice. Yet, Wacquant concludes that engagement and acceptance in the pugilistic field ‘operate beneath the level of discourse and consciousness’ (1995: 88). The absolutist positions of Wacquant and Bourdieu just cannot explain this. Because this practice operates primarily below the level of consciousness does not mean that practice is not available to some forms of consciousness.

Wacquant’s material shows that: athletes can be highly reflective; the monitoring processes built into their training involve a focused attention; the successful boxer is one for whom skills become increasingly automatic over time; and others are intimately involved in the conscious transformation of the boxer’s bodily capital. Together with the insights drawn from the pedagogy of coaching, Wacquant’s material allows us to reconceptualize the modalities of consciousness in the acquisition of habitus.

To do this we need to recognize that consciousness is not a simple or singular category. In his critique of rational action theory, Bourdieu empties practical sense

of any consciousness, confuses calculation with consciousness and fails to distinguish between the consciousness *in* action and the consciousness *of* action, or what Searle (1997: 5–6) describes as the distinction between general ‘states of sentience and awareness’ and self-consciousness. Giddens distinguishes between practical consciousness – a tacit awareness – and the more reflexive discursive consciousness (Giddens, 1984: 4–7). Neurobiologist Antonio Damasio (1999: 121–2) makes a more complicated set of distinctions – between core and extended consciousnesses (and degrees within extended consciousness), but he also distinguishes consciousness from wakefulness. Archer differentiates between embodied knowledge (relating to the natural order), practical (or procedural) knowledge and discursive (or reflective) knowledge (2000: 162).

The point here is not to elaborate a systematic typology of states of consciousness, but to make heuristic distinctions between the ‘differing states of intensity’ and attentiveness (Searle, 1997: 5) to explain the complex processes of consciousness and their relation to embodied practice, which Bourdieu’s account fails to do. Sports training demonstrates that there are various levels of awareness – reflection, attention and practical sense, in analytic and synthetic modes – that are mobilized in the development of bodily capacities and their sedimentation into habitus.

LEVEL OF AWARENESS

Analytic mode

Synthetic mode

Agentic Reflection

retrospective

projective

Bodily Attention

monitoring technique

monitoring ‘feel’ and ‘look’

Practical Sense (Automaticity)

passive

active

Agentic reflection

In arguing for the unconscious nature of habitus, Bourdieu dismisses any form of ‘ordinary’ consciousness as either calculation or a spurious meta-consciousness. On the other hand, Bourdieu also makes a case throughout his work for the necessity of critical reflexivity, and argues that it is sociology’s task to accept that there is no transcendental consciousness; true reflexivity is gained by recognizing the interests behind scholarly knowledge and building this into analysis. However, implicit in Bourdieu’s argument is an assumption that there

is only critical reflexivity or unconscious action. He ignores the kinds of ordinary reflection that social actors engage in constantly.² We call this agentic reflection because we want to distinguish it from any grand claims about critical or transcendental consciousness. Agentic reflection is that discursive practice in which we consider our behaviour and its principles, which involves the monitoring of conduct which can be brought to discourse (Giddens, 1984: 4–7). It is not critical, in that it does not necessarily entail some engagement with relations of power or the sense of social location; rather it is an awareness of what we have done and what we can do. That is, it can be both backward and forward looking. Such acts of reflection are not to be judged in terms of veracity or social awareness; rather, they are about putting daily conduct into discourse.

We only have to turn to sports magazines, coaching videos and exercise books to see the ways human bodily capacities are constantly under reflection for purposes of transformation. Such reflection can be both analytic – deconstructing past or others’ actions and capacities – and synthetic – thinking about future actions and capacities. The processes of deconstruction are at work in the training texts to which we have already referred: Roche’s detailing of grip, shot and stance is an analysis of the appropriate elements of the movement, an important step in the embodiment of those actions. Murray in *Smart Tennis* talks about the importance of ‘debriefing’: a process of match review to reflect on technical, mental and strategic aspects (1999: 93).

However, to make that step into embodiment, deconstructive reflection has to shift into synthetic reflection. In synthetic reflection we *imagine* we can do what we cannot do, and experience it as a projected, embodied *fantasy*, but on the basis of already inscribed bodily capacities. So every kid who kicks a ball and fantasizes that they are soccer player David Beckham is therefore involved in the imagining of a potential habitus. This sense of projection is akin to what McMurtry (1992) identifies in Marx’s notion of human imagination as ‘projective consciousness’. Bourdieu, following Husserl, makes an important distinction:

the relationship to the future that might be called a *project*, and which poses the future as future, that is, as a possible constituted as such . . . is opposed to the relationship to the future that he calls *protension* or preperceptive anticipation, a relationship . . . to a future that is almost present.

(1998: 80–2)

It is this second relationship – which he also calls preoccupation – that is the ‘feel for the game’ he describes so well. Those who have a feel for the game, he argues, do not have to pose the objectives of their practice as ends because they are absorbed in the doing, in the ‘coming moment’. He goes on to use this as the basis of a critique of the intellectualist tradition of the cogito, but in fact his ignored category – the project or plan – has a significant place in sport at several levels: at the level of tactics in a game, for example, which are planned in advance. More

importantly, the distinction between the plan and anticipation when applied to learning a sport is a misguided one: the kind of anticipation Bourdieu talks about is an ideal – to achieve it there has to be some element of a project.

In training, this is typically referred to as goal setting: as champion Australian athlete Jane Flemming argues, ‘you have to have a plan’ to succeed in sport, and you have to engage in setting goals to achieve the plan (2000: xi, 15–16). Sports psychologists use various techniques to get athletes to embody a plan. Murray talks about the role of imagery as a form of mental rehearsal or visualization for short-term preparation, and about ‘prophetic imagery’ as the setting of goals for future performances (1999: 71, 93). Such visualization is intended to produce anticipation as automaticity during the course of a game – but it does this through very conscious reflection.

Bodily attention

‘Between’ reflection and the automaticity Bourdieu and sportspeople desire is the constant monitoring of the body. Bodily attention captures the consciousness attendant when we engage in everyday activities and which makes it possible to monitor them without disruption. Wacquant’s study repeatedly emphasizes this monitoring, although he accords it no status as a form of consciousness. As *The Coach in Action* (Australian Coaching Council, 1993) suggests, ‘the ability of athletes to internally analyse their performance is often underestimated’.

It is important to note that there are different modes of attention – in the analytic mode, it is the kind of focus on dismantling technique which is at stake, while in the synthetic mode, what is monitored is rather the ‘feel’ of the movement. In the Tony Roche video, he talks both of a checking of the individual components of the grip, the stance, the movement, but he also talks of their feel and look. These modes are complementary in training.

Bodily attention is something that has to be managed during a game, but it is learnt through training. Murray talks of the different dimensions of ‘attentional focus’ in tennis – broad and narrow, external and internal – through which the player can control their concentration. This involves mastering ‘selective attention’, or shifting the object of attention – from court to ball, from strategy to mental state – both during a game and as part of the process of training. Murray argues that attentional control is something we ‘naturally do’, but says that we can learn to do it better (1999: 35, 44). ‘Self-talk’ is the kind of internal dialogue many sportspeople use to regulate attentional control, as well as things like routine (1999: 53, 58).

Practical sense

Lastly, we have the level of practical sense that Bourdieu emphasizes. There is no doubt that automaticity is crucial to sporting success. Many athletes, like

the tennis star Bjorn Borg, explain their performance as though they are on 'automatic pilot' where instinct takes over (Borg, 1980: 142). However, this kind of automaticity in a sporting event is an accomplishment involving many hours of application in training. Borg admits that his intuitive anticipation was the result of 'experience' (1980: 139). One coaching technique refers to 'automation' as the necessary stage between learning basic technique and virtuosity (Schönborn, 1999: 77).

Unlike Bourdieu, we stress two things. First, this practical sense is not radically distinct from the forms of consciousness involved in the acquisition of the automaticity necessary to sporting competence. These 'levels of awareness' are not discrete states of consciousness, but rather a chain of intensities between which we move in achieving automaticity. Second, these levels of awareness can operate at the same time, even during a game. Our ability to play requires different uses of these intensities for different things: when we play tennis, we can simply 'go with the flow' and 'forget' our bodily movements in terms of shot execution; or we can check our stroke when we realize it isn't working; or we can reflect upon our strategy and alter it as we see fit. Murray's discussion of selective attention during a game makes this point. The notion of 'being in the zone' is what athletes use to describe the flow state which is not pure unconsciousness, but the controlled concentration achieved through 'overlearning' necessary to make things feel automatic (Murray, 1999: 45, 52).

It is important to point out that it is not simply the case that automaticity is always active, is always about doing, which is assumed in Bourdieu. When we turn our attention to training, it is crucial to note the kinds of passive automaticity necessary in the analytic mode – in listening to the coach in thinking about technique, visualizing movements and contemplating goals – as well as the active automaticity of the synthetic mode, when movements are integrated in a larger act. Crudely put, the passive mode involves the subordination of the body to the mind, while the active mode reverses this relation.

To reiterate, this discussion rests on a monism that sees mind and body not as separate entities but as distinct and parallel expressions of the same reality; we should not oppose practical sense and consciousness as Bourdieu does. Sensory perception is not simply bodily sensation but is fundamental to the development of self-consciousness. Consciousness is a lived involvement in a series of concrete situations that provide the necessary sense of a continuous self: self-consciousness derives from embodied practices in the world, through which we discover otherness as well as selfhood (Archer, 2000: 7–8, 131). Memory is the bodily sedimentation of accomplished acts, which gives us a past and a future (Archer, 2000: 132). Against Bourdieu's radical distinction between practical sense and 'theoretical discourse', Archer argues that it is through embodied practice that we develop thought and language – about distinct objects and about self and our relation to the world. She claims that Bourdieu cannot

accord the primacy to practice as he states because he severs the tie between practical and discursive thought (2000: 146, 151–2). This self-consciousness deriving from embodied practice is central to potential space: objectifying bodily capacities and, hence, conceiving and realizing transformation.

The web of others

The potential space of human capacitation is not just created by the mind-body relation within the individual, for what is clear from these examples is the importance of the mind-bodies of others, and especially the coach in structuring the training process. As Spinoza and phenomenology both emphasize, subjectivity is not an individual, internal process but a worldly practice of embodied beings in intersubjective relations (Crossley, 1996). Ironically, given that Bourdieu exhorts us to ‘think relationally’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 228), there is little sense of the intersubjective dimensions here.

Sports stars frequently admit that they couldn’t have succeeded without their coach and the history of coaching suggests that it became more systematic and more ‘scientific’ in the later twentieth century when an extended division of labour emerged – with one or more coaches, physiotherapists, psychologists, nutritionists and so on (Phillips, 1989). Wacquant recognizes the extent to which the ‘government of the body’ is a collective enterprise that involves (conscious, even calculating) monitoring by the trainer, manager, stable mates and family through a ‘web or relations of information and cooperation’ (1995: 80–1). Yet, as with Bourdieu, who claims that trainers speak to the body, he forgets that the trainer’s consciousness involves forms of ‘intellectual understanding’.

The potential space of subject-formation begins as a relation of self-other (Winnicott, 1971); the coaching relation is an elaboration of this basic form of intersubjectivity. The space of awareness built into the mind-body relation is given greater dimensionality by the web of other mind-bodies through which athletic development is constituted: the spoken and kinaesthetic feedback from the coaching staff complements the mind-body relation of the athlete. Indeed, there exists in this web a distribution of mental and bodily tasks in which the cognitive load of structuring the training process can be carried by the coaching staff, who take greater responsibility for theoretical practice as the athlete concentrates on doing-practice. This conceptualization of human capacities as potential space allows for a temporal conceptualization of subjective development as well as the spatialized conceptualization of the field of positions. What needs to be returned to the concept of habitus, and what is central to structuring the map of the levels of awareness above, is a concept of habituation.

Conclusion: from habitus to habituation

We have argued that habitus needs to be reconceptualized by articulating it with the modalities of consciousness, rather than opposing habitus to consciousness. Bourdieu, in trying to emphasize the largely unconscious nature of embodied practice, mistakes automaticity for absence of consciousness. While we can agree with Wacquant that 'progressive bodily self-transformation is akin to a process of sedimentation' (1995: 72), this is NOT the same as claiming there is no discursive mediation, no conscious transfer. As Damasio (1994: 133) argues, if consciousness was so unnecessary to human action we would not need it at all. He points out that 'consciousness buys an enlarged protection policy . . . [a] flexibility of response based on the particular history of your interactions with the environment'. There is no doubt that much of what we do remains submerged in the unconscious, that is an unconscious with both a psychical and a bodily dimension, but consciousness allows for the possibility of calibration necessary to repeated actions and to human development.

What Wacquant calls sedimentation we want to call habituation: both suggest a crucial part of the refinement of technique is that these skills become *naturalized*; that is, largely automatic reactions in the environment in which they are to be executed. This process of sedimentation is built into training programmes: *The Coach in Action* argues that players move through various stages: as beginners they need explicit instruction regarding technique; as intermediate players they have developed an ability to link elements into movement, and hence need practice to develop their rhythm to concentrate on the result of the action rather than the action itself; as advanced players with high levels of skill they can co-ordinate all the aspects of the game, so they need guidance with tactics.

Bourdieu argues that habitus is not habit, although he lists habits as expressions of habitus (1996: 180). Habit, for him, implies a 'mechanistic vision', while he is trying to explain practical sense as 'an active and creative relation to the world' (1992: 122). Yet, habitus cannot develop except via habituation. Performativity is based on iteration (Butler, 1990); to be able to do something reliably and 'naturally', one has had to do it again and again. Habituation, moreover, allows us to account for how conscious behaviour can become unconscious. There is no doubt that much of what we do remains unconscious, yet throughout the training process we have the capacity to reflect upon our practical sense. Competence is achieved, however, when we return much of the bodily process to the realm of the unconscious. We conceive of this relation as a dialectic of bringing behaviour to consciousness in order to alter it, and then habituating that behaviour: a dialectic of 'remembering' and 'forgetting'. We develop what Gehlen calls 'disengagement': it is the indispensable precondition for continued activity. We cannot think about all the actions we need to undertake, otherwise we would not get around to acting. Disengagement saves time, creating a division

of labour within the mind-body. Much action needs to be spontaneous and repetitive to liberate our higher capabilities (cited in Heller, 1984: 129) – in this case, thought given over to contemplation of strategy. Habituation, then, is not simply an ignorant and passive capitulation to a logic of power. As Merleau-Ponty (1999: 143) points out, it allows us greater agency: ‘Habit expresses our power of dilating our being-in-the-world, or changing our existence by appropriating fresh instruments’.

This notion of disengagement suggests that things are in a partly conscious state for them to subside below the level of consciousness. This allows for the possibility of returning habituated activity to the realm of consciousness. We can forget things, following Merleau-Ponty, because we can recall them. Leder (1990) has coined the term ‘dysappearance’ to capture the ways the body becomes an object of consciousness in moments of crisis, but we have shown how such awareness exists as part of the process of bodily transformation. The automaticity spoken of above is a specific mind–body relation: we also have the capacity to make ourselves the object of reflection even in the act of doing, given the appropriate training. It is this ‘affinity’ between consciousness and habituated technique that is crucial to competent performance.

Frequently, the movement between reflection, attention and automaticity is built into preparation for the event. The champion long jumper Bob Beamon, who talks of jumping as being ‘automatic’, when ‘instinct’ takes over, stresses that this happens *after* the descent into readiness: ‘When it came time to jump, I would follow the same cadence in my mind: relax, focus, pray and see. When the sand settled, I had literally flown over the pit’ (Attwood, 2000: 54). It is this ‘affinity’ between consciousness and habituated technique that is central to sporting performance.

We have argued that Bourdieu’s conceptualization of habitus can be elaborated by returning to the question of acquisition and by linking the extension of bodily capacity to the dialectic of consciousness and habituation. Intervention reshapes bodily capacity through conscious acts of calibration; and, through repetition, this refined technique becomes habitus. This refinement cannot occur without taking stock and making use of where one’s habitus is at, but the development of habitus has simply been explained, in the past, by the logic of the field. As a category that captures temporal duration, habituation could allow us to explore the links between mimicry, repetition, experimentation, appropriation and so on in the formation of habituated capacities, the modalities of consciousness and the relations between multiple mind-bodies. It is hard to imagine how Bourdieu could have learnt to play tennis, or anything else, without the presence of consciousness – his own and that of others – in his habituation of bodily capacities.

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Notes

- 1 We use ‘mind–body’ to indicate a monist parallelism, in contrast to the oppositional ‘mind/body’ of Descartes.
- 2 Wacquant (1992: 36–46) has an excellent discussion of Bourdieu’s ‘epistemic reflexivity’ – the kind of reflexivity Bourdieu discusses in *Pascalian Meditations* – but like Bourdieu, Wacquant forgets to discuss the everyday functions of reflection that he mentions briefly.

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