To take a decentered view of master–apprentice relations leads to an understanding that mastery resides not in the master but in the organization of the community of practice of which the master is part ...
                                        Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, 1991[1]

When talking about seasickness, Icelanders implicitly recognize the relationship between knowledge and practice, and the unity of emotion and cognition, body and mind. For them, "seasickness" (*sjóveiki*) not only recalls the bodily state of nausea sometimes caused by lack of practical knowledge, the unexpected rocking movements of the world, but it is also used as a metaphor for learning in the company of others, which is seen in terms of the *recovery* from seasickness – "getting one's sea legs" (*sjóast*). Those who return "home" after an experience on rough seas are said to have *found* their sea legs (*verða sjóaðir*); as nausea is replaced by well-being, a quantum leap in learning and sociality takes place. I shall argue that getting one's sea legs – becoming skillful – means to attend to the task at hand, actively engaged with a social and natural environment. This suggests a notion of enskilment that emphasizes immersion in the practical world, being caught up in the incessant flow of everyday life – and not simply, as many cognitive studies have assumed, the mechanistic internalization and application of a mental script, a stock of knowledge or a "cultural model," "what one needs to know in order to behave as a functioning member of one's society" (Holland and Quinn 1987: 4).

The approach adopted here is informed by theories of practice and practical knowledge recently advanced in several disciplines, including anthropology (Bourdieu 1990, Lave 1988, Ingold 1993). Such an approach was outlined many years ago in both European and North American contexts – by Malinowski (see Leach 1970), Polanyi (1958), and some others (Joas 1993); only recently, however, has it begun to emerge as a consistent theme with a momentum of its own (Ortner 1984), reinforced by current theorizing on

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[1] J. Lave and E. Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, 1991, Cambridge University Press.

the body. The perspective of practice theory, I suggest, has important implications for studies of differential fishing success, a theme explored by a number of anthropologists, especially discussions of the so-called "skipper effect," the idea that the contribution of the skipper is critical to the size of his catch relative to that of others (Palsson and Durrenberger 1982, Gatewood 1983). Discussions of differential fishing success, I argue, often remain couched in reductionist terms, emphasizing the notion of the autonomous individual, sometimes at the expense of both ethnography and theoretical insight. Acheson observes that the "technical skills" of the fishing captain "are far more critical in determining the catch of a boat than *any other single factor*" (1977: 111; emphasis added) and much research has attempted to establish to what extent that is so. The problem, however, is that it is far from clear what exactly the reference to "technical skills" as a "single factor" should be taken to mean.

Readdressing the issue of fishing skills, and emphasizing the social nature of human action, inevitably shifts the ethnography to new kinds of questions. Focusing on everyday activity and situated practice rather than individualistic, normative models – as Lave (1988: 15) points out in another context – "motivates . . . a different set of problems and questions than the study of virtuoso performance and people's failures to produce such performances." In particular, it encourages us to attend to whole persons, master–apprentice relations, and the wider community to which they belong, decentring the study of enskilment. If enskilment is a necessarily collective enterprise – involving whole persons, social relations, and communities of practice – so also is ethnographic apprenticeship, doing anthropological fieldwork (Gudeman and Rivera 1990, 1995). I will argue, drawing upon my experience in my native Iceland, that enskilment in fieldwork inevitably involves psycho-somatic processes, if not veritable "gut reactions." Fieldworkers usually begin their "trip" on the margin of the community, nauseated by their novice status. As they become increasingly involved in and knowledgeable about the activities of others, they move towards the center and begin to feel "at home," in both their bodies and the company of others.

9.1   Learning theory

Theories of learning and craftsmanship have often been presented in highly normative terms, presupposing a natural novice who gradually becomes a member of society by assimilating its superorganic heritage (see Bloch 1991: 189). Although different social theories have different notions of the relationship between the individual and the collective and of what sociality entails – thus Boasian culture theory speaks of the "enculturation" of individuals as cultural knowledge is stored in their heads, while for Durkheimians "collective

representations" are supra-individual byproducts of interaction – in *normative* theory learning is generally assumed to take place with socialization, broadly defined as the acquisition of a stock of knowledge about expected ways of thinking, feeling, and acting (see Ochs 1988: 5). Given the normative approach, learning entails the transmission of culture, a mental code or script that exists prior to and independent of human activities, a recipe for action (a pre*scription*) analogous to a book of grammar or a dictionary – in short, a Saussurean *langue*. Related to the notion of learning as cultural transmission is the tendency to think of the person in terms of a container, "as if the person possessed a fixed capacity [of competence] analogous to the amount of liquid that can be placed in a glass" (Fischer *et al.* 1993: 94).

There are several serious problems with such an approach. For one thing, in reducing the novice to an imitator of technique, the normative approach leaves unanswered the fundamental question as to how a body of cultural knowledge is constructed. If both novices and tutors (by definition, former novices) are mere recipients of models and texts, submitted to a body of knowledge given in advance, it is difficult to see how human creativity could be possible at all. This problem is evident in much of the literature on "indigenous knowledge" and "ethnoecology"; as Ellen (1982: 225) remarks with respect to this litera-ture, people "just do not conduct their lives in ... pre-programmed ways." Also, the model of cultural transmission is highly ethnocentric – the product of Western history and textual discourse, reinforced by the tradition of literacy and the institutions of formal schooling and disembedded training – caught up in dualisms of mind versus body and learning versus context (Suchman 1987). Western tradition is preoccupied with analytic and theoretical ways of know-ing, *episteme*, devaluing and misrepresenting practical and contextual know-ledge, *techne* (Marglin 1990). This tradition needs to be explained and not taken for granted in a truly comparative study of epistemology.

The normative view, moreover, misconstrues the essence of the lived-in world, failing to capture what it means to engage in a skillful act, the "feel" for the game. Rosaldo (1980: 22) rightly remarks, using the game of basketball as an example, that ethnographic narratives of complex events must go beyond descriptions of rules and strategies; "there is a vast difference," he points out, "between merely knowing the rules of the game and having the knowledge required to follow the game in the manner of an experienced fan of fine judgement." What is most important, however, is the construction of a third kind of knowledge, conveying the essence of the game *from the point of view of the player*. This is precisely the approach Rosaldo seems later to have adopted, in his critique of the objectivist ethnographer who "positions himself as a spectator who looks on from the outside" (1987: 99). While rules and representations are relevant for the participant – the player – they are not what learning is all about. As Ingold (1993: 462) argues, the novice becomes skilled

not through the acquisition of rules and representations, "but at the point where he or she is able to dispense with them":

rules and representations ... are like a map of an unfamiliar territory, which can be discarded once you have learned to attend to features of the landscape, and can place yourself in relation to them. The map can be a help in the beginning to know the country, but the aim is to learn the country, not the map.

Indeed, a person who cannot *use* his or her knowledge to do something is "like a man who collects maps but never takes a trip" (Miller, Galanter, and Pribram 1960: 2).

Finally, normative theory assumes a one-way, hierarchical ordering of knowledge, as Lave (1988: 8) points out:

In this theory, duality of the person translates into a division of (intellectual) labor between academics and "the rest" that puts primitive, lower class, (school) children's, female, and everyday thought in a single structural position *vis-à-vis* rational scientific thought.

Normative theory, then, necessarily dismisses everyday language as cheap and theoretically irrelevant, as "mere" household words or "loose talk."

Oddly enough, anthropologists, who at the beginning of fieldwork normally assume the role of the apprentice, sometimes shift to the heroic role of the privileged "observer" at a later stage in their work; when in the field, in the process of writing *down*, they present themselves as naïve novices and their "informants" as their tutors, but as soon as they return to their academic bases the roles are sometimes mysteriously reversed, as if the act of writing *up* necessarily presupposes a kind of communicative metamorphosis. The humble novice anthropologist becomes a tutor. The textual "ups" and "downs" of ethnographic research are separated not only by physical movement; the journey "back home" represents a rite of passage during which the anthropologist supposedly experiences an instant coming of age – and meanwhile the native is trapped in the mythical "ethnographic present." Malinowski ridiculed the validity of native accounts – even though they might turn out to be close to or identical to his own. Malinowski, Leach (1970: 134–135) suggests, "specifically mocked at the account of Trobriand social structure that one might expect to obtain from a professional Trobriand informant, ... though when he himself attempted to write a concise description of 'The Constitution of Trobriand Society' ... the result resembles most strikingly that given by his imaginary despised 'informant.'"

Practice theory offers an alternative view of learning, craftsmanship, and ethnography – a view that allows for a novice whose sociality is given right from the beginning. Assuming a social or constitutive model of the individual is to introduce purpose, agency, and dialogue into the process of enskilment – a radical break with the Cartesian tradition of separating ideas and the real

world, learning and doing, experts and laypersons, knowledge and practice. The theory of practice, then, suggests a change in gestalt which "shifts the boundaries of activity well outside the skull and beyond the hypothetical economic actor, to persons engaged with the world for a variety of 'reasons'" (Lave 1988: 17–18); the proper unit of analysis is no longer the autonomous individual separated from the social world by the surface of the body, a natural being who passively internalizes the mental scripts of the cultural environment, but rather the whole person in action, acting within the contexts of that activity.

Such an approach – informed by practice theory and the notions of situated action, mutual enskilment, and communities of practice – emphasizes both democratic communion and the continuity of the social world. While the relations of novices and their tutors are rarely those of equals, there is quite a difference between the open and linear system of apprenticeship and the dualistic structure suggested by normative learning theory. The former mode, as Reed (1993: 54) remarks, invoking the "ecological" language of J.J. Gibson (1979), involves joint intentions and collaborative instruction, "in the sense of helping others to learn the affordances of objects and tools within the context of a given skill," whereas the latter involves a pyramidal context and a formal method of teaching.

9.2 "Getting one's sea legs"

Moving from learning theory to ethnographic practice, my own Icelandic fieldwork provides a useful starting point. In the early phases of my fieldwork, the process of establishing the necessary trust and rapport often seemed painfully slow. At one point, however, in the middle of the winter season in 1981, I felt as if I had made certain and sudden progress. A skipper invited me to join him on one of his fishing trips: "If you *really* want to know what the fishing industry is all about, you must go fishing." I accepted his offer, and shortly after we left harbor we were in rough seas. While the skipper and his crew patiently waited for the weather to improve, however, I was busy emptying the contents of my stomach. Then, miraculously, it seemed, the weather improved and, fortunately, the feeling of seasickness vanished. Quite suddenly, my nausea had been replaced with a sensation of alertness and well-being, an "oceanic" feeling. I had, quite literally, "found my sea legs."

Many other fieldworkers have referred to similar "breakthroughs" – signals of dramatic, positive change – in their relationships with the people they visit (Okely 1992: 17); such stories are often used in modern fieldwork rhetoric. For me, however, the metaphoric association with the journey draws attention not so much to privileged excursions into the exotic as to the similarities in doing fieldwork and fishing in rough seas. Seasickness, in fact, has much in common with the psycho-somatic symptoms identified, by both fieldworkers

and medical experts, as "culture shock" (see Wengle 1988: 9–10). It would be wrong, of course, to simply dismiss the experiences of seasickness and culture shock as pathological ones; both involve bodily manifestations of a particular stage in learning. The fishing trip, then, served as a useful reminder of a critical stage in my fieldwork, and, more generally, of the emotional and physical manifestations of mastery and enskilment. As many had before me, I came to realize that to engage in anthropology is not just to "observe" and record but to participate in the lives of other people.

While I find it useful to refer to my fieldwork as a fishing trip, I do not regard it as a solitary trip across cultural boundaries. During my original fieldwork, of course, I relied heavily on conversations with local friends and key informants, and later on I collaborated extensively with another anthropologist (Paul Durrenberger). Whether we liked it or not, we were rarely able to enjoy the luxury of being the detached ethnographer. Anything we had to say on the subject of common interest – differential fishing success – inevitably got entangled in ongoing debates among indigenous fishermen and boat-owners on the role and nature of individual contributions, on fishing expertise and resource management. We came to the conclusion that anthropology was best described as a dialogic enterprise involving both feedback and disagreement, as a Malinowskian "long conversation" (Gudeman and Rivera 1990) in which the acts of "writing down" and "writing up" were difficult to separate. This recognition – triggered by discussions with fishermen and social scientists and by the reading of anthropological texts – sent me back to my early fieldnotes, to the communities where I had worked, and to comparative ethnography. Somewhat ironically, it was only some years after my experience of seasickness, fishing, and collaborative ethnography that I began to suspect that the perspective I had adopted with respect to my own enskilment as fieldworker and ethnographer might be applied to the context I had studied – to fish-finding and travels at sea.

In fact, the contrast made above, between the textual approach of normative theory and the situated approach of practice theory, may well be illustrated with reference to the ethnography of fishing and ocean navigation. An article by Gladwin (1964), which compares the strategies used by European navigators and by Trukese sailors when traveling from one island to another over miles of empty ocean, contains some pertinent observations. In the case of Europeans, Gladwin suggests, most of the necessary thinking is typically done in advance of its implementation, whereas in the case of the Trukese, decision-making is continuous, accommodated to winds, tides, ocean currents, and so on. Also, while European navigators are able to describe in words the procedures they follow and are likely to give a "logical" explanation of what they are doing, a Trukese navigator "cannot possibly put into words all of the myriad perceptions which have led him to be sure at that moment where the island is"

(Gladwin 1964: 174). The European navigator operates deductively, proceeding from general principles to details, whereas the Trukese navigator seems to operate inductively "[h]e does indeed start with details, but he never arrives at any discernible principles" (Gladwin 1964: 175). Gladwin's description, then, captures some of the differences between the abstract, textual logics of much of European navigation and the situated, intuitive procedures of Trukese navigators (see Hutchins 1983, Suchman 1987: vii–x). His analysis, however, tends to be phrased in the normative terms of Western educational discourse, emphasizing mental models and "cognitive strategies" – what goes on inside the brain: "The Trukese navigator," he argues, "does it all in his head. This is an astounding intellectual achievement" (Gladwin 1964: 172). Gladwin is quite right in pointing out that Trukese navigation is a remarkable achievement – we may refer to "this kind of ability as a 'knack,'" he says, "and respect a person for his competence" (1964: 175). Anxious to show, however, that Trukese are able to travel long distances on open boats without the use of the "external" navigational devices of the European, he accepts uncritically the mentalistic premises of the normative theory of craftsmanship.

In an article on salmon fishing in Alaska, Gatewood (1983) similarly emphasizes intuitive, situated procedures, contrasting them to "rational" procedures of decision-making by means of terms not unlike those used by Gladwin. For Gatewood (1983: 348–349), a "rational" procedure involves conscious consideration of alternatives, deliberation in terms of these considerations, thoughtful reflection on the process itself, and adherence to well-defined procedures for selecting the right alternative. An intuitive or "reasonable" procedure, he argues, is the same as a rational one "except that the manner by which the final synthesis is accomplished cannot be specified by the decider in advance of the decision itself" (Gatewood 1983: 348–349). In Alaskan fishing, the crew expect their skipper to make a decision on a "rational" basis – "as opposed to basing it on hunches, sheer randomness, dreams, divination, etc.," but contrary to the image of rationality they try to protect, under severe constraints of competition and impression management, "most skippers fall short of explicit, algorithmic procedures when it comes time to decide" (Gatewood 1983: 348, 349). Gatewood's explanation for the discrepancy between image and reality is not simply that rational solutions to the decision dilemmas of fishing are unavailable; more importantly, skippers' decisions are "a matter of unspecifiable skill, of tacit knowledge" (1983: 363). Shifting the focus of inquiry "from normative and outcome-predictive to ethnographic," Gatewood (1983: 364) argues, "reveals how people differ from the machines and mathematical models they create." Bloch (1991: 190) similarly points out that if we think of decision-making as a normative serial process carried on by a single processor, everyday tasks which a skilled practitioner adequately deals with in only a few seconds inevitably become

Herculean in size. Bloch's perspective of "connectionism," which postulates a different "cognitive mechanism" (multiple parallel processors) fails, however, to account for bodily knowledge and communities of practice, emphasizing instead knowledge as existing in the brain.

The perspective of intuitive knowledge and situated practice represents a radical challenge to cognitive anthropology and its preoccupation with intellectualized static systems. Few people actually operate in everyday life in the idealized manner described for the European navigator and the "rational" Alaskan skipper, and those who do are unlikely to do so on a regular basis. Many people act, much of the time, on the basis of intuitive knowledge and bodily dispositions – "tacit" knowledge (Polanyi 1958) or *techne* (Marglin 1990). As Suchman (1987: ix) suggests, "plans are best viewed as a weak resource for what is primarily *ad hoc* activity. It is only when we are pressed to account for the rationality of our actions, given the biases of European culture, that we invoke the guidance of a plan." To adequately represent situated practice, the flow of unfolding activity, and how we find our sea legs, other models are needed. And this brings me back to differential fishing success, Icelandic fishing, and the notion of the skipper effect.

9.3   Differential fishing success

In fisheries generally, catches vary from one boat to another. As Sahlins (1972: 73–74) observes, "for certain forms of production, notably hunting and fishing, the likelihood of differential success is known to common sense and experience." The nature and causes of such differences, however, are matters of some disagreement among anthropologists. In the literature on fishing, there has been a tendency to emphasize the variability of the skills of the leaders of fishing operations. Reviewing the literature, Acheson (1981: 290) points out that "the vast majority of anthropologists are convinced that . . . differential success is primarily due to marked differences in fishing skill." At the same time, several ethnographies have drawn attention to the social world to which the skipper belongs. Some have focused on the importance of the crew for skippers' decision-making and, by extension, fishing success – a classic example being Barth's (1966) analysis of the role of trust and self-confidence in Norwegian herring fishing (see also Heath 1976). Some accounts, too, have emphasized that the world of the ship should not be presented as an "endogenous" one, as a "closed cultural system" (Byron 1986: 96). In the latter view, any study of what happens on board fishing vessels must consider the role of fleet behavior and the larger contexts of fisheries and fishing communities. To what extent, then, does the focusing on the personality and production value of the fishing skipper contradict the emphasis on communities of practice (crews, fleets, and fisheries) and the situated nature of learning and decision-making?

When explaining differential fishing success, Icelanders often assumed, during most of the twentieth century, that the contribution of the leader of fishing operations overshadows that of everything else. Catches were said to vary from one boat to another during any one fishing trip, a single season, or a generation largely because skippers are different. In competitive fishing, the skipper's position or "seat" (*sæti*) in the local hierarchy of catches was a central concern; if the skipper had a low position, he risked losing his job. Once during my fieldwork, a skipper was fired mid-season by his company because "he did not fish enough." Being at the head of the fleet for the season, on the other hand, being *aflakóngur* (literally, "catch-king"), brought a high degree of honor and prestige. One of the central points in Icelandic theories of fishing success, then, was the attribution of particular qualities to the "good" skipper which enable him to catch more fish than others. The chief quality of a good skipper was held to be a very personal one, perhaps comparable to "intelligence" in psychological testing, a quality that is independent of the frequency of its application. For Icelanders such a distinction was just as important as the distinction made by many educators between the "cleverness" of a student and how often he or she puts it to work, the difference between intelligence quotient and diligence. The dominant Icelandic theory of fishing success, then, was *hierarchical* in that it emphasized differences among a group of producers, normally within a local fleet. As I shall argue later on, however, another (and somewhat less visible) element of indigenous discourse also drew attention to the co-operation of the crew and the wider context of communities and fisheries.

In Iceland, the hierarchical model of fishing success first developed at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the domestic economy gave way to entrepreneurial fishing and large-scale capitalist production for an expanding foreign market. In order to appropriate fish, skippers had to become fishers of men. Later – especially after the introduction of a quota system in the cod fishery in 1983, a few years after my original fieldwork – a new discourse developed in competition with the earlier one. The present system of quota management allocates a given share of the annual catch, a transferable quota, to each boat-owner. Fishermen and managers agree that, as a result, the "hunting element" of fishing (*veiðimennska*) has been disappearing. Sometimes they expressed the view that, with increasing governmental control of the industry, the custom of awarding the most successful skipper of the year a particular prize on Fishermen's Day (a standard custom in most Icelandic fishing communities for decades) was a little archaic; as fishing was "reduced" to business transactions, success became less a matter of fishing skills than capital and economics. The top skippers were simply privileged quota-kings (*kvótakóngar*).

Keeping in mind the importance of the hierarchical model in both the ethnographic literature and the Icelandic context, Durrenberger and I tried to

separate the rhetorical element of production discourse and the realities of differential success, including the role of the skipper effect (Palsson and Durrenberger 1982, 1983). We tried to assess statistically the skipper's contribution in the case of the winter fleet of Sandgerði. The "residual" in our analyses, the percentage of variance unaccounted for by the variables of boat size and number of trips, represented the effects of all other factors that could possibly influence catch – such as the skipper and crew, the mechanical condition of the boats, the weather, and economic and political factors. Given the small residual in our calculations, we concluded that the skipper effect was far less than generally assumed. If differential success was principally a "material" matter, individual differences in fishing skills ("fishiness," *fiskni*) were overstated in folk accounts.

Several studies have addressed similar issues, attempting to identify the nature and causes of differential success by statistical means (see, for instance, Thorlindsson 1988). One of the problems, however, in most, if not all, of the statistical studies involved is that they exhibit certain methodological flaws and weaknesses. As Gatewood and Mace (1990: 346) point out, the findings of many of these studies typically remain ambiguous because the key "variables" (skipper's skills, in particular) are relegated to the status of residual effects – in other words, they are not measured directly. Another problem is that some of the variables – skipper, boat size, and fishing effort – tend to be confounded; a good skipper tends to have a large boat and to fish frequently and it is difficult, therefore, to separate the effects of person, effort, and technology.

The central issue, however, is not so much a matter of statistics and methodological refinement; rather, it has to do with the conceptual issues that remain. Take, for one thing, the "confounded variables" of person and technology. The problematic nature of technology and its relation to the person is well captured in the Icelandic distinction sometimes made between those who fish "by skill" (*af lagni*; literally, with dexterity) and those who fish "by force" (*af krafti*; literally, with power). In the former case, typically involving an experienced skipper, dexterity and alertness to the tasks at hand are of primary importance; in the latter case, usually that of a novice, it is technology that counts. The skillful skipper attends to his fishing technology as if it were an extension of his person; the novice, in contrast, focuses on the gear itself – fetishizing his gadgets, making more trips, and using more fuel, often destroying more gear in the process. Where are we, then, to draw the boundaries between fishermen, their technology, and the environment? Polanyi (1958: 59) observes that as we become skillful practitioners we assimilate technology as *a part* of our own body. In the process of learning, he suggests, "we shift outwards the points at which we make contact with the things that we observe as objects outside ourselves"; as tools become "part of ourselves, the operating persons," we "pour ourselves into them and

assimilate them as parts of our own existence. We accept them existentially by dwelling in them" (Polanyi 1958: 59).

Significantly, in Iceland experienced skippers often speak of knowing the details and the patterns of the "landscape" of the sea bottom "as well as their fingers." This indicates that for the skilled skipper fishing technology – the boat, electronic equipment, and fishing gear – is not regarded as an "external" mediator between his person and the environment but rather as a bodily extension in quite a literal sense. Thanks to such technological extensions the experienced skipper is able to "see" the fish, an otherwise invisible prey, and the landscape of the seabed – much like, given the necessary training, a blind person is able to walk with the aid of a stick. Thus, as Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (1993: 388–389) point out, "skippers operating comparable boats will make different use of them in terms of effort and efficiency." Such bodily extensions have their ethnographic parallels; skilled fieldworkers pour themselves into their pen or notebook (or computer), not so much focusing on them as dwelling in them. In the situated practice of fieldwork, our equipment, too, has a tendency to "disappear" (see Suchman 1987: 53).

More importantly, given the present perspective, the whole framing of the issue of differential fishing skills rests on a reductionist notion of skill and the autonomous human agent, much like sociolinguistic notions of speaking and communicative competence (Palsson 1991: 17). Assuming that enskilment is mainly the result of practical engagement with the environment, the notion of the autonomous skipper is a misleading one; whatever different contributors to the discussion of the skipper effect may have said about the *size* of the statistical residual, and about the amount of variance in catches explained by the skipper's skill, there has been a tendency to think of the skipper as a separate "variable" more or less independent of social context, and to remove his actions from the sphere of social relations. Thorlindsson, who argues for the *strength* of the skipper effect by comparing the hierarchies of the Icelandic herring fishery and international chess, is no doubt right in suggesting that in both cases "individual performance is . . . based on skill," (1988: 206), but the analogy between a highly individualistic game and fishing – equivalent to Saussure's famous analogy between chess and speaking (see Harris 1988) – tends to draw upon a culturally specific view of the craftsman and producer. When applied to fishing, the analogy of chess suggests a dubious model of the skipper, a person operating outside society, removing his actions from his relations with crew, other skippers and their crew, and the wider community to which he belongs. If those who emphasize the strength of the skipper effect tend to lose sight of the social nature of the tasks involved, then statistical analyses (including my own) that purport to show the *weakness* of the skipper effect, relative to folk accounts, likewise fail adequately to render the collective project of fishing.

Again, indigenous discourse provides a lead. While Icelandic fishermen and boat-operators frequently underline the role of the skipper, they also emphasize the importance of "having a good crew" (*að hafa góðan mannskap*). One trawler skipper I talked to used the analogy of music, referring to the crew as an instrument and the skipper as a piano player:

A good player is useless if the piano is deficient or out of tune. Likewise, a first class piano doesn't make good music if the player is no good.

Skippers' frequent statements about the significance of "having a good crew" have something to do with modesty; a good skipper is unlikely to elaborate on his own performance or capabilities, since boasting would not be tolerated. Nevertheless, there is every reason to take seriously skippers' claims about the importance of the crew; such statements are not merely rhetoric. To adequately render the social nature of production we may have to extend the notion of the "skipper effect" and refer as well to a "crew effect" (Rob van Ginkel 1992, personal communication) – if not to a "fleet effect" (White 1989). If, for the skipper, the crew is an "instrument" analogous to his boat and fishing gear, it logically follows, given what I said above, that it, too, forms a part of the operating person of the skipper. To return to the question I posed above, concerning the relative contributions of the individual and the larger social context, fishing success is both a matter of personalities *and* collectivities. And this is precisely to decenter the notion of skipperhood; in order to have success in catching fish, the skipper must dwell with his crew and the larger community of practice to which they all belong.

To continue the ethnographic analogy, to find their sea legs – to learn to "make good music," to use the skipper's words – ethnographers must pour themselves into the community they work in. While for anthropologists such a perspective of dwelling and empathy strikes a familiar note, it also runs against much accepted wisdom, including the current image of the lonely fieldworker and the alienating discourse on violence and boundaries associated with the notion of anthropology as cultural translation.

9.4   The flow and momentum of fishing

While fishing the crew performs a highly complex operation, involving a series of specialized and interrelated tasks, each of which must be performed quickly and in accordance with a given schedule. Fishing with gill nets is a good example. A net boat has several units of gill nets (*trossur*) and on each trip the skipper will normally visit several locations, drawing the nets set during the previous trip (usually a day or two earlier) and re-setting them. Deciding on the exact location is the skipper's responsibility; the crew are not directly involved although they take an active interest (given the application of a "share system")

and, occasionally, especially when fishing is not going well, they may offer their own views. In contrast, setting the nets and drawing them are intensely co-operative tasks. Once the boat is in the right spot, the engine is set to full speed while the crew "cast" the nets overboard in a swift operation. The key issue here is to make sure that the nets do not become entangled, so that the operation can be completed smoothly and without accident.

Drawing the nets is a slower but far more complex process. The skipper oversees the whole operation from his base on the "bridge." Each member of the crew occupies a specific position on the deck, the most critical one being that of the operator of the winch that draws the net. Not only is this a highly dangerous task, it sets the speed of the operation and ensures the flow of the job. The position of the winch-operator tends to be permanent and specialized; other deck-hands, in contrast, rotate relatively freely from one position to another. Clearing the net and removing the fish also demands quick hands, careful attention, and good co-ordination. Each person has constantly to adjust his or her actions to those of the other crew as well as to the speed of the net passing through their hands. If one person fails to cope with the demands of the task, the whole operation comes to a halt. Keeping stops to a minimum not only diminishes the likelihood of accidents as well as maximizing free time ashore between trips, but also increases catches relative to effort (that is, per trip). Asked about the importance of co-operation among the crew, a manager of a large fishing firm (and a former successful skipper) explained:

It almost makes *all* the difference to have a good crew. After all, a skipper cannot achieve considerable success unless he has a good crew. Two of our boats are almost identical, but in one case there is a constant turnover of crew – as three or four deck-hands leave the boat after each fishing trip – while in the other the crew remains essentially the same. The latter boat, with its stable and experienced crew, enjoys much greater fishing success.

Since an experienced crew is the key to efficiency and safety on deck, as well as to the economic use of gear and technology, boat-owners try to avoid a high turnover in personnel. Skippers, similarly, emphasize that successful fishing is only possible as long as certain interactional demands are met – a low turnover of crew and good relationships among the persons involved. Thus skippers at the top of the local hierarchy tend to have stable crews, while those at the bottom must accept inexperienced novices much of the time. Generally, a high turnover of crew is regarded as a bad sign with severe implications; it suggests low fishing effort (relatively few trips), limited catches in any one trip, low salaries, low morale, lack of prestige, and a high accident rate. Skippers point out that while every skillful deck-hand was once a novice, and while they may have to put up with one novice at any time, a "mixed crew" with a relatively high number of inexperienced deck-hands is both a safety hazard and a social and economic handicap.

Given the importance of skilled deck-hands and a low turnover of personnel, crew membership, the result of complex negotiations, needs careful consideration. Whether or not he owns his boat or works for someone else (the larger vessels are usually company-owned while the smaller ones tend to be the property of skippers and their families), the skipper is responsible for hiring personnel – one or two mates, a cook, one or two mechanics, and several deck-hands, depending on the size of the boat and the kind of fishing gear used. Potential crew members are likely, of course, to keep in mind the skipper's record in fishing. It is not, however, the only relevant consideration. Some skippers are known to be arrogant, strong leaders while others have the reputation for being democratic "nice chaps." As one deck-hand put it:

Skippers very much differ from one another. A skipper may be good at catching fish (*aflamaður*), but he can be so boring that one is not willing to put up with him and work for him.

"Cultural" factors, therefore, may outweigh economic ones. Skippers, too, may be motivated by non-economic considerations. Some skippers believe that women pose particular difficulties at sea irrespective of their competence in the narrow context of fishing. Also, friendship and other personal connections may be more important to the skipper than the reported "market" value of a deck-hand. Often, however, it is difficult to separate the economic and the cultural; in the long run, cultural considerations may *become* economic, as self-fulfilling prophecies.

A good skipper needs a disciplined crew, but he also needs to be a friend of those who work with him. During fishing trips, the relationship between skipper and crew tends to be authoritarian and rigid, but when they reach harbor they often "loosen up," shifting to a more informal gear. Sometimes skippers socialize with their crew between fishing trips, strengthening social bonds and enhancing the solidarity of the crew, even though such occasions lack many of the ritual aspects Johnson (1979: 248) describes for the "group-binding" Portuguese *caldeirada* (a joint meal at a local tavern). While the hierarchy of skippers is subject to some stability, the skipper's trust and reputation is not given once and for all from the moment he begins to fish, as Barth's account would lead one to believe, emphasizing the "self-confirming pattern" (1966: 10) whereby "good" skippers get stable crews, fish independently, and land high catches (cf. Heath 1976); rather, trust and reputation are negotiated and maintained in the context of social discourse and changing social and economic realities, in the flux and movement of boats, capital, skippers, and crews.

The fishing crew, of course, is part of a larger context. Fishermen often speak of the personnel (*mannskapur*) of a boat in an extended sense – including several people ashore, those who ensure efficient repairs of equipment

between fishing trips and those who bait lines and take care of nets, repairing old ones or supplying new ones. Indeed, folk accounts of fishing success often emphasize the importance of good fishing gear and the diligence of the people ashore responsible for its maintenance. "Having a good crew," therefore, means not only being able to rely on a good *fishing* crew, but also being provided with good "services" (*þjónusta*) on land. Other ties connect the fishing crew to a series of social networks ashore, family and relatives, neighbors, and friends. Such networks are not limited to the landing port in question as they extend over a wider area. Skippers and crew get together in their respective regional organizations and unions, to negotiate shares and salaries and, generally, to defend their economic interests. Such relations significantly affect the process of recruitment, the mutual knowledge of fishermen, working conditions on board the boat, and, generally, the momentum of fishing.

The fleet is ever-present as well. While one may speak of the vessels temporarily associated with a particular landing port and nearby fishing grounds as a "local" fleet, such a fleet knows no clear boundaries (cf. Acheson 1988). The fleet, in fact, is a changing constellation of boats that are registered in different towns and municipalities, and many of the skippers, crew, and boat-owners involved are permanent residents of other localities. Moreover, the fleets of different ports are hard to separate; during fishing they merge on the boundless sea. Nevertheless, the communion at sea is a very important one. Inevitably the skipper's decisions while fishing are constrained by the decisions of other skippers and by the movements of the fleet. While deciding where to fish is largely guided by the readings of electronic equipment and by the skipper's experience of earlier fishing seasons, of no less importance is knowing what *other* skippers are doing, where they are likely to be, and how much they will catch. There are obvious benefits in co-operating with other skippers and crews on a daily basis while at sea, especially after a long break in fishing; sharing information on the state of the major areas saves time and fuel and each skipper gains information about fish migrations that he could not acquire on his own. As Wilson (1990: 14) points out, while fishermen seek to reduce the search problem by looking for recurrent patterns in the migration and location of fish, "the number of observations necessary to establish regularity is far too large for any single individual to acquire." White (1989: 25) proposes the notion of the "fleet effect" to address this issue, suggesting that information-sharing and variable discovery techniques within a fleet "result in larger catches than if all boats fished alone." However, because skippers compete among themselves for locations, fish, crew, and prestige, they often carefully guard valuable information available to them.

One way to solve the tricky problem of co-operating under conditions of competition is to participate in an informal club of skippers, a network with

relatively stable membership, thereby exchanging information on a regular and reciprocal basis: "This method of trading information tends to maintain strong incentives for the acquisition of new knowledge and at the same time tends to coordinate and disperse information in a way that provides few benefits for free riders" (Wilson 1990: 15). Icelandic skippers refer to the participation in clubs of this kind as "belonging to a code" (*vera í kóda*); club members agree on a secret code or language which enables them to freely discuss important issues (especially catches and locations) on the inter-boat radio (a device fishermen call "the spy") without providing information to "outsiders." In the absence of direct, visual clues, skippers try to learn as much as possible about their colleagues (whether club members or not) through the use of the inter-boat radio. The lengthy and repetitive exchanges between skippers, and the gossip, teasing, and joking they contain, often seem to be simply an end in themselves, but one should not underestimate their social significance. Such exchanges not only maintain communion in the fleet, they also provide subtle information on fishing. What skippers say is interpreted on the basis of an extensive prior knowledge of catch records, fishing locations, and fellow fishermen. With the introduction of mobile telephones and the Internet, which allow for increasing privacy in communication between club members, the role of the inter-boat radio has been much reduced.

Due to the physical seclusion of the crew while at sea, the competitive nature of fishing, and the changing and somewhat arbitrary definition of "local" boats, it is easy to lose sight of the importance of the fleet. During my early fieldwork I was suddenly reminded of the sociality of the fleet by a search of an unusual nature – a tragic event in which a small boat with two men on board disappeared in the middle of a fishing trip, apparently due to rough seas. Quite abruptly, "the fleet" became visible, operating as a single unit, scanning the seascape for several hours – searching, without success, for the lost boat and crew.

The reference to sociality is not to suggest that crews and fleets are best described as collective, rule-governed entities – as sets of "markedly stereotyped, detailed roles" (Barth 1966: 10) generated on the basis of formal statuses and transactional constraints. As I remarked earlier, with reference to Rosaldo's example of the game of basketball, rules are not the essence of games from the point of view of those who play them. Nor am I arguing that crews and fleets are supra-individual byproducts of interaction and co-ordination, reified entities in the Durkheimian sense. If we were to follow the Durkheimian lead, the agency of the skipper (and any other member of crew, of course) would dissolve in a hierarchically more inclusive agency of the collectivity of crew and fleet. Given an interpretation that abandons any radical distinction between the individual and the collective, assuming that each person is an "ensemble" of social relations, as Marx once put it, the

skipper is endowed with both agency and sociality. As developmental psychologists Fischer, Rotenberg, Bullock, and Raya (1993: 97) point out in their discussion of learning, "the skill concept includes the person as well as the context. It is as much a mistake to leave out the person as to leave out the context." A skipper's agency is inevitably constituted within the nexus of social relations, and yet his personal authority is essential for the collective project of fishing.

The collaborative mode of practice and enskilment emphasized in the present account is increasingly the subject of anthropological discussions, usually in connection with the notion of "apprenticeship" (see, for example, Coy 1989). Many accounts of *ethnographic* practice, however, are excessively self-indulgent and individualistic, in the writing-culture genre. Assuming the perspective of practice theory, and rejecting any radical distinction between experts and laypersons, it seems essential to extend the notion of apprenticeship to the work of anthropologists – and this means to move from autobiographies and narcissistic accounts of autonomous selves to social histories of fieldwork as a co-operative enterprise sustained by relationships with other people (spouses, friends, informants, and colleagues). Fieldwork, as Gudeman and Rivera emphasize (1995), is teamwork with a flow and momentum of its own – the anthropologist produces his or her ethnography *with* a responding people; the fieldworker is an apprentice in the collective enterprise of making an ethnography.

9.5 Apprenticeship and attentiveness

Becoming a skillful skipper – a competent member of the collectivity of a fleet – demands several years of training, both formal and informal. A prospective skipper, usually a fisherman's son, begins his career as a deck-hand, often in school holidays during early adolescence. To get a skipper's license, however, a fisherman has to receive formal training in a specialized institution, the Marine Academy. The formal title of the "skipper" (*skipstjóri*) assumes particular legally enforced rights and obligations, emphasized and assimilated in the classroom, through two years of formal instruction. Much of the training focuses on navigation, safety measures, and the use of electronic equipment. For skippers, however, enskilment in *fishing* is not a matter of formal schooling and the internalization of a stock of knowledge; rather, it is achieved through active engagement with the environment, in the broadest sense of the term. As one skipper explained,

the Marine Academy teaches interesting subjects, including meteorology. On the other hand, you learn even more by simply taking part, by living the life at sea – especially if you are young and enthusiastic.

"Real" schooling, then, is supposed to take place in actual fishing. The emphasis on "outdoor" learning is emphasized in frequent derogatory remarks about the "academic" learning of people who have never "had a pee in a salty sea" (*migið í saltan sjó*). Questioned about the role of formal schooling, skippers often say that what takes place in the classroom is more or less futile as far as fishing skills and differential success are concerned, although they readily admit that schooling has some good points, preventing accidents and promoting proper responses in critical circumstances involving the safety of boat and crew. Even a novice fisherman, they say, with minimal experience of fishing, is likely to know more about the practicalities of fishing than the teachers of the Marine Academy. The most important items of equipment, including fish-finders, continue to be modified, new models constantly enter the market, and, in any case, each tool or machine has its "nuances" that need to be studied and established in context, in the course of fishing. No formal training can cope with this flexibility and variability in the real world. Therefore, there is little, if any, connection between school performance and fishing success.

Advice by former skippers may be useful schooling, but here, again, what counts is what the skipper does with his information on the spot, during actual fishing. On one occasion I witnessed a discussion between a novice skipper and a retired one about a "rocky area," a particularly difficult place to fish. The experienced skipper advised the young one on how to maneuver the boat and the fishing gear, elaborating on the complex details of currents, fish migrations, and seabed features. The novice listened carefully and then commented, somewhat perplexed, "I guess I'll figure it out when I get there." Some years earlier the young skipper had been a deck-hand on the old man's boat. That job had different demands – relating more to what happened aboard the vessel than in the sea – and, therefore, he said, he had rarely "attended to" (*fylgdist með*) the task of locating and catching fish.

Skipper education recognizes the importance of situated learning. Earlier participation in fishing, as a deck-hand (*háseti*), is a condition for formal training, built into the teaching program; this is to ensure minimum knowledge about the practice of fishing. Once the student in the Marine Academy has finished his formal studies and received his certificate, he must work temporarily as an apprentice – a mate (*stýrimaður*) – guided by a practicing skipper, if he is to receive the full license of skipperhood. The attitude to the mate varies from one skipper to another; as one skipper remarked, "some skippers regard themselves as teachers trying to advice those who work with them, but others don't." While skippers differ from one another and there is no formal economic recognition of their role in this respect, in terms of a teaching-salary, according to many skippers the period of apprenticeship is a critical one. Reflecting on his mentor, with whom he had spent several years at sea, one

skipper explained: "I acquired my knowledge by working with this skipper, learning his way of fishing. I grew up with this man." It is precisely here, in the role of an apprentice at sea, that the mate learns to attend to the environment *as a skipper*. Working as a mate under the guidance of an experienced skipper gives the novice the opportunity to develop attentiveness and self-confidence, and to establish skills at fishing and directing boat and crew. The role of the mate, in fact, institutionalizes what Lave and Wenger (1991) term "legitimate peripheral participation," a form of apprenticeship that allows for protection, experimentation, and varying degrees of skill and responsibility. This is not a one-way transfer of knowledge as the skipper frequently learns from the co-operation of his mate; mate and skipper – in fact, the whole crew – educate each other. In the beginning, the mate is just like an ordinary deck-hand; in the end he is knowledgeable enough to have a boat of his own. At first he is of little help to his tutor, but later on he can be trusted with just about anything; occasionally, the skipper may even take a break and stay ashore, leaving the boat and the crew to his mate.

Often the advice of the skipper is in the form of verbal directions. He will draw the novice's attention to various aspects of skipperhood – how to maneuver the boat, how to use electronic equipment, how to follow fish migrations, and so on. A skipper is unlikely to share his most personal tricks, as the mate may later on become one of his competitors, in charge of another local boat. Every skipper has a personal "diary" with details about times, species, catches, and fishing locations, and mates are rarely, if ever, given *direct* access to this information (some of it is stored in the memory of a computer located in the wheel-house and, significantly, passwords are some-times used for protection). On the other hand, a keen novice will gradually learn to imitate the actions of his skipper, observing his decisions and carrying out his commands. One skipper pointed out that he "simply" learned most of what he knew "by *seeing* how others handled their tasks."

From the point of view of the mate, the choice of a tutor is very important. In the words of one skipper, "to get an experienced and clever man is the most important thing that can happen to a beginner, the greatest luck of all." Some skippers envy colleagues who have had the opportunity to work early in their career with renowned skippers, acknowledged mentors and "men of catch" (*aflamenn*). Sometimes, they say, the period of apprenticeship is terminated too soon. Thus, one skipper who enjoyed modest success claimed that he "did not spend enough time as a mate" with an experienced skipper, and that he regretted having left too soon to become a full-time skipper. This was the main reason, he continued, why he could not compete with the top skippers. There may be several reasons, personal and economic, for quitting apprenticeship too early. For one thing, a retiring skipper-owner, or someone with a temporary health problem, may encourage his son to take over at an early stage, before

the latter really matures as a skipper. This seems to have been the case with a young and unsuccessful skipper in one of the communities in which I worked. He was repeatedly subject to critical discussions and some even laughed at his flamboyance and inexperience; one fisherman commented, when hearing the skipper's voice on the inter-boat radio, that the skipper "could not even handle the channels on the radio." Another fisherman made sarcastic comments about the "unlucky" skipper who tended to go fishing in bad weather and vice versa, staying home when the weather was good. The implication was that the skipper was inattentive. Other skippers, it seems, were reluctant to respond to the novice on the radio, despite his insistence to communicate. Skippers who do not take the period of apprenticeship seriously, or who cut it short, invariably fish "by force" and not "by skill"; they are referred to as *göslarar*, inattentive and clumsy skippers. To become a respected skipper, a fisherman not only has to become a mate and later on a skipper, he also has to "prove himself" (*sanna sig*) in his capacity as skipper over several seasons, "growing up" or "developing himself" (*verða að manni*).

The skipper's knowledge is a complex one; a skipper must choose times and places to fish on the basis of a series of detailed environmental information. It is not surprising, therefore, that fishermen often refer to the importance of "attentiveness" (*eftirtekt*, *athygli*) and "perceptiveness" (*glöggskyggni*); the ability to recognize and apply an array of minute but relevant details. Attentiveness is a complex ability and includes, for example, being able to "read" the sky and predict the weather, to participate in discussions within the local fleet, to understand the "sparks" of electronic instruments, and to be able to co-ordinate crew activities. In some fisheries, technological and economic changes seem to have resulted in rapid de-skilling. There is little reason to believe that this has been the case in Iceland. While old and retired skippers sometimes point out that fishing has been radically transformed by electronic technology (including the computer), emphasizing that "natural signs" are increasingly redundant, attentiveness continues to be one of the central assets of the good skipper and, just as before, it demands lengthy training. The skipper's universe is very different from that of his colleagues of earlier decades, but what shows on the screens of the radar, the computer, and the fish-finder is just as much a "natural sign," directly sensed, as birds in the air or natural landmarks.

As in the Alaskan situation described by Gatewood (1983), the most important test of skippers' skills, and the most relevant criterion for their prestige, is fishing success. Good grades and formal schooling – and sizable fishing quotas – are useless if one fails to catch fish. Unlike their Alaskan colleagues, on the other hand, Icelandic skippers are not expected to follow "rational" procedures, nor do they say they necessarily do. If skippers account for their procedures at all when making decisions about the locations of prey,

they are likely to say that they follow what Gatewood calls "reasonable" procedures. Many skippers have described how a dilemma regarding fishing locations was solved by a strange message or intuition, some kind of "whisper." When explaining exceptional catches during single fishing trips, they sometimes claim they simply know intuitively (*finna á sér*) what to do. Often they also refer to "messages" or hunches received on the spot and the state of "fishing mood" (*fiskistuð*), a peculiar psychological experience – "like being possessed" – beyond skippers' understanding and control. As one skipper pointed out,

sometimes one is so thoroughly confused when leaving harbour that one hasn't got a clue as to where to go. Then one may suddenly get a hunch.

Skippers sometimes speak of cerebral processes in this context, of "knowledge in the head" and "being able to think like fish," but they also refer to wisdom "carried in the blood" and "unexplainable" bodily judgment.

Skippers are likely to have a plan when they embark on a fishing trip, but in the process of fishing they may be forced to revise it, or even to abandon it:

Sometimes one tries to follow some plan, based on one's experience from the day before or the recent past. And then a new day arrives, with new kinds of circumstances, and it simply becomes impossible to follow a plan.

While fishing, the skipper's tactics are continuously adapted to new circumstances – the teamwork on board, the decisions of other skippers, the amount and kinds of fish caught, weather forecasts, and ocean movements.

Although skippers frequently discuss the relevance of attentiveness, they rarely mention how they actually make decisions. One reason is that they are guided more by practical results than by an interest in theoretical advancement. Often they "simply" notice that a particular strategy seems to work, without worrying about why that is the case. Skippers' reluctance to discuss their own fishing tactics is not only the result of competition and secrecy, and the value they generally place on independence and modesty; they have difficulties in verbalizing their complex experience and intuition. What fishermen label as hunches and fishing mood is particularly difficult to verbalize; some important decisions are made "out of the blue." What matters most of all, one skipper explained, is "how one's body will cope." Decision-making, then, is based less on detached calculation or "mental" reflection than on practical involvement. Similarly, the process of enskilment is not just a cognitive one; rather it involves the whole person interacting with the social and natural environment.

Once again, the analogy with ethnographic practice is revealing. Gatewood (1985) has told the story of how he became a competent deck-hand in salmon seining in Alaska. After only a few days he had to abandon his "arrogant" hopes of being a participant-observer; trying to cope with the demands of

fishing did not leave much time and energy for anything else – "I had all I could handle," he says, "trying to participate" – and besides, the cognitive demands of "observation" were quite irrelevant, if not detrimental, to the learning process (Gatewood 1985: 205). Learning was not a matter of verbal encoding and enculturation but of adapting to the "practical constraints" of the job:

The development of a seiner's cognitive organization is directed not by some transcendental need to share meanings but by the practical constraints of coordinating his actions with those of his fellows. His actions, and theirs, speak louder than words. (Gatewood 1985: 216)

Edelman's (1993) ethnographic study of shunting in a Swedish railway yard provides similar observations. At the beginning of her fieldwork Edelman was preoccupied with the "middle-class" notion of personal autonomy, of distinguishing herself from others, a notion which proved to be an obstacle to the progress of her fieldwork. Later on, however, she was "beset . . . by the reciprocity of the demands and obligations that spring from the daily toil, the constant efforts to co-operate and create a 'flow' in the work, the logic of the work-process, and the meanings that were attached to individual actions" (Edelman 1993: 160–161).

As a novice fieldworker and fisherman I, too, could not help noticing the importance of co-operation, of co-ordinating one's bodily movements and the actions of others to ensure the continuity of the enterprise. Such mutual attentiveness, the result of collective enskilment, is essential for efficient teamwork, the synchronization of the tasks involved. Occasionally, the Icelandic skipper will shout commands at his crew, over the noise of the engines, during the process of drawing a net: "Loosen the net!" or "Stop the winch!" The better the crew know each other, however, the more likely it is that they will be able to predict one another's actions and respond appropriately in emergencies, and the less likely is the skipper to intervene. Silence is a sign of smooth co-operation and, likewise, direct commands signify the opposite – low morale. Most of the time, words are beside the point simply because actions speak *faster* than words.

9.6   Conclusions

Icelanders, as we have seen, sometimes apply the metaphor of the journey, the fishing trip, to the issue of personal enskilment. This is to suggest that learning is not a purely cognitive or cerebral process, a mental reflection *on* differences in time and space, but is rather grounded in the contexts of practice, involvement, and personal engagement. Enskilment is not only *likened* to the physical experience of seasickness, it is indeed a bodily exercise. To become skilled at

something like catching fish is to progress from nausea to well-being, to feel at home in both one's body and the company of others. As Bourdieu reminds us, socialization produces very real, physical effects, durable dispositions inscribed in the *habitus*. The novice imitates the *actions* of others, not simply their models and discourses; practical schemes "pass directly from practice to practice without moving through discourse and consciousness" (Bourdieu 1990: 74).

Another argument from Icelandic discourse, concerning the situatedness of decisions and the importance of teamwork, poses a fundamental challenge to the terms of academic debate on differential success, in particular the "skipper effect." Fishing, after all, is a social enterprise. While the skipper is unlikely to acknowledge, let alone ask for, the advice of his crew and other skippers, and although it may be tempting to think of his decisions as independent ones and more or less his own, each of them is constrained by the context in which it is made, much like a discourse is inevitably constrained by context, including what has been said before. In fact, we may well think of a fishing season as a "long conversation" involving a whole community of actors – both at sea and ashore – in which the agency of each is continually constituted in relation to the others. Folk accounts of the context of decision-making and the importance of the crew and the local fleet indicate an indigenous practice theory of fishing, emphasizing that what skippers do and what happens at sea is not the result of an internalized system of formal decision rules, as normative learning theory assumes, but of hunches and tacit knowledge, of insights developed on the spot but firmly grounded in the flux and collectivity of fishing.

For those familiar with the mood and momentum of a game like basketball – the rhythm of a team and the flux of physical movement and bodily contact – the practice perspective of fishing immediately has parallels. As Larry Bird, a superb basketball player, reasoned, "[a lot of the] things I do on the court are just reactions to situations . . . I don't think about some of the things I'm trying to do . . . A lot of times, I've passed the basketball and not realized I've passed it until a moment or so later" (cited in Dreyfus 1991: 93). Skills – in fishing or doing fieldwork (or anything else, for that matter) – are indeed individual in the sense that they are properties of the body, dispositions of the *habitus*. However, to isolate their acquisition and application from everything outside the boundaries of their soma is to subscribe to a normative theory of learning and a natural conception of the individual. An alternative approach recognizes the sociality of the individual being and the situated nature of human activities. If, as Bakhtin (1986: 293–294) has argued, every word in conversation is half someone else's, every fish that gets caught is partly that of others.

It is one thing to participate in face-to-face interaction and to engage in fieldwork and quite another, perhaps, to "write it *up*." What would the perspective of practice theory adopted here imply for the latter project – the

construction of comparative knowledge or ethnographic writing *outside* the field? Bloch (1991: 193) emphasizes that anthropologists must be aware that by writing up the knowledge of the people they study they are not merely reproducing it, they are also "transmuting it into an entirely different logical form." How can we, then, textualize the knowledge we acquire in the field without – in the process – fundamentally distorting both its character and the manner in which it was acquired? The important issue is not, however, whether or not our models agree with the models of the actors, but the way in which we *continue* the ethnographic conversation, the character of the social relations of ethnographic production. It may be easy to labor under the Orientalist illusion – assuming, as Knowlton (1992: 78) puts it, that we are able "to keep the 'native' safely in our notes or at the end of a journey, rather than among us" – since, thereby, "we avoid having our caricatures challenged and our categories confused in the messiness of solidary sociality." By terminating the ethnographic conversation once we are "out of the field," we preserve our essentialist enterprise, localizing our anthropological voices rather than anthropologizing local voices. Arguably, however, we never actually leave the field as long as we take part in the ethnographic enterprise; in one way or another we keep on conversing with the people we study, either directly (especially nowadays) as anthropologists "at home" or as visitors returning to a host, or, indirectly, through inner talk.

If the act of writing up is inevitably situated in a boundless community of practice – a community that admits no radical distinction between modelers and participants, scholars and natives, scientists and informants – then indeed ethnography is best regarded as a "perpetual discussion" (Gudeman and Rivera 1990: 4). Just as it is important to go beyond the "claustrophobic" concepts of cognition characteristic of normative learning theory (Lave 1988, Reed 1993: 63), it is important to go beyond the monologic notion of ethnographic production. In such a view, ethnography becomes, to paraphrase Benhabib (1992: 9), a "moral conversation exercising enlarged thinking." As ethnographers, we may be nauseated at times, given the shifting grounds of postmodernity and the contemporary critiques of monopolistic narratives and totalizing accounts. However, only by engaging ourselves in a continuous dialogue – with both our "informants" and fellow ethnographers – can we realistically expect to find our ethnographic sea legs.