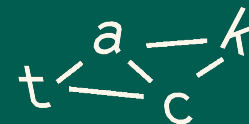


Understanding Architectural Design Studios as ‘Communities of Tacit Knowledge’

Teaching Module 10



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 860413.



Communities of Tacit Knowledge
Architecture and its Ways of Knowing

Module Aims

To introduce the theory of Tacit Knowledge in the context of architectural education

To understand how tacit knowledge is transferred, particularly in design studios

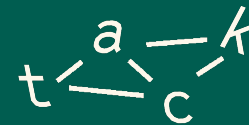
To frame design studios as “communities of tacit knowledge”

To apply these theoretical conceptions of tacit knowledge to two cases:

- summer schools
- end-of-semester crits



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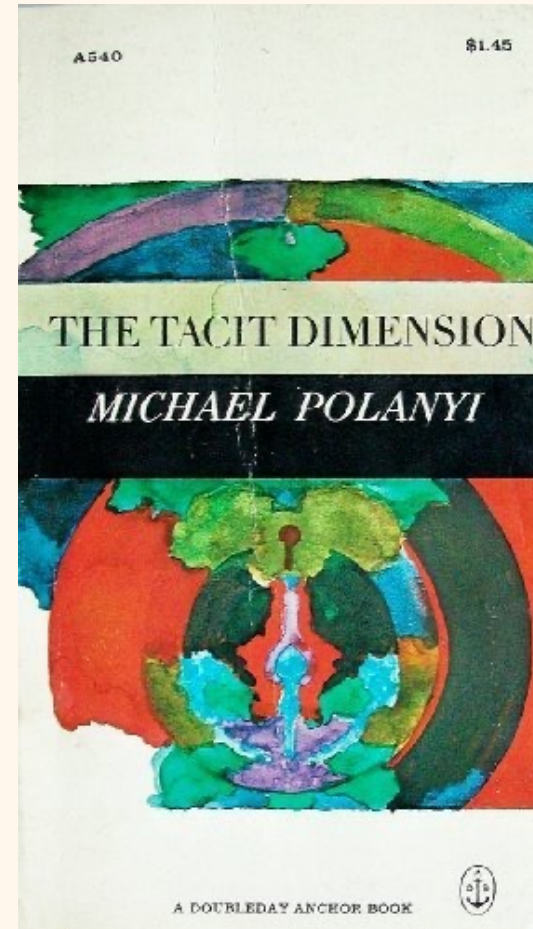


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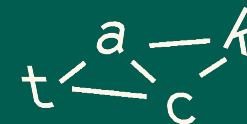
Tacit Knowledge

“I shall reconsider human knowledge by starting from the fact *that we can know more than we can tell.*” (Polanyi, 1966, p4)

“We have seen that tacit knowledge dwells in our awareness of **particulars** while bearing on an **entity** which the particulars **jointly constitute**. In order to share this **indwelling**, the pupil must presume that a teaching which appears meaningless to start with has in fact a meaning which can be discovered by hitting on the same kind of indwelling as the teacher is practicing. Such an effort is based on accepting the teacher's **authority.**” (Polanyi, 1966, p61)



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Communities of Tacit Knowledge
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Tacit Knowledge

What is tacit knowledge?

- Knowledge that we cannot **tell** to others, that we express instead through our actions
- Actions can be physical, verbal or cognitive

How can we transfer tacit knowledge according to Polanyi?

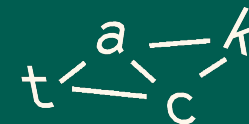
- Student must **dwell** in **particulars** (e.g. drawing technique) while keeping in mind the **entity** (e.g. overall design task) which is **jointly constituted** by these particulars
- A student must trust their teacher's **authority**, even if they don't understand the design task or drawing technique at first



Professor with students, TACK Summer School, September 2021
Photo by Marwan Magroun.



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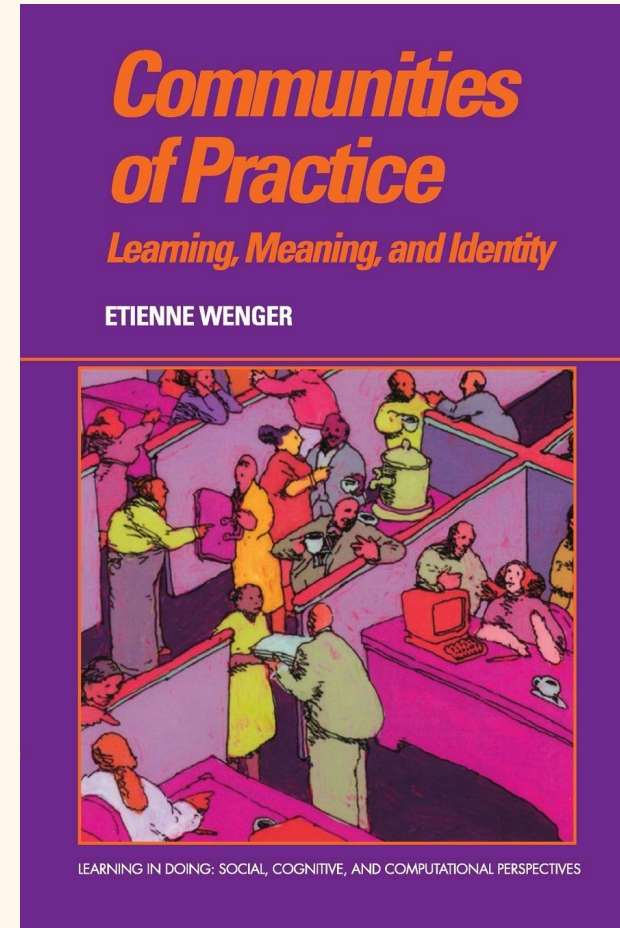


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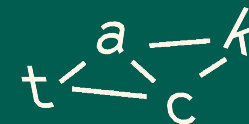
Communities of Practice

“Communities of practice are the prime context in which we can work out **common sense** through **mutual engagement**. Therefore, the concept of practice highlights **the social and negotiated character** of both the explicit and the tacit in our lives.”
(Wenger, 2008, p47)

“Teachers, masters, and specific role models can be important, but it is by virtue of their [students’] **membership** in the community as a whole that they can play their roles...newcomers must be granted enough **legitimacy** to be treated as potential members.” (Wenger, 2008, p100)



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Communities of Tacit Knowledge
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Communities of Practice

What is a “community of tacit knowledge”?

- Adapted from “community of practice”, but emphasising the way the **social and negotiated character** of such communities depends on, and defined by, tacit knowledge
- That members of a community **mutually** shape its specific **common sense**, which is substantially tacit

How do communities transfer tacit knowledge?

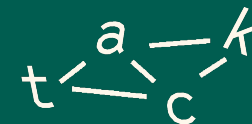
- New **members** of a community learn by being invested with **legitimacy** and playing an active role in that community
- Transfer doesn't rely on masters or teachers



A community of tacit knowledge composed of students and professors
TACK Summer School, September 2021. Photo by Marwan Magroun.



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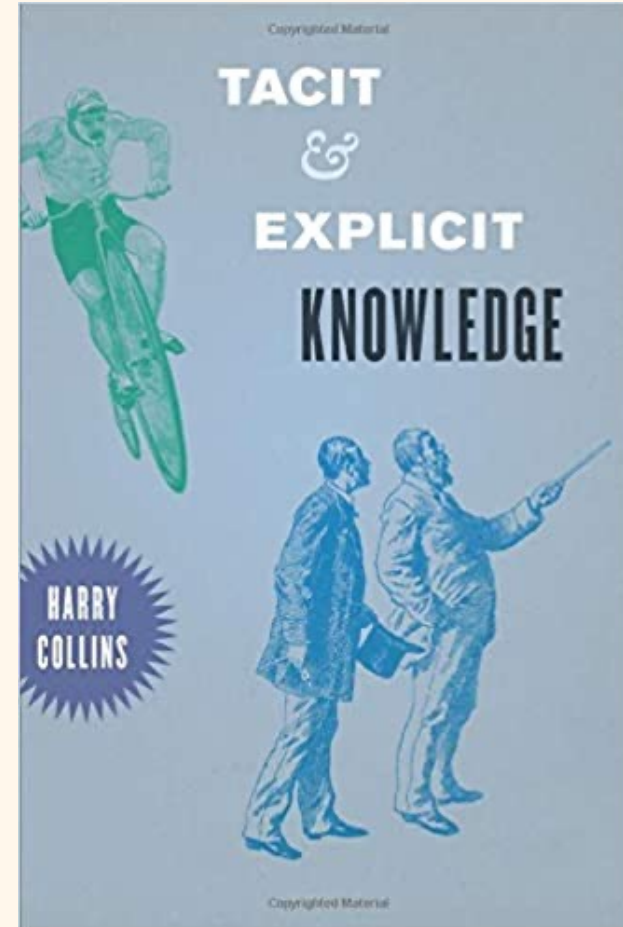


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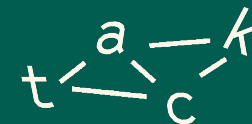
Collective Tacit Knowledge

“collective tacit knowledge [is] the knowledge that the individual can acquire only by being **embedded** in society. This is called “strong,” because we know of no way to describe it... Strong tacit knowledge is a property of **society** rather than the individual.” (Collins, 2010, p11)

“[In] older students **tacit knowledge** is acquired by **socialization** among parents, teachers, and peers. In the workplace it is acquired by “sitting by Nellie” or more organized **apprenticeship**. In science it is acquired during research degrees, by talk at conferences, by laboratory visits, and in the coffee bar.” (Collins, 2010, p87)



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Communities of Tacit Knowledge
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Collective Tacit Knowledge

What is a “Collective” Tacit Knowledge?

- Knowledge that can only be shared and communicated by people **embedded** in a community of tacit knowledge
- It resides, in flux, in the community itself

How is collective tacit knowledge transferred?

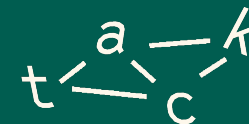
- Individuals are **socialized** in communities through sustained formal (apprenticeships, architecture degrees) or informal (conversations, observation) interactions
- More senior members (parents, colleagues) assist new people to become **embedded**



Informal lunch time conversations within a community of tacit knowledge
TACK Summer School, September 2021. Photo by Marwan Magroun.



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Communities of Tacit Knowledge
Architecture and its Ways of Knowing

The Summer School: Cross-cultural Exchange

Architectural summer schools are one place where multiple “Communities of Tacit Knowledge” from different schools and design studios **meet** and **negotiate** their differences

These communities might differ in:

- educational approach (e.g. academy of fine arts, technical university, liberal arts school)
- geographic region and language
- approaches to disciplinary issues such as representation, context, technology, the architect’s role, autonomy, theory etc.

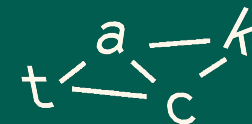
These are often differences of collective tacit knowledge, making it difficult to **bridge** between communities



Participants of the CIAM Summer School, Venice, 1956
Photo by Jaap Bakema, Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut



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Communities of Tacit Knowledge
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The Summer School: Cross-cultural Exchange

Encountering these differences can reveal the **hidden** tacit knowledge of a participant's own community: difficult to recognise from **within**

Summer schools have developed specific **tools** to quickly **integrate** participants in the summer school's own "community of tacit knowledge"

Some of these tools include:

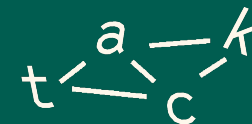
- the **authority** of "master" architects
- **structured conversations** centred on tangible drawings, models, buildings
- **informal talks** over meals or site visits
- **publications** prepared ahead of time to familiarise participants with the community



Jaap Bakema with participants of the Salzburg Sommerakademie, 1967
Photo by Frans Hooykaas, private collection



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Communities of Tacit Knowledge
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The Crit: Internal and External Communities

End-of-semester crits are a moment where **external guests** are invited into the “community of tacit knowledge” of a studio

External guests are part of their own “communities of tacit knowledge,” with their own **interests, biographies and bodies**

These differences affect the way they **value** students’ projects in a way that can be difficult to make explicit

Crits can reveal strong **consistency** between guests, tutors and students on issues such as:

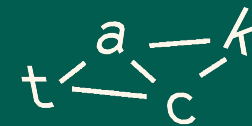
- graphic and linguistic **convention**
- understanding of space and construction



Students presenting their work to external guests and audience in a crit
TACK Summer School, September 2021. Photo by Marwan Magroun.



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The Crit: Internal and External Communities

Crits can also reveal differences between participants' various communities including on:

- **aesthetic** and **formal** qualities
- disciplinary and evaluative **terminology**
- architectural and cultural **references**
- ethics, politics, and other broad **social** issues
- the **role** of architecture and the architect

Some of these disagreements can be **overcome** and differences **bridged** when participants

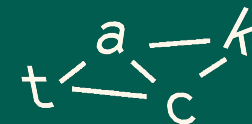
- focus on the **immediate qualities** of a students' project and representations
- emphasise **dialogue** over their authority



Students presenting their work to external guests and audience in a crit
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