

# Breathing like a soldier: culture incarnate<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Breathing appears to be so natural and organic that it hardly seems worth analyzing. Yet to inhabit an institution can mean having to learn to breathe in culturally distinct ways. This chapter presents the findings of an ethnographic study of 'learning to breathe like a soldier' in the army. I focus on the processes by which the body is transformed and new disciplinary techniques are developed, and present the body as an alternative category of cultural analysis to a vision of military culture as the internalization of norms, values and beliefs that shape identities and provide cognitive frames for social action. Cultural patterning in the army is not an abstract intellectual process, but takes place at the level of the body as it engages in practical activity in the training environment, and becomes adapted to the military milieu.

**Key Words:** socialization; military; body, pedagogy

## Introduction

Two platoons are lined up in front of the first sergeant, a young female cadet who has just been rotated into a leadership position. The cadets chat loudly, standing 'at ease,' while waiting to begin marksmanship training. The first sergeant stands at attention and says, 'ATTENTION.' It comes out sounding more like a question than a command. The platoons come to attention, but do not do so with the sense of urgency and assurance that is customary when a sharp, loud and correctly intoned command is given by one of the Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs). One of the upperclassmen runs to the front of the formation and tells the first sergeant, 'don't speak from your throat. No-one will hear what you say as a command. Breathe from your stomach.'

Throughout the remainder of her time as first sergeant the young cadet is corrected on how she breathes when she speaks, but problems remain. When calling cadences while marching, the young cadet can't coordinate the movement of the company because she can't project her voice. When she is giving commands to execute movements, only some hear her voice.

Toward the end of the week the cadet battalion commander finally pulls the cadet to one side to explain to her that she still has not learned the 'command presence.' 'You have to speak like a leader,' says the battalion commander. Another cadet, a third year, stands beside the battalion commander, who says to the first sergeant, 'So the deal is you got to learn to speak from your diaphragm, not your throat. It's like, you know, when you get punched in the stomach and you feel how the air comes out of you from your stomach, that is how you have to learn to talk.' The other cadet, who till then had been standing by listening concernedly, jumps in saying, 'ok, say "attention."' But when you say it I am going to push your stomach in like you were being punched so you get the feel.' Together the three cadets repeat this exercise until the cadet is able to produce the command with the right kind of breathing and therefore the prosody to speak with authority. (September 2004, Field notes)

The body is a crucial foundation of the military world. This excerpt from my fieldwork notes on cadets in the United States Army's Reserve Officer Training Corp shows that even something as simple as giving a command requires a good fit between bodily structures and social structures. That fit arises through a collective labour upon the body of cadets. In the army, breathing 'properly' is a key embodied prerequisite for such practices as firing a rifle, running long distances, and even projecting authority on the drill ground. Without being able to breathe like a soldier, participation in military activity is severely restricted.

This chapter focuses on how soldiers move in and out of social relationships through the movements and processes of their bodies. The intertwining of bodies in social relationships is important in explaining how soldiers enter into and become committed to their social worlds. In crossing the threshold between civilian and soldier, the body not only takes on new meanings (as a 'weapon,' 'vehicle,' and 'protective armour') and value (physical performance is a principle of hierarchy), it is lived differently and thus changes its form. Changes in form to what phenomenologists call the 'corporeal schema' (Merleau-Ponty, 2002) entail the addition of new dispositions and kinetic and sensory powers that alter the very foundations of social interaction and conduct. This is not how sociologists have envisaged the socialization of soldiers.

Following Parsons and Merton, scholars of the military have conceived of socialization into military culture as the internalization of institutional values, norms, and role expectations (Caforio, 2003; Franke, 2000; Priest, 1998; Stevens *et al.*, 1994). In the more clearly Durkheimian tradition, some have looked at the rituals through which new recruits are integrated into the armed forces: military stories, songs, jokes, rites of passage and even clothing shape a shared set of beliefs and identities (Burke, 2004; Winslow, 1999). Other sociologists emphasize soldiers' cognitive scripts and schemas in accounting for how they interpret their worlds as meaningful, while ethnomethodologists focus on the everyday methods through which soldiers construct their sense of the world (Ben-Ari, 1998; Herbert, 1998). Finally, discursive theories of culture look at how people entering into a military role adopt discursive practices that shape their identities (Sasson-Levy, 2003).

While symbolic structures shape the meaning of the social world, where in these accounts is the embodied agent or the cadet who has learned to speak

from the stomach or who has shaped his or her body into a long range ‘weapons platform’? In order to understand these achievements, we need to appreciate that ‘military culture’ is largely a *military habitus* (a system of transposable and durable dispositions that generate *body techniques*, or traditional and efficacious ways of using the body) that allows for proficient participation according to the symbolic divisions and valuations of the military world (Bourdieu, 1990, 2000; Mauss, 1979). Simply, before we can discuss what people think or value about their worlds, we need to consider how the articulation of their bodies acts as the foundation for those beliefs and values. Before cadets can reflect on their world through acquired symbols they are ‘always already there’ in their world through their feeling and acting bodies. Embodiment is thus a crucial but missing theme from traditional sociological accounts of military life.

The military world demands that its members exert themselves constantly, master fatigue, suffer, and exhibit physical dexterity and skill. Moral categories emphasize physical readiness and technical competence. In this world the categorization of a ‘good soldier’ is less a matter of the imposition of representation upon the body than a reference to a kind of embodiment that army cadets struggle, with more or less success, to achieve. When cadets and cadre (the army officers and NCOs in charge) point to a soldier and say ‘he’s a good cadet’, they are referring to a stable set of features of the *soldier’s body* – an upright posture, chin up, chest forward, ‘head on a swivel,’ running hard – that are durable across a variety of settings. Understanding what is involved in the production of a ‘good soldier’ requires that we appreciate both the bodily logic of soldiering and how the corporeal schemes of the *habitus* are passed on from experts to newcomers within chains of interdependence.

Of course, what takes place in the military is an extreme form of how social life is conducted everywhere. The body is the very medium by which a person comes to enter into a collectively inhabited world (cf. Wacquant, 2004 on boxing; Sudnow, 2001 on learning an instrument; Benner, 2001 on becoming a nurse; Charlesworth, 2000 on learning working class language; Csordas, 1990, 1994 on pentecostal religions). The cadet, like a dancer or boxer, is a carnal being of flesh and blood, inhabited by the demands and necessities of the social world in the form of incorporated habits and skills that make it possible for him or her proficiently to develop the body as an instrument of social life.

In exploring the process by which social membership of the army is established in and through bodily activity, I draw on Bourdieu’s (1990; 2000) analytic tools to describe how the process of teaching enjoins soldiers to act and breathe like they ‘should.’ My investigation focuses on the importance of breathing for two physical activities that are integral to being a military officer: running and shooting. I focus on how breathing in both of these situations serves as the foundation of social interactions. I conclude by discussing the implications of my study for the study of culture in general. In short, breathing is far from being a taken-for-granted physical activity. It is the social sinew that holds together social institutions by anchoring norms and beliefs in viscera.

## Research design

Different cultural phenomena mandate different methodological postures. I wanted to know how one can *be* a soldier and this meant prying into the sentient, lived, and breathing body. This chapter draws on ethnographic and experiential data produced over 18 months of intensive fieldwork in the United States Army Reserved Officer Training Corp. I enrolled in ROTC as an army cadet, because I was interested in comprehending the cultural logic of bodily practices that often ‘go without saying’ in the United States army, and spent my time in the field, training and living with cadets and soldiers on a college campus, in the barracks at Fort Knox and in the woods of North Carolina with a group of soldiers training for the Special Forces. I spent an average of fifteen to twenty hours a week in the field while at my home battalion and twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, while at Fort Knox and in North Carolina during a summer.

The approach I took was that of an apprentice to a profession. I wanted to undergo a ‘moral and sensual conversion to the cosmos under investigation’ (Wacquant, 2004: vii) so as to be able to grasp practically what it meant to act and be like a soldier. Passive participant observation and interviews would not suffice because what I wanted to know about was often pre-thetic and inarticulate. Most participant observation attends to what people say and do, but this does not capture the ‘sensorimotor, mental, and social aptitudes’ or ‘total pedagogy’ that ‘tacitly guides social agents in their familiar universe’ (Wacquant, 2005: 465). In contrast, I learned the ins and outs of becoming a soldier, on the rifle range, at my four days a week of physical training, on the parade grounds at Fort Knox with Drill Sergeants yelling, and during tactical exercises in the mountains of California. I kept detailed diaries and field notes of my training, recording my observations on the events, practices, people and rhythms of my field site at home after training and furtively under my covers or in the bathroom in the barracks after ‘lights out.’ I will often refer to both field notes and my personal reflections, and I often write in the present tense to preserve some sense of the immediacy and sensuousness of a situation.<sup>2</sup>

Wacquant argues that the value of apprenticeship, ‘considered as an activity’, is that it ‘enables us to pry into practice in the making and to realize that the ordinary knowledge that makes us competent actors is an incarnate, sensuous, situated “knowing-how-to” that operates beneath the controls of discursive awareness and propositional reasoning’ (Wacquant, 2005: 466). Such a method was adequate to the task in hand as it helped me explain the *production*, not the products, of the military *habitus* and the coordinated body techniques and patterns of social relations that form it.

I don’t pretend to have emerged from this apprenticeship with a singularly representative ‘native’s point of view’ but I was finally accepted as a competent and even highly proficient cadet. As one army lieutenant, then a cadet, frankly put it to me, ‘you disgusted me. You couldn’t do a push up, you were skinny, wore glasses. I was wrong. You pushed it every day at PT, hitting failure, now you’re

probably one of the most “squared away” cadets here.’ Having ‘pushed it’ and ‘put in the time’ to acquire the skills and competencies necessary to be recognizably proficient I occupied a position within the world of army officer training that gave me one of many possible perspectives on the production of a soldier.

## **Breathing and soldiering**

By describing two situations (running, and shooting) where a specific technique of breathing anchors the soldier’s body in the military world, I explore how institutional dilemmas and imperatives become addressed by and absorbed in the body. For cadets, running and shooting constitute two aspects of basic soldiering skills: movement and combat. A sociological analysis of breathing allows us to describe the relationship between bodily transformation and social activity.

### *Running*

Cadets are embedded in a social world that demands physical prowess and dexterity. To a surprising degree cadets are defined and evaluated in terms of their potential for movement. Everywhere cadets go they are expected to move fast and for as long as it takes to get to their destination. Soldiers often refer to the need for the rigorous and speedy movement that saturates training as ‘moving with a purpose.’ Strenuous movement is a basic feature of the soldiers bodily being. The very notion of leadership, to ‘lead from the front’ or to ‘drive on’, presupposes a shared kinetic culture adjusted to the demand for strenuous activity. This means cadets must transform their sensorimotor structures and expand their limits so that they can run farther, faster, and longer than would be possible for the vast majority of civilians. These demands are institutionalized in physical training and frequent Army Physical Fitness tests that evaluate and rank cadets *vis-a-vis* one another in terms of their abilities for strenuous and vigorous movement. Day by day, cadets also learn – by being insulted, berated, and demeaned – that certain kinds of breathing are desirable and demanded:

On one of my first runs, while running with another cadet at the back of formation and nearly hyperventilating, a senior cadet, with prior military service, runs besides us. He says, ‘Mr. Lande. How are you going to be a leader . . . a *lieutenant*, if you can’t *lead from the front*. How do you think your soldiers are going to feel when you’re *huffing it* at the rear of formation when you’re on a mission?’ (August 2003, Field notes)

Running with some female cadets toward the rear, I overhear them say to a new cadet who is gasping for air, ‘come on, you gonna let a woman outrun you?’ (August 2003, Field notes)

And:

I am pushing hard. I am toward the rear of the fastest ability group—not good since I am leading physical training today. Each step requires effort. I get into a rhythm breathing. In, out, in out. It is almost meditative and it helps with boredom. . . . By

the last half-mile I am working hard to keep up. I have to force my breathing to stay regular. I am doing OK until I have to get everyone in my ability group into formation to run while calling cadence. Trying to call cadence with a loud bellowing voice and run at an 8-minute a mile pace is too much. I start gasping for breath and breaking up the cadence. I direct another cadet to call cadence . . . After I have dismissed the company formation, an upperclassmen [a cadet who in the advanced course of officer instruction] comments to me about my cadence calling and says, *'this is why you got to stay fit. If you can't breathe you can't keep your composure, that doesn't look so good as a leader if you are huffing it at the rear.'* (December 2003, Personal diary)

In each of these situations, breathing is encountered as something that is moralized or criticized and therefore experienced as urgent. Breathing is not neutral but is confronted as a culturally meaningful aspect of activity. To be a moral member of the community is, following Durkheim, to have 'a bodily consensus' (as opposed to a 'logical consensus,' [Durkheim, 1995]). When cadets engage in dialogic acts such as tactical movements, rhythm and cadence are essential. Each apt action is attuned through a shared sense of movement and time. When this is lost, the group falls into confusion, people fall out of formation and the integrity and security of the group is lost. More explicitly, when the bodily consensus on breathing fails we see the coherence of social interactions and the 'mutual-tuning-in' (Schutz, 1964) of bodily rhythms fall apart.

As part of an escape and evasion course, 3<sup>rd</sup> squad, 4<sup>th</sup> platoon has just escaped from the POW camp where we have been held for the last several hours as POWs. Low on ammunition, our point man runs in front of the squad. We have to run 3k through the hot humid climate of Fort Knox before hitting safe territory. Out of breath, we stop to take a break and regroup. The squad leader gets accountability for everyone. We had been taking sporadic fire from the opposition force. But now that we have stopped the intensity of the fire has increased. I duck behind a tree as paint balls splatter around me. This is the second time so far that this has happened. Every time we stop the intensity of fire increases. The point man screams to the squad leader to get us moving. The point man lays down suppressive fire and we start running again, tree-to-tree, taking cover as we bound forward as a group. But there is a problem. One of the cadets, a newcomer to the Army, is hyperventilating. 'I . . . I can't. I can't breathe.' 'Slow down your breathing, just take deep breaths' the Squad Leader says. Angrily, the cadet replies, 'Look I'm trying, but I can't!' The lane walker [an experienced soldier who evaluates performance] says, 'OK, you [pointing at the cadet] are out of shape, you are a casualty.' Because Baxter can't recoup her breath we have to carry her the remaining 2k. We quickly grab two large branches and take off our shirts to make a stretcher. We run through the woods carrying Baxter but it comes at a cost. Because of our slow speed we are all shot by high velocity paintballs. (June 2004, Field notes)

The ability to breathe is morally valued not as an end but as something negatively reacted to in the form of classifications of the cadet who can't breathe as 'ate up', 'jacked', and a 'buddy fucker'. These categories of stigma refer to the 'the person who can't keep up' or who 'isn't fit and so gets everybody screwed.'

The technique of breathing coordinates bodies-in-time. As such it is vital for the 'sharing of the other's flux of experiences in inner time, this living through

a vivid present in common' that constitutes 'the mutual tuning-in relationship, the experience of the 'We' (Schutz, 1964: 173).<sup>3</sup> To breathe the 'right' way is to conduct ones self virtuously. Hyperventilating, like being flustered in face-to-face interaction (Goffman, 1967: 100), threatens the very capacities that coordinated tactical activity presupposes. As Goffman (1967: 47–113) has shown, the moral qualities of interactive life hinge upon 'demeanour' and 'poise' or, as here, upon the more primordial consensus between coordinated corporeal schemes that function as the taken-for granted background of successful collective action.

The body invested with value, that can 'drive on' and 'lead from the front', is created in pedagogical encounters where cadre demand that cadets 'push it.' A master sergeant who has cadets doing a timed run says to the runners,

you got to push it [your limit]! You only run harder when your lungs burn and the only way to stop your lungs from burning next time is to run harder. Quit complain'n and suck it up. (June 2004, Field notes)

But how do cadets learn to 'push it?' The command 'push it' has its effect against a background of monotonous situations of visual, verbal, and bodily contact where strenuous exertion is absorbed into the cadets corporeal structures. Cadets new to running are given small pointers on how to keep the pelvis over the heels, to have shoulders back, back erect, and chin up while running, which are all meant to shape the ability to breathe.

As we came toward the third mile of the run I was spent. My lungs and shins hurt. I begin to hyperventilate, breathing in and out in quick succession. I feel nausea washing over me. One of the upperclassmen runs alongside me and asks how I am doing. I don't think I replied as much as I grunted. He says 'Whoa, Lande, you got to control your breathing. Take deep slow breaths. In through your nose, out through your mouth. With me, in . . . out . . . in . . . out.' He does this for a few more seconds until I get my breathing back under control. He also corrects my posture saying, 'Chin up, back straight, you'll get more air.' We get back to the battalion. I am sweating profusely, and still near hyper-ventilating. Another cadet tells me to walk around in circles to 'cool down.' But as soon as I stop running I am hit with a wall of nausea. I race over to the trash can and dry-heave [I had not eaten yet] and try to catch my breath. (October 2003, Personal diary)

Similarly, an army major describes trying to instruct a female cadet on the correct way to breathe,

I was running with a cadet and she was hurting and I was telling her to breathe, to fill herself up like a bottle and hold it, breathe in through your nose for four seconds breath out through your mouth for two, and I kept telling her to do it but she just keep breathing at her own pace. I kept telling her, if you want the pain to stop you have to listen and hold your breath in. (May 2004, Field notes)

Thus, to breathe like a soldier means not breathing 'at her own pace' but breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth in time with the Major. Learning to breathe is a social activity that demands active participation and

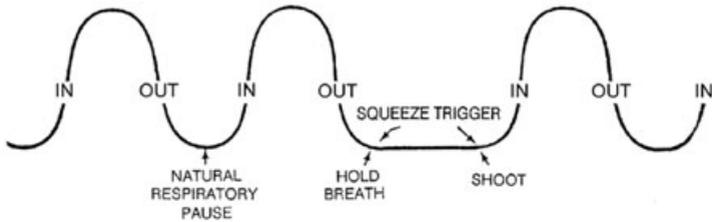
openness to the conduct of others. In the situation described by the Major we have an example of where enlistment in breathing fails.

Breathing is learned and experienced in situations in which bodies of instructors and peers perceive each other's bodily presence. Against a backdrop of constant categorization that threatens cadets with humiliation but also holds out the promise of acquiring practices that make it possible to be well regarded, cadets incorporate a bodily being that is adjusted to the evaluations and expectations of those around them.

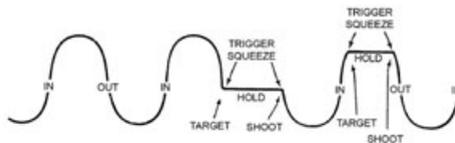
### *Shooting*

Just as all army cadets must be able to engage in vigorous activity requiring stamina and endurance, all army cadets are expected to have the dexterity and calm to be able to use a rifle. It is a basic feature of military training and a competency in which all soldiers are expected to have minimum proficiency. It is therefore no surprise that cadets represent this fact about their world in terms of metaphors of the body as a 'vehicle', 'platform', and 'weapon' of combat. But these beliefs about the body as a weapon do not themselves generate the competency required to fire a weapon well. As with running, the martial qualities of the cadet are the result of the embodiment of the objectified practices of instructors. Even though learning to shoot a rifle involves doctrinal texts and codified practices, the transmission of practical schemes involves a combination of imitation, direct physical contact, an array of visual and textual artifacts, and disciplinary techniques. Producing a soldier who handles a rifle well involves creating a *bodily sensitivity* that is the result of a protracted and diffuse process (a 'figuration' to use Elias's term) rather than the product of a deliberate will.

If cadets want to hit what they aim at with their rifle, they have to breathe 'rightly.' Aligning sites on a rifle and pointing it in the direction of a target is not enough to establish a 'good shot.' Irregular breathing and breathing that moves the body up and down too much will lead to misplaced shots. In order to create effective and efficient marksmen, army officer training deliberately targets cadets' breathing. For example, an army field manual (Army, 2003: section 4–5) specifies that cadets should become sensitized to the 'normal respiratory pause' that occurs at the end of the exhale (Figure 1). This way of breathing is meant to be used to 'zero' a weapon, ie, make sure that there is a harmony between the target and the cadet's movements, posture, gaze and aim. Regulated breathing is necessary to ensure that the body is not interfering with the correct aligning of the gaze and bodily posture. This style of breathing is preferred when a cadet has plenty of time to take a shot, but soldiers are often in situations where they must shoot under time constraints. Cadets in this context acquire the habit of coordinating the pause of their inhale or exhale with the other bodily movements that go into firing a rifle, as shown in Figure 2. A background aspect of bodily being is thus verbally and visually articulated in the foreground of action so that it can be integrated into an actional gestalt (the linking in practice of schemes for breathing, perception, and fine motor



**Figure 1.** *Breathing to ‘zero’ and to take timely shots. (Army 2003: section 4–5)*



**Figure 2.** *Breathing in order to shoot rapidly and stability. (Army 2003: section 4–5)*

movements like trigger pulls). This is accomplished through the social organization of training into ‘the four fundamentals of marksmanship’: breathing, trigger pull, position, and aiming. Each stage has its practice station, instructors, texts, and bodily targets, and each is initially taught as separate in order to sensitize the cadet to parts of his or her body that are typically ignored. Once learned according to ‘spec’ these aspects of the body are pushed to the background.

At the dime-and-washer station the goal is to become very sensitive to one’s body movements while shooting. It is the same five cadets but this time only one instructor. The instructor says ‘OK, we are going to work on trigger squeeze and breathing. When you shoot you want to reduce your movement as much as possible. Even a little movement can send a bullet off in the wrong direction. Who here knows the right way to use the trigger?’ A hand goes up and a cadet says, ‘You squeeze slowly and don’t jerk it.’ She continues, ‘Also you use the meaty part of your finger [points at the center of the tip of her index finger].’ The instructor says ‘Right. How about breathing, when do you hold your breath?’ A cadet answers ‘at the top of your breath.’ The instructor corrects, ‘you can do it that way but the best way is to hold at the bottom of the exhale [he demonstrates by taking a big breath and exhaling]. Now all of you take a breath and just pause when you have emptied your lungs of air. Good. That is when you want to shoot.’

Next he has us lay on the floor in the prone unsupported position and has us team up with a partner. ‘What you are going to do now, with your partner, is take turns dry-firing your rifle. Your partner is going to put a dime on the barrel of your rifle and you need to dry-fire without knocking the dime off the tip of the barrel. You need to do this five times consecutively to get a “go”.’

I partner up with a first-year cadet. She gets on the floor and takes up a prone position. I put the dime on her barrel and she shoots and the dime falls. She charges the weapon and tries again but the same thing happens. I try to identify what is wrong to give some 'peer coaching.' The First Sergeant who is walking among the groups stops by the cadet and says, 'How is my MSI [first-year cadet] doing?' Very frustrated, the cadet says 'I get two or three in a row and then the dime falls off and I have to start all over again!' The sergeant says to me, 'move over, Lande man.' He gets down on the ground, lying on his belly at a slight angle away from the cadet and watches her shoot and gives her instruction. 'OK, bring your elbows in more. Good, good. It hurts, I know, but you won't fatigue your muscles if you use your bones. OK now move your whole body around more so it is easier to have your natural point of aim pointing straight ahead at your target. Make sure that your ankles are splayed inward, yeah that will keep you steady. Bring your right leg up and crook it OK. See, that's better, isn't it? I am going to put a dime on your barrel and I want you to shoot [dry fire] without the dime falling off the barrel. No! Your breathing is all jacked up. You're holding your breath too long and getting shaky. Watch me. Hold your breath at the end of the exhale. Show me. Good. Now just do that when you're shooting.' (October 2003, Field notes)

The whole story of this body pedagogics is not contained in army field manuals but requires situating training doctrine in the modes of coparticipation in which it is embedded (Lave and Wenger, 1991). These manuals contain rules, prescriptions, and descriptions of how to fire a rifle correctly, but they do not contain the kinds of bodily skills and shared corporeal knowledge that enable cadets to follow rules and fully grasp verbal instructions. For example, the field manual for rifle training is used against a backdrop of verbal injunctions ('no!', 'bring your elbows in!', etc.) that permeate training but are not specified in the manual; they are implicit. They take place against the background of a gestural, visual, mimetic and physical engagement (Wacquant, 2004: 100). Goffman (1981) calls this 'embedding.' As he puts it, 'Every utterance and its hearing have gestural accompaniments, these under some control of the actors' (1981: 3-4). That is, the utterance 'breathe with me' acquires its meaning as a consequence of it being made by an authorized instructor who is breathing in a manner that provides the cadet with an example of what it means to breathe 'correctly'. Cadre and advanced cadets are constantly touching and manipulating the bodies of novice cadets to accomplish a corporeal understanding. They demonstrate and act as bodily mirrors. Instructors create the proper movement and have learners follow along until they are regularly adjusting their bodies to that of the instructor. These nonverbal practices give cadets a practical understanding of what it means to 'hold your breath at the bottom of the exhale' or a feel for how unregulated breathing makes the rifle's muzzle move away from what it is aimed at.

When an instructor has his hand on the back of a cadet and is saying 'breathe with me . . . pause . . . inhale, don't hold it!' this *physical contact* is part of the meaning of the utterance. The cadet understands the command to breathe in a certain way only when he or she has incorporated the proper rhythm. Acquiring this rhythm is done through a process similar to what Wacquant (2004) has

called ‘the dialectic of visual and corporeal mastery’ except that we ought to expand that account to include auditory and gestural contact.

An example of how trained capacities are passed on in and through practice can be found in the first weapons training lab of the second semester, when cadets are being reintroduced to the fundamentals of marksmanship.

One of the third-year cadets is leading the instruction, ‘There are two ways to control your breathing when shooting. First, when you are stationary try to shoot at the top of your breath or at the bottom of your exhale. If your chest is moving you will move and your aim will be off. Try to get a feel for it. Take up the prone position and watch how much your weapon moves while breathing normally.’ We all get down on the ground. I assume a prone position. I have my left leg out at an angle and my right leg cocked to provide added stability. I bring my elbows in and center them as much as possible under my chest. I scoot my body out at a slight angle so that it is not in a straight line with my rifle. More comfortable this way, I find. I take aim at a spot on the wall and watch my movement. Up and down, up and down. I try breathing and holding. My movement is reduced. I then try breathing and holding on my exhale, it works even better. But if I hold on to the exhale too long I start to move again because I get stressed by not having enough air. I try again. I find that after about five seconds of pausing on the exhale my movement begins to increase steadily. The instructor says: ‘OK, now if you are dealing with moving targets or have to acquire a target quickly you’re not going to wait to breathe, so since you are spending most of your breathing time not at the top of your breath or at the bottom of your exhale just pick a comfortable spot and hold your breath.’ (September 2004, Field notes)

These pedagogical situations, which occur early in marksmanship training, emphasize the tacit bodily knowledge that is necessary to grasp what is being discursively taught. When breathing is learned there is a literal ‘harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 167). The crucial point, however, is that transmission of symbolic information is not enough for cadets to comprehend their activity because without a shared sense of the body, indexical statements about breathing have little meaning. This is why a labour of direct bodily manipulation and training has to occur in order to incorporate verbal utterances into the body schema. The display of texts and images (see Figures 1 and 2) have ‘symbolic efficacy’ only when embedded in practices of pointing, verbal utterances and reprimands, and body-to-body contact that are meant to link different modalities of perception, comprehension, and movement in order to coordinate bodily movements *as a whole*. Images and texts don’t work by imparting representations. They derive their meaning from their *use* as one instrument among many.

### **Conclusion: from foreground to background – training to embody culture**

Culture is bodily as much as it is symbolic: ‘When the properties and movements of the body are socially qualified, the most fundamental social choices are nat-

uralized' (Bourdieu, 1990: 71). The effect of bodily learning is the incorporation of new competencies and dispositions that modify the *habitus*. Cadets, like any person entering a new social microcosm, undergo a collective pedagogy that does more than remake their mental representations, deliberative ends, self-concept, role, or discursive repertoire. New cadets literally become something different. In doing so, in learning how to breathe like a soldier, cadets become anchored in their field, able to respond appropriately to events in the world through acquired skills.

To inhabit the military world, cadets must incorporate into their own flesh the habits and capacities that are the 'products of collective history'. Breathing is exemplary of how cadets inhabit their world through the ways that they are possessed by the practices of the military world. These techniques of the body arise from a preobjective intersubjectivity rooted in the bodily practices that orient people to one another. The motor function of breathing 'is both individual and systematic, because linked to a whole system of techniques involving the body and tools, and charged with a host of social meanings and values' (Bourdieu, 1977: 87).

The technique of breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth is learned by cadets who are attentive to what it takes to become an accomplished cadet. They learn this by seeing and hearing stories of how others succeeded, are praised, or criticized. Military styles of breathing become practical strategies for negotiating disparate reprimands, threats of shame, practices of evaluation and ranking that constitute and implicitly define the basic stakes and rewards of a field. Cadets' practical sense is effected collectively and often diffusely through instruction that is far from deliberate or fully thought out. All the injunctions to 'breathe through your nose and out through the mouth' or 'no no! Breathe with me' are never spelled out, justified, or debated. Nor do they fit together according to a 'deep structure.' These utterances and the gestures that accompany them are so many examples of hundreds of islands of instruction, spread out across time and people. Even in marksmanship, where there is some codification, much of the pedagogical work is tacit and suffused in body-to-body contact that is embedded in summary descriptions given about how to breathe that are not written down in any manual. The end effect is to cultivate the body as the background of social action. The body is only momentarily thrown to the foreground of action, when it becomes problematic, and then it recedes from view as it once again become the medium of interaction.

We better understand what is meant by military culture, and culture more generally, when we foreground the backgrounded kinetic and sensorial structures of the body. In this way we are able to construct a more inclusive definition of culture that is sensitive to how practical competencies are acquired in and for action. Techniques of the body, incorporated in the form of dispositions to use the body in socially approved ways and postures, are coextensive with the socially generated practices and utterances that orient the body to its world. When the pre-objective structures of the cadets fit the structures of world so

that demands to run are met by a body that *can* run, we are able to understand better how social beings tacitly commit to their social worlds by an incarnate collusion.

## Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Loïc Wacquant, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, and Arlie Hochschild for their remarks on early versions of this paper and also Heather Haverman, Chris Shilling and Nicholas Wilson for their comments. I also want to acknowledge the thoughtful comments and advice that I received for a different version of this paper from the organizer and presenters of the *Embodying Sociology* sessions at the 37th World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology, Stockholm, Sweden. July 5th–9th, 2005.
- 2 Also note that I alternate between ‘operational’ and ‘presentational’ data. Operational data refers to the ‘running stream of spontaneous conversations and activities engaged in and observed by the ethnographer while in the field’ and pertains to the ‘everyday problematics’ of group members (Van Maanen, 1979: 542). This data includes the actual situated practices whereby people engage one another to shape breathing as well as the verbal injunctions and admonishments meant to alter their behavior. Presentational data refers to the ‘ideological, normative, and abstract, dealing far more with a manufactured image of idealized doing than with routinized practical activities actually engaged in by members of the studied organization’ (ibid). In other words, some data includes what people say and do in situations where the body is foregrounded, especially descriptions of how the body is collectively worked upon, and other data emphasizes the primary meanings that group members attribute to the body and their accountings of what a certain kind of body means to them.
- 3 The reciprocal coordination of action is based on the sharing of inner time, the coordinated rhythms of bodies, through socialized organismic activities like breathing that create a ‘vivid present together’ (Schutz, 1964: 177). ‘Only within this experience does the Other’s conduct become meaningful to the partner tuned in on him—that is, the Other’s body and its movements can be and are interpreted as a field of expression of events within his inner life . . . Facial expressions, gait, posture, ways of handling tools and instruments, without communicative intent [or significance], are examples of such a situation’ (ibid).

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