

## TECHNIQUES, TECHNOLOGY AND CIVILISATION

Marcel Mauss

Edited and with an Introduction by Nathan Schlanger

Marcel Mauss's writings on techniques and technology are at the forefront of an important anthropological and sociological research tradition, and they also highlight the theoretical and ideological challenges surrounding this field of study. A selection of Mauss's texts – including his major statements on methodology, body techniques, practical reason, nation and civilisation, progress – are here translated and presented together for the first time, with a discussion of their context, impact and implications. This book will interest scholars and students dealing with the French sociological tradition, and also more generally those concerned with technology and material culture studies in archaeological, anthropological or contemporary settings.

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TECHNIQUES, TECHNOLOGY AND CIVILISATION

MARCEL MAUSS

MARCEL  
MAUSS

Techniques,  
Technology  
and Civilisation

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dwell any further on this self-evident topic. Besides this oral tradition, there is another one, more basic perhaps, which is generally mistaken for imitation. The use of oral symbols is but one case of the use of symbols: any traditional practice, endowed with a form and transmitted through that form, can in some measure be regarded as symbolic. When one generation hands down to the next the technical knowledge of its manual and bodily actions, as much authority and social tradition is involved as when transmission occurs through language. In this there is truly tradition, and continuity. The important deed is the handing over of science, knowledge and power from master to pupil; everything can perpetuate itself in this way.

These are rather the intellectual forms of thought that depend on language in order to be communicated. The other forms of moral and material life are transmitted through direct contact, and this communication necessarily takes place in a context of authority. This applies equally as far as the forms of emotional life are concerned. Moral and religious feelings, as well as technical or aesthetic activities, and so on, are imposed by elders on youth, by leaders on followers, by one individual on another. What is labelled imitation in the realm of individual psychology, and what is worthy of the name tradition in social psychology, boils down to this way in which things become established in ancient societies. Wisdom, etiquette, ability, skill – even in sports – ultimately find expression in two ways: these are proverbs, opinions and saws, dictamina, precepts, myths, tales, riddles, etc., on the one hand; on the other, significant movements, and finally a series of movements the success of which is believed or known to be certain precisely because they form a chain where the first is a sign for the others to follow. Since their value as signs is known not only by the agent but equally by all those present, and since they are construed as causes by the agent and by the spectators at the same time, they therefore become symbolic gestures which are simultaneously real, physically effective gestures. Furthermore, the fact that this physical effectiveness is confounded with religious and moral effectiveness leads us to conceive that in such societies, the symbols of procedure and ritual are of the same kind as those of meals, walking and posture, etc. I shall come back to this point.

Thus tradition extends to everything, and it is at least very powerful. Its omnipotence, the power of its constraining character, in Durkheim's thinking, has been contested (Moszkowski, the Revd Schmidt, etc.). Abstract discussion here is useless. Observation and a sense of relative importance is what we need.

## Text 9

### Techniques of the Body (1935)

M. Mauss, 1935, 'Les techniques du corps', *Journal de psychologie* 32:271–93.  
Translated by Ben Brewster and previously published in *Economy and Society* (1973) 2/1:70–88.

All notes and references follow Brewster.

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Mauss's presidential address to the Société de Psychologie Française in May 1934, subsequently published in the society's *Journal*, was part of the ongoing interdisciplinary contacts he had initiated with psychology since the early 1920s, seeking notably to move beyond the residual antagonisms left by Durkheim. In this context, and through dialogues with Meyerson, Georges Dumas and other scholars, Mauss elaborated his famous conception of 'totality', as generally applied to the *homme total* and more specifically to the expression of sentiments, the idea of death and indeed the gift. In this text, Mauss revealingly disclosed the mental processes by which he came to reach this notion of 'techniques of the body', and how he rescued the phenomena thus designated from the unsatisfactory category of 'divers' by realising that there exists a range of techniques without instruments. Mauss went on to propose that in their corporeal and technical *habitus*, individuals are 'total' human beings, setting in motion the biological, psychological and sociological dimensions of their being.

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### Chapter One: The Notion of Techniques of the Body

I deliberately say techniques of the body in the plural because it is possible to produce a theory of *the* technique of the body in the singular on the basis of a

study, an exposition, a description pure and simple of techniques of the body in the plural. By this expression I mean the ways in which from society to society men know how to use their bodies. In any case, it is essential to move from the concrete to the abstract and not the other way round.

I want to convey to you what I believe is one of the parts of my teaching which is not to be found elsewhere, that I have rehearsed in a course of lectures on descriptive ethnology (the books containing the *Summary Instructions* and *Instructions for Ethnographers* are to be published) and have tried out several times in my teaching at the Institut d'Ethnologie of the University of Paris.

When a natural science makes advances, it only ever does so in the direction of the concrete, and always in the direction of the unknown. Now the unknown is found at the frontiers of the sciences, where the professors are at each other's throats, as Goethe put it (though Goethe was not so polite). It is generally in these ill-demarcated domains that the urgent problems lie. Moreover, these uncleared lands are marked. In the natural sciences at present, there is always one obnoxious rubric. There is always a moment when, the science of certain facts not being yet reduced into concepts, the facts not even being organically grouped together, these masses of facts receive that posting of ignorance: 'Miscellaneous'. This is where we have to penetrate. We can be certain that this is where there are truths to be discovered: first, because we know that we are ignorant, and second, because we have a lively sense of the quantity of the facts. For many years in my course in descriptive ethnology, I have had to teach in the shadow of the disgrace and opprobrium of the 'miscellaneous' in a matter in which in ethnography this rubric 'miscellaneous' was truly heteroclit. I was well aware that walking or swimming, for example, and all sorts of things of the same type, are specific to determinate societies; that the Polynesians do not swim as we do, that my generation did not swim as the present generation does. But what social phenomena did these represent? They were 'miscellaneous' social phenomena, and, as this rubric is a horror, I have often thought about this 'miscellaneous', at least as often as I have been obliged to discuss it and often in between times.

Forgive me if, in order to give this notion of techniques of the body shape for you, I tell you about the occasions on which I pursued this general problem and how I managed to pose it clearly. It was a series of steps consciously and unconsciously taken.

First, in 1898, I came into contact with someone whose initials I still know, but whose name I can no longer remember.<sup>1</sup> I have been too lazy to look it up. It was the man who wrote an excellent article on 'Swimming' for the 1902 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, then in preparation. (The articles on 'Swimming' in the two later editions are not so good.) He revealed to me the historical and ethnographical interest of the question. It was a startingpoint, an observational framework. Subsequently – I noticed it myself – we have seen swimming techniques undergo a change, in our generation's lifetime. An example will put us in the picture straight away: us, the psychologists, as well

as the biologists and sociologists. Previously we were taught to dive after having learnt to swim. And when we were learning to dive, we were taught to close our eyes and then to open them under water. Today the technique is the other way round. The whole training begins by getting the children used to keeping their eyes open under water. Thus, even before they can swim, particular care is taken to get the children to control their dangerous but instinctive ocular reflexes, before all else they are familiarised with the water, their fears are suppressed, a certain confidence is created, suspensions and movements are selected. Hence there is a technique of diving and a technique of education in diving which have been discovered in my day. And you can see that it really is a technical education and, as in every technique, there is an apprenticeship in swimming. On the other hand, here our generation has witnessed a complete change in technique: we have seen the breaststroke with the head out of the water replaced by the different sorts of crawl. Moreover, the habit of swallowing water and spitting it out again has gone. In my day swimmers thought of themselves as a kind of steamboat. It was stupid, but in fact I still do this: I cannot get rid of my technique. Here then we have a specific technique of the body, a gymnastic art perfected in our own day.

But this specificity is characteristic of all techniques. An example: during the War I was able to make many observations on this specificity of techniques. E.g. the technique of *digging*. The English troops I was with did not know how to use French spades, which forced us to change 8,000 spades a division when we relieved a French division, and vice versa. This plainly shows that a manual knack can only be learnt slowly. Every technique properly so-called has its own form.

But the same is true of every attitude of the body. Each society has its own special habits. In the same period I had many opportunities to note the differences between the various armies. An anecdote about *marching*. You all know that the British infantry marches with a different step from our own: with a different frequency and a different stride. For the moment I am not talking about the English swing or the action of the knees, etc. The Worcester Regiment, having achieved considerable glory alongside French infantry in the Battle of the Aisne, requested Royal permission to have French trumpets and drums, a band of French buglers and drummers. The result was not very encouraging. For nearly six months, in the streets of Bailleul, long after the Battle of the Aisne, I often saw the following sight: the regiment had preserved its English march but had set it to a French rhythm. It even had at the head of its band a little French light infantry regimental sergeant major who could blow the bugle and sound the march even better than his men. The unfortunate regiment of tall Englishmen could not march. Their gait was completely at odds. When they tried to march in step, the music would be out of step. With the result that the Worcester Regiment was forced to give up its French buglers. In fact, the buglecalls adopted army by army earlier, in the Crimean War, were the calls 'at ease', 'retreat', etc. Thus I saw in a very precise and frequent fashion, not only

with the ordinary march, but also at the double and so on, the differences in elementary as well as sporting techniques between the English and the French. Prince Curt Sachs, who is living here in France at present, made the same observation. He has discussed it in several of his lectures. He could recognise the gait of an Englishman and a Frenchman from a long distance.

But these were only approaches to the subject. A kind of revelation came to me in hospital. I was ill in New York. I wondered where previously I had seen girls walking as my nurses walked. I had the time to think about it. At last I realised that it was at the cinema. Returning to France, I noticed how common this gait was, especially in Paris; the girls were French and they too were walking in this way. In fact, American walking fashions had begun to arrive over here, thanks to the cinema. This was an idea I could generalise. The positions of the arms and hands while walking form a social idiosyncrasy, they are not simply a product of some purely individual, almost completely psychical arrangements and mechanisms. For example: I think I can also recognise a girl who has been raised in a convent. In general she will walk with her fists closed. And I can still remember my third-form teacher shouting at me: 'Idiot! why do you walk around the whole time with your hands flapping wide open?' Thus there exists an education in walking, too.

Another example: there are polite and impolite *positions for the hands* at rest. Thus you can be certain that if a child at table keeps his elbows in when he is not eating he is English. A young Frenchman has no idea how to sit up straight; his elbows stick out sideways; he puts them on the table, and so on.

Finally, in *running* too, I have seen, you all have seen, the change in technique. Imagine that my gymnastics teacher, one of the top graduates of Joinville around 1860, taught me to run with my fists close to my chest: a movement completely contradictory to all running movements; I had to see the professional runners of 1890 before I realised the necessity of running in a different fashion.

Hence I have had this notion of the social nature of the '*habitus*' for many years. Please note that I use the Latin word – it should be understood in France – *habitus*. The word translates infinitely better than '*habitude*' (habit or custom), the '*exis*', the '*acquired ability*' and '*faculty*' of Aristotle (who was a psychologist). It does not designate those metaphysical *habitudes*, that mysterious '*memory*', the subjects of volumes or short and famous theses. These '*habits*' do not just vary with individuals and their imitations, they vary especially between societies, educations, proprieties and fashions, prestige. In them we should see the techniques and work of collective and individual practical reason rather than, in the ordinary way, merely the soul and its repetitive faculties.

Thus everything moved me towards the position that we in this Society are among those who have adopted, following Comte's example: the position of Georges Dumas, for example, who, in the constant relations between the biological and the sociological, leaves but little room for the psychological mediator. And I concluded that it was not possible to have a clear idea of all these facts about running, swimming, etc., unless one introduced a triple

consideration instead of a single consideration, be it mechanical and physical, like an anatomical and physiological theory of walking, or on the contrary psychological or sociological. It is the triple viewpoint, that of the '*total man*', that is needed.

Lastly, another series of facts impressed itself upon me. In all these elements of the art of using the human body, the facts of *education* were dominant. The notion of education could be superimposed on that of imitation. For there are particular children with very strong imitative faculties, others with very weak ones, but all of them go through the same education, such that we can understand the continuity of the concatenations. What takes place is a prestigious imitation. The child, the adult, imitates actions which have succeeded and which he has seen successfully performed by people in whom he has confidence and who have authority over him. The action is imposed from without, from above, even if it is an exclusively biological action, involving his body. The individual borrows the series of movements which constitute it from the action executed in front of him or with him by others.

It is precisely this notion of the prestige of the person who performs the ordered, authorised, tested action *vis-à-vis* the imitating individual that contains all the social element. The imitative action which follows contains the psychological element and the biological element. But the whole, the ensemble, is conditioned by the three elements indissolubly mixed together.

All this is easily linked to a number of other facts. In a book by Elsdon Best that reached here in 1925 there is a remarkable document on the way Maori women (New Zealand) walk. (Do not say that they are primitives, for in some ways I think they are superior to the Celts and Germans.) 'Native women adopted a peculiar gait [the English word is delightful] that was acquired in youth, a loosejointed swinging of the hips that looks ungainly to us, but was admired by the Maori. Mothers drilled their daughters in this accomplishment, termed *onioni*, and I have heard a mother say to her girl: "*Ha! Kaore koe e onioni*" [you are not doing the *onioni*] when the young one was neglecting to practise the gait'.<sup>2</sup> This was an acquired, not a natural way of walking. To sum up, there is perhaps no '*natural way*' for the adult. A fortiori when other technical facts intervene: to take ourselves, the fact that we wear shoes to walk transforms the positions of our feet: we feel it sure enough when we walk without them.

On the other hand, this same basic question arose for me in a different region, *vis-à-vis* all the notions concerning magical power, beliefs in the not only physical but also moral, magical and ritual effectiveness of certain actions. Here I am perhaps even more on my own terrain than on the adventurous terrain of the psychophysiology of modes of walking, which is a risky one for me in this company.

Here is a more '*primitive*' fact, Australian this time: a ritual formula both for hunting and for running. As you will know, the Australian manages to outrun kangaroos, emus, and wild dogs. He manages to catch the possum or phalanger at the top of its tree, even though the animal puts up a remarkable resistance.

One of these running rituals, observed a hundred years ago, is that of the hunt for the dingo or wild dog among the tribes near Adelaide. The hunter constantly shouts the following formula:

Strike (him, i.e. the dingo) with the tuft of eagle feathers (used in initiation, etc.)  
 Strike (him) with the girdle  
 Strike (him) with the string round the head  
 Strike (him) with the blood of circumcision  
 Strike (him) with the blood of the arm  
 Strike (him) with menstrual blood  
 Send (him) to sleep, etc.<sup>3</sup>

In another ceremony, that of the possum hunt, the individual carries in his mouth a piece of rock crystal (*kawemukka*), a particularly magical stone, and chants a formula of the same kind, and it is with this support that he is able to dislodge the possum, that he climbs the tree and can stay hanging on to it by his belt, that he can outlast and catch and kill this difficult prey.

The relations between magical procedures and hunting techniques are clear, too universal to need stressing.

The psychological phenomenon I am reporting at this moment is clearly only too easy to know and understand from the normal point of view of the sociologist. But what I want to get at now is the confidence, the psychological *momentum* that can be linked to an action which is primarily a fact of biological resistance, obtained thanks to some words and a magical object.

Technical actions, physical actions, magicoreligious actions are confused for the actor. These are the elements I had at my disposal.

\* \* \*

All this did not satisfy me. I saw how everything could be described, but not how it could be organised; I did not know what name, what title to give it all. It was very simple, I just had to refer to the division of traditional actions into techniques and rites, which I believe to be well founded. All these modes of action were techniques, the techniques of the body.

I made, and went on making for several years, the fundamental mistake of thinking that there is technique only when there is an instrument. I had to go back to ancient notions, to the Platonic position on technique, for Plato spoke of a technique of music and in particular of a technique of the dance, and extend these notions.

I call technique an action which is *effective* and *traditional* (and you will see that in this it is no different from a magical, religious or symbolic action). It has to be *effective* and *traditional*. There is no technique and no transmission in the absence of tradition. This above all is what distinguishes humans from the animals: the transmission of their techniques and very probably their oral transmission.

Allow me, therefore, to assume that you accept my definitions. But what is the difference between the effective traditional action of religion, the symbolic or juridical effective traditional action, the actions of life in common, moral actions on the one hand and the traditional actions of technique on the other? It is that the latter are felt by the author as *actions of a mechanical, physical or physicochemical order* and that they are pursued with that aim in view.

In this case all that need be said is quite simply that we are dealing with *techniques of the body*. The body is man's first and most natural instrument. Or more accurately, not to speak of instruments, man's first and most natural technical object, and at the same time technical means, is his body. Immediately this whole broad category of what I classified in descriptive sociology as 'miscellaneous' disappeared from that rubric and took shape and body: we now know where to range it.

Before instrumental techniques there is the ensemble of techniques of the body. I am not exaggerating the importance of this kind of work, the work of psychosociological taxonomy. But it is something: order put into ideas where there was none before. Even inside this grouping of facts, the principle made possible a precise classification. The constant adaptation to a physical, mechanical or chemical aim (e.g. when we drink) is pursued in a series of assembled actions, and assembled for the individual not by himself alone but by all his education, by the whole society to which he belongs, in the place he occupies in it.

Moreover, all these techniques were easily arranged in a system which is common to us, the notion basic to psychologists, particularly William Halse Rivers and Sir Henry Head, of the symbolic life of the mind; the notion we have of the activity of the consciousness as being above all a system of symbolic assemblages.

I should never stop if I tried to demonstrate to you all the facts that might be listed to make visible this concourse of the body and moral or intellectual symbols. Here let us look for a moment at ourselves. Everything in us all is under command. I am a lecturer for you; you can tell it from my sitting posture and my voice, and you are listening to me seated and in silence. We have a set of permissible or impermissible, natural or unnatural attitudes. Thus we should attribute different values to the act of staring fixedly: a symbol of politeness in the army, and of rudeness in everyday life.

## Chapter Two: Principles of the Classification of Techniques of the Body

Two things were immediately apparent given the notion of techniques of the body: they are divided and vary by sex *and* by age.

### 1. *Sexual division of techniques of the body (and not just division of labour among the sexes)*

This is a fairly broad subject. The observations of [Robert Mearns] Yerkes and [Wolfgang] Köhler on the position of objects with respect to the body, and especially to the groin, in monkeys provide inspiration for a general disquisition on the different attitudes of the moving body with respect to moving objects in the two sexes. Besides, there are classical observations of man himself on this point. They need to be supplemented. Allow me to suggest this series of investigations to my psychologist friends. I am not very competent in this field and also my time is otherwise engaged. Take the way of closing the fist. A man normally closes his fist with the thumb outside, a woman with her thumb inside; perhaps because she has not been taught to do it, but I am sure that if she were taught, it would prove difficult. Her punching, her delivery of a punch, are weak. And everyone knows that a woman's throwing, of a stone for example, is not just weak, but always different from that of a man: in a vertical instead of a horizontal plane.

Perhaps this is a case of two instructions. For there is a society of men and a society of women. However, I believe that there are also perhaps biological and psychological things involved as well. But there again, the psychologist alone will only be able to give dubious explanations, and he will need the collaboration of two neighbouring sciences: physiology, sociology.

### 2. *Variations of techniques of the body with age*

The child normally squats. We no longer know how to. I believe that this is an absurdity and an inferiority of our races, civilisations, societies. An example: I lived at the front with Australians (whites). They had one considerable advantage over me. When we made a stop in mud or water, they could sit down on their heels to rest, and the '*flotte*' as it was called, stayed below their heels. I was forced to stay standing up in my boots with my whole foot in the water. The squatting position is, in my opinion, an interesting one that could be preserved in a child. It is a very stupid mistake to take it away from him. All mankind, excepting only our societies, has so preserved it.

It seems besides that in the series of ages of the human race this posture has also changed in importance. You will remember that curvature of the lower limbs was once regarded as a sign of degeneration. A physiological explanation has been given for this racial characteristic. What even Rudolf Virchow still regarded as an unfortunate degenerate and is in fact simply what is now called Neanderthal man, had curved legs. This is because he normally lived in a squatting position. Hence there are things which we believe to be of a hereditary kind which are in reality physiological, psychological or sociological in kind. A certain form of the tendons and even of the bones is simply the result of certain forms of posture and repose. This is clear enough. By this procedure,

it is possible not only to classify techniques, but also to classify their variations by age and sex.

Having established this classification, which cuts across all classes of society, we can now glimpse a third one.

### 3. *Classification of techniques of the body according to efficiency*

The techniques of the body can be classified according to their efficiency, i.e. according to the results of training. Training, like the assembly of a machine, is the search for, the acquisition of efficiency. Here it is a human efficiency. These techniques are thus human norms of human training. These procedures that we apply to animals men voluntarily apply to themselves and to their children. The latter are probably the first beings to have been trained in this way, before all the animals, which first had to be tamed. As a result I could to a certain extent compare these techniques, them and their transmission, to training systems, and rank them in the order of their effectiveness.

This is the place for the notion of dexterity, so important in psychology, as well as in sociology. But in French we only have the poor term '*habile*' which is a bad translation of the Latin word '*habilis*' far better designating those people with a sense of the adaptation of all their well-coordinated movements to a goal, who are practised, who 'know what they are up to'. The English notions of 'craft' or 'cleverness' (skill, presence of mind and habit combined) imply competence at something. Once again we are clearly in the domain of techniques.

### 4. *Transmission of the form of the techniques*

One last viewpoint: the teaching of techniques being essential, we can classify them according to the nature of this education and training. Here is a new field of studies: masses of details which have not been observed, but should be, constitute the physical education of all ages and both sexes. The child's education is full of so-called details, which are really essential. Take the problem of ambidextrousness for example: our observations of the movements of the right hand and of the left hand are poor and we do not know how much all of them are acquired. A pious Muslim can easily be recognised: even when he has a knife and fork (which is rarely), he will go to any lengths to avoid using anything but his right hand. He must never touch his food with his left hand, or certain parts of his body with his right. To know why he does not make a certain gesture and does make a certain other gesture neither the physiology nor the psychology of motor asymmetry in man is enough, it is also necessary to know the traditions which impose it. Robert Hertz has posed this problem correctly.<sup>8</sup> But reflections of this and other kinds can be applied whenever there is a social choice of the principles of movements.

There are grounds for studying all the modes of training, imitation and especially those fundamental fashions that can be called the modes of life, the *modes*, the *tonus* the 'matter', the 'manners', the 'way'.

Here is the first classification, or rather, four viewpoints.

### Chapter Three: A Biographical List of the Techniques of the Body

Another quite different classification is, I would not say more logical, but easier for the observer. It is a simple list. I had thought of presenting to you a series of small tables, of the kind American professors construct. I shall simply follow more or less the ages of man, the normal biography of an individual, as an arrangement of the techniques of the body which concern him or which he is taught.

#### 1. *Techniques of birth and obstetrics*

The facts are rather little known, and much of the classical information is disputable.<sup>5</sup> Among the best is that of Walter Roth on the Australian tribes of Queensland and on those of British Guiana.<sup>6</sup>

The forms of obstetrics are very variable. The infant Buddha was born with his mother Māya upright and clinging to the branch of a tree. She gave birth standing up. Indian women still in the main give birth in this position. Something we think of as normal, like giving birth lying on one's back, is no more normal than doing so in other positions, e.g. on all fours. There are techniques of giving birth, both on the mother's part and on that of her helpers, of holding the baby, cutting and tying the umbilical cord, caring for the mother, caring for the child. Here are quite a number of questions of some importance. And here are some more: the choice of the child, the exposure of weaklings, the killing of twins are decisive moments in the history of a race. In ancient history and in other civilisations, the recognition of the child is a crucial event.

#### 2. *Techniques of infancy*

*Rearing and feeding the child.* Attitudes of the two interrelated beings: mother and child. Take the child, suckling, etc., carrying, etc. The history of carrying is very important. A child carried next to its mother's skin for two or three years has a quite different attitude to its mother from that of a child not so carried;<sup>7</sup> it has a contact with its mother utterly unlike our children's. It clings to her neck, her shoulder, it sits astride her hip. This remarkable gymnastics is essential throughout its life. And there is another gymnastics for the mother carrying it. It even seems that psychical states arise here which have disappeared from infancy with us. There are sexual contacts, skin contacts, etc.

*Weaning.* Takes a long time, usually two or three years. The obligation to suckle, sometimes even to suckle animals. It takes a long time for the mother's milk to run dry. Besides this there are relations between weaning and reproduction, suspensions of reproduction during weaning.<sup>8</sup>

Mankind can more or less be divided into people with cradles and people without. For there are techniques of the body which presuppose an instrument. Countries with cradles include almost all the peoples of the two Northern hemispheres, those of the Andean region, and also a certain number of Central African populations. In these last two groups, the use of the cradle coincides with a cranial deformation (which perhaps has serious physiological consequences).

*The weaned child.* It can eat and drink; it is taught to walk; it is trained in vision, hearing, in a sense of rhythm and form and movement, often for dancing and music. It acquires the notions and practices of physical exercise and breathing. It takes certain postures which are often imposed on it.

#### 3. *Techniques of adolescence*

To be observed with men in particular. Less important with girls in those societies to whose study a course in Ethnology is devoted. The big moment in the education of the body is, in fact, the moment of initiation. Because of the way our boys and girls are brought up we imagine that both acquire the same manners and postures and receive the same training everywhere. The idea is already erroneous about ourselves – and it is totally false in so-called primitive countries. Moreover, we describe the facts as if something like our own school, beginning straight away and intended to protect the child and train it for life, had always and everywhere existed. The opposite is the rule. For example: in all black societies the education of the boy intensifies around the age of puberty, while that of women remains traditional, so to speak. There is no school for women. They are at school with their mothers and are formed there continuously, moving directly, with few exceptions, to the married state. The male child enters the society of men where he learns his profession, especially the profession of arms. However, for men as well as women, the decisive moment is that of adolescence. It is at this moment that they learn definitively the techniques of the body that they will retain for the whole of their adult lives.

#### 4. *Techniques of adult life*

To list these we can run through the various moments of the day among which coordinated movements and suspensions of movement are distributed.

We can distinguish sleep and waking, and in waking, rest and activity.

a. *Techniques of sleep.* The notion that going to sleep is something natural is totally inaccurate. I can tell you that the War taught me to sleep anywhere, on beans of stones for example, but that I have never been able to change my bed



without a moment of insomnia: only on the second night can I go to sleep quickly.

One thing is very simple: it is possible to distinguish between those societies that have nothing to sleep on except the 'floor', and those that have instrumental assistance. The 'civilisation of latitude 15°' discussed by Graebner<sup>9</sup> is characterised among other things by its use of a bench for the neck. This neck-rest is often a totem, sometimes carved with squatting figures of men and totemic animals. There are people with mats and people without (Asia, Oceania, part of America). There are people with pillows and people without. There are populations which lie very close together in a ring to sleep, round a fire, or even without a fire. There are primitive ways of getting warm and keeping the feet warm. The Fuegians, who live in a very cold region, cannot warm their feet while they are asleep having only one blanket of skin (*guanaco*). Finally there is sleep standing up. The Masai can sleep on their feet. I have slept standing up in the mountains. I have often slept on a horse, even sometimes a moving horse: the horse was more intelligent than I was. The old chroniclers of the invasions picture the Huns and Mongols sleeping on horseback. This is still true, and their riders' sleeping does not stop the horses' progress.

There is the use of coverings. People who sleep covered and uncovered. There is the hammock and the way of sleeping hanging up.

Here are a large number of practices which are both techniques of the body and also have profound biological echoes and effects. All this can and must be observed on the ground; hundreds of things still remain to be discovered.

b. *Techniques of rest.* Rest can be perfect rest or a mere suspension of activity: lying down, sitting, squatting, etc. Try squatting. You will realise the torture that a Moroccan meal, for example, eaten according to all the rituals, would cause you. The way of sitting down is fundamental. You can distinguish squatting mankind and sitting mankind. And, in the latter, people with benches and people without benches and daises; people with chairs and people without chairs. Wooden chairs supported by crouching figures are widespread, curiously enough, in all the regions at fifteen degrees of latitude North and along the Equator in both continents.<sup>10</sup> There are people who have tables and people who do not. The table, the Greek *trapeza*, is far from universal. Normally it is still a carpet, a mat, throughout the East. This is all complicated, for these forms of rest include meals, conversation, etc. Certain societies take their rest in very peculiar positions. Thus, the whole of Nilotic Africa and part of the Chad region, all the way to Tanganyika, is populated by men who rest in the fields like storks. Some manage to rest on one foot without a pole, others lean on a stick. These resting techniques form real characteristics of civilisations, common to a large number of them, to whole families of peoples. Nothing seems more natural to the psychologists; I do not know if they would quite agree with me, but I believe that these postures in the savannah are due to the height of the grasses there and the functions of shepherd or sentry, etc.; they are laboriously acquired by education and preserved.

You have active, generally aesthetic rest; thus even dancing at rest is frequent, etc. I shall return to this.

c. *Techniques of activity, of movement.* By definition, rest is the absence of movements, movement the absence of rest. Here is a straightforward list: movements of the whole body: climbing; trampling; walking.

*Walking.* The *habitus* of the body being upright while walking, breathing, rhythm of the walk, swinging the fists, the elbows, progression with the trunk in advance of the body or by advancing either side of the body alternately (we have got accustomed to moving all the body forward at once). Feet in or out. Extension of the leg. We laugh at the 'goose step'. It is the way the German Army can obtain the maximum extension of the leg, given in particular that all Northerners, high on their legs, like to make steps as long as possible. In the absence of these exercises, we Frenchmen remain more or less knockkneed. Here is one of those idiosyncrasies which are simultaneously matters of race, of individual mentality and of collective mentality. Techniques such as those of the about-turn are among the most curious. The about-turn 'on principle' English style is so different from our own that it takes considerable study to master it.

*Running.* Position of the feet, position of the arms, breathing, running magic, endurance. In Washington I saw the chief of the Fire Fraternity of the Hopi Indians who had arrived with four of his men to protest against the prohibition of the use of certain alcoholic liquors in their ceremonies. He was certainly the best runner in the world. He had run 250 miles without stopping. All the Pueblos are accustomed to prodigious physical feats of all kinds. [Henri] Hubert, who had seen them, compared them physically with Japanese athletes. This same Indian was an incomparable dancer.

Finally we reach techniques of active rest which are not simply a matter of aesthetics, but also of bodily games.

*Dancing.* You have perhaps attended the lectures of Erich Maria von Hornbostel and M. Curt Sachs. I recommend to you the latter's very fine history of dancing.<sup>11</sup> I accept their division into dances at rest and dances in action.<sup>12</sup> I am less prepared to accept their hypothesis about the distribution of these dances. They are victims to the fundamental error which is the mainstay of a whole section of sociology. There are supposed to be societies with exclusively masculine descent and others with exclusively uterine descent. The uterine ones, being feminised, tend to dance on the spot; the others, with descent by the male, take their pleasure in moving about.

Curt Sachs has better classified these dances into extravert and introvert dances.<sup>13</sup> We are plunged straight into psychoanalysis, which is probably quite well founded here. In fact the sociologist has to see things in a more complex way. Thus, the Polynesians and in particular the Maori, shake very greatly, even on the spot, or move about very much when they have the space to do so.

Men's dancing and women's dancing should be distinguished, for they are often opposed.

Lastly we should realise that dancing in a partner's arms is a product of modern European civilisation. Which shows you that things we find natural are historical. Moreover, they horrify everyone in the world but ourselves.

I move on to the techniques of the body which are also a function of trades and part of vocations or more complex techniques.

*Jumping.* We have witnessed a transformation of jumping techniques. We all jumped from a springboard and, once again, fullface. I am glad to say that this has stopped. Now people jump, fortunately, from one side. Jumping lengthways, sideways, up and down. Standing jump, polejump. Here we return to the objects of the reflections of our friends Wolfgang Köhler, Paul Guillaume and Ignace Meyerson: the comparative psychology of humans and animals. I won't say anything more about it. These techniques are infinitely variable.

*Climbing.* I can tell you that I'm very bad at climbing trees, though reasonable on mountains and rocks. A difference of education and hence of method.

A method of getting up trees with a belt encircling the tree and the body is crucial among all so-called primitives. But we do not have the use of this belt. We see telegraph workers climbing with crampons, but no belt. This procedure should be taught there.<sup>14</sup>

The history of mountaineering methods is very noteworthy. It has made fabulous progress in my lifetime.

*Descent.* Nothing makes me so dizzy as watching a Kabyle going downstairs in Turkish slippers (*babouches*). How can he keep his feet without the slippers coming off? I have tried to see, to do it, but I can't understand. Nor can I understand how women can walk in high heels. Thus there is a lot even to be observed, let alone compared.

*Swimming.* I have told you what I think. Diving, swimming; use of supplementary means; airfloats, planks, etc. We are on the way to the invention of navigation. I was one of those who criticised the de Rougés book on Australia, demonstrated their plagiarisms, believed they were grossly inaccurate. Along with so many others I held their story for a fable: they had seen the Niol-Niol (N.W. Australia) riding cavalcades of great seaturtles. But now we have excellent photographs in which these people can be seen riding turtles. In the same way Robert Sutherland Rattray noted the story of pieces of wood on which people swim among the Ashanti.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, it has been confirmed for the natives of almost all the lagoons of Guinea, Porto-Novo in our own colonies.

*Forceful movements.* Pushing, pulling, lifting. Everyone knows what a backheave is. It is an acquired technique, not just a series of movements. Throwing, up or along the ground, etc.; the way of holding the object to be thrown between the fingers is noteworthy and undergoes great variation.

*Holding.* Holding between the teeth. Use of the toes, the armpit, etc.

This study of mechanical movements has got off to a good start. It is the formation of mechanical 'pairs of elements' with the body. You will recall Franz

Reuleaux's great theory about the formation of these pairs of elements.<sup>16</sup> And here the great name of Louis-Hubert Farabeuf will not be forgotten. As soon as I use my fist, and a fortiori, when a man had a 'Chellean hand-axe' in his hand, these 'pairs of elements' are formed.

This is the place for conjuring tricks, sleight of hand, athletics, acrobatics, etc. I must tell you that I had and still have a great admiration for jugglers and gymnasts.

d. *Techniques of care for the body. Rubbing, washing, soaping.* This dossier is hardly a day old. The inventors of soap were not the Ancients, they did not use it. It was the Gauls. And on the other hand, independently, in the whole of Central and North East of South America they soaped themselves with *quillaia* bark or 'brazil', hence the name of the empire.

*Care of the mouth.* Coughing and spitting technique. Here is a personal observation. A little girl did not know how to spit and this made every cold she had much worse. I made inquiries. In her father's village and in her father's family in particular, in Berry, people do not know how to spit. I taught her to spit. I gave her four sous per spit. As she was saving up for a bicycle she learnt to spit. She is the first person in her family who knows how to spit.

*Hygiene in the needs of nature.* Here I could list innumerable facts for you.

e. *Consumption techniques. Eating.* You will remember the story Herald Høffding repeats about the Shah of Persia. The Shah was the guest of Napoleon III and insisted on eating with his fingers. The Emperor urged him to use a golden fork. 'You don't know what a pleasure you are missing,' the Shah replied.

*Absence and use of knives.* An enormous factual error is made by William S. McGee who believed he had observed that the Seri (Indians of the Madeleine Peninsula, California), having no notion of knives, were the most primitive human beings. They did not have knives for eating, that is all.<sup>17</sup>

*Drinking.* It would be very useful to teach children to drink straight from the source, the fountain, etc., or from puddles of water, etc., to pour their drinks straight down their throats, etc.

f. *Techniques of reproduction.* Nothing is more technical than sexual positions. Very few writers have had the courage to discuss this question. We should be grateful to M. Friedrich Saloman Krauss for having published his great collection of *Anthropophyteia*.<sup>18</sup> Consider for example the technique of the sexual position consisting of this: the woman's legs hang by the knees from the man's elbows. It is a technique specific to the whole Pacific, from Australia to lower Peru, via the Bering Straits – very rare, so to speak, elsewhere.

There are all the techniques of normal and abnormal sexual acts. Contact of the sexual organs, mingling of breath, kisses, etc. Here sexual techniques and sexual morals are closely related.

g. Lastly there are the *techniques of the care of the abnormal*: massages, etc. But let us move on.

## Chapter Four: General Considerations

General questions may perhaps be of more interest to you than these lists of techniques that I have paraded before you at rather too great a length.

What emerges very clearly from them is the fact that we are everywhere faced with physiopsychosociological assemblages of series of actions. These actions are more or less habitual and more or less ancient in the life of the individual and the history of the society.

Let us go further: one of the reasons why these series may more easily be assembled in the individual is precisely because they are assembled by and for social authority. As a corporal this is how I taught the reason for exercise in close order, marching four abreast and in step. I ordered the soldiers not to march in step drawn up in ranks and in two files four abreast, and I obliged the squad to pass between two of the trees in the courtyard. They marched on top of one another. They realised that what they were being made to do was not so stupid. In group life as a whole there is a kind of education of movements in close order.

In every society, everyone knows and has to know and learn what he has to do in all conditions. Naturally, social life is not exempt from stupidity and abnormalities. Error may be a principle. The French Navy only recently began to teach its sailors to swim. But example and order, that is the principle. Hence there is a strong sociological causality in all these facts. I hope you will accept that I am right.

On the other hand, since these are movements of the body, this all presupposes an enormous biological and physiological apparatus. What is the breadth of the linking psychological cogwheel? I deliberately say cogwheel. A Comtean would say that there is no gap between the social and the biological. What I can tell you is that here I see psychological facts as connecting cogs and not as causes, except in moments of creation or reform. Cases of invention, of laying down principles, are rare. Cases of adaptation are an individual psychological matter.

But in general they are governed circumstances of life in common, of contact.

On the other hand there are two big questions on the agenda for psychology: the question of individual capacities, of technical orientation, and the question of salient features, of biotypology, which may concur with the brief investigations I have just made. The great advances of psychology in the last few years have not, in my opinion, been made vis-à-vis each of the so-called faculties of psychology, but in psychotechnics, arid in the analysis of psychological 'wholes'.

Here the ethnologist comes up against the big questions of the psychical possibilities of such a race and such a biology of such a people. These are fundamental questions. I believe that here, too, whatever the appearances, we are dealing with biologicosociological phenomena. I think that the basic

use. For example, the great tests of stoicism, etc., which constitute initiation for the majority of mankind, have as their aim to teach composure, resistance, seriousness, presence of mind, dignity, etc. The main utility I see in my erstwhile mountaineering was this education of my composure, which enabled me to sleep upright on the narrowest ledge overlooking an abyss.

I believe that this whole notion of the education of races that are selected on the basis of a determinate efficiency is one of the fundamental moments of history itself: education of the vision, education in walking—ascending, descending, running. It consists especially of education in composure. And the latter is above all a retarding mechanism, a mechanism inhibiting disorderly movements; this retardation subsequently allows a coordinated response of coordinated movements setting off in the direction of a chosen goal. This resistance to emotional seizure is something fundamental in social and mental life. It separates out, it even classifies the so-called primitive societies; according to whether they display more brutal, unreflected, unconscious reactions or on the contrary more isolated, precise actions governed by a clear consciousness.

It is thanks to society that there is an intervention of consciousness. It is not thanks to unconsciousness that there is an intervention of society. It is thanks to society that there is the certainty of pre-prepared movements, domination of the conscious over emotion and unconsciousness. It is right that the French Navy is now to make it obligatory for its sailors to learn to swim.

From here we easily move on to much more philosophical problems.

I don't know whether you have paid attention to what our friend Marcel Granet has already pointed out in his great investigations into the techniques of Taoism, its techniques of the body, breathing techniques in particular.<sup>23</sup> I have studied the Sanskrit texts of Yoga enough to know that the same things occur in India. I believe precisely that by education, and at least at the bottom of all our mystical states there are techniques of the body which we have not studied, but which were perfectly studied by China and India, even in very remote periods. This socio-psycho-biological study should be made. I think that there are necessarily biological means of entering into 'communication with God'. Although in the end breath technique, etc., is only the basic aspect in India and China, I believe this technique is much more widespread. At any rate, on this point we have the methods to understand a great many facts which we have not understood hitherto. I even believe that all the recent discoveries in reflex therapy deserve our attention, ours, the sociologists', as well as that of biologists and psychologists ... much more competent than ourselves.

## Notes

1. [In fact Sydney Holland. See Holland, 1902–3.]. NB. The notes in square brackets are provided by the translator, Ben Brewster.
2. Best (1924: 1, 408; cf. 135) [*sic* – the latter reference seems to be a mistake of Mauss's; could he have meant 1924: 1, 426–47, 556, which refers to the grit of men and women respectively?]

3. Teichmann and Schürmann (1840: 73); cit. Eyre (1845: 11, 241).
4. Hertz (1929 and 1960).
5. Even the latest editions of Ploss, *Das Weib* (Bartels's editions, etc.) leave something to be desired in this question. [See Ploss 1884; Ploss and Bartels 1905; Ploss, Bartels and Bartels 1935.]
6. [See Roth 1897: 182–83; Roth 1924: 693–96.]
7. Observations are beginning to be published on this point.
8. Ploss's large collection of facts, supplemented by Bartels, is satisfactory on this point. [see Ploss, Bartels and Bartels 1935: III, 183.]
9. Graebner (1923).
10. This is one of the fine observations from Graebner (1923).
11. Sachs (1933 and 1938).
12. [Sachs 1938 uses the terms 'close dance' and 'expanded dance'.]
13. [Sachs 1938: 59–61.]
14. I have just seen it in use at last (Spring 1935).
15. [Ratray 1923: 62–3, Figs. 8–12, 15–16.]
16. [The kinematic elements of a machine are not employed singly, but always in pairs; or in other words ... the machine cannot so well be said to consist of elements as of pairs of elements (Elementenpaare). This particular manner of constitution forms a distinguishing characteristic of the machine'. Reuleaux, 1876: 43.]
17. [McGee 1898: 152. In fact the Seri live on the island of Tiburon and the adjacent mainland of Sonora province, Mexico, on the Gulf of California.]
18. [Krauss 1904–13; 1906–7; 1909–29.]
19. [Granet 1929 and 1930.]

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