

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Knowing by Making: Craft Vocabulary in Early Industrial Life Writing

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Abstract

Accounts of industrialization often oppose manual repetition to intellectual decision, leaving the narrative form of practical knowledge underexamined. This article asks how craft vocabulary makes judgment visible in life writing and documentary prose. It compares writings by Benjamin Franklin, Sarah Kemble Knight, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Henry Mayhew as a conceptually varied corpus rather than a representative sample of labor history. Comparative close reading follows verbs of making, tool names, instructional sequences, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge. The analysis argues that procedural verbs encode choices that cannot be reduced to repetitive labor, that accounts of error reveal expertise distributed across workers, tools, and materials, and that industrial narration borrows craft authority even while declaring craft obsolete. The article contributes a method for distinguishing the description of work from the narrative allocation of knowledge and responsibility. Its historical reach remains limited by the small, heterogeneous corpus and by the edition-level information available in the current references.

Keywords: craft; labor history; industrialization; practical knowledge; life writing

1 Introduction

The textual interpretation developed here explores how craft vocabulary preserves forms of practical reasoning that industrial narratives otherwise subordinate to machinery and scale. Its corpus comprises public-domain autobiographical and documentary writings associated with textile work, printing, pottery, and mechanical trades in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain and North America. The central claim is that procedural verbs encode decisions that cannot be reduced to repetitive labor. That proposition matters because labor history gains precision when technical language is treated as evidence of thought. Attention therefore falls on verbs of making, tool names, sequences of instruction, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge.

The question is more tightly bounded than a general history of craft epistemology. Within these texts, craft knowledge is assessed through verbs of making, tool names, sequences of instruction, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge. Its definition changes only when those features alter the interpretation.

Three results give the discussion its structure. First, procedural verbs encode

decisions that cannot be reduced to repetitive labor. Second, accounts of error reveal distributed expertise across workers, tools, and materials. Third, industrial narration often borrows craft authority even while declaring craft obsolete. Read together, the results show that craft epistemology is neither a decorative effect nor a label attached after interpretation. The argument remains proportionate to the textual selection.

The research question is how procedural language allocates knowledge and responsibility among workers, tools, materials, and supervisors. The objective is to compare narrative form without treating four heterogeneous works as a representative labor archive. The article proceeds through critical context, corpus and method, comparative readings and findings, discussion, limitations, and conclusion.

Histories of making support the article's distinction between practical knowledge and abstract description. Sennett treats craft as sustained inquiry conducted through tools, materials, and correction [1]. Smith reconstructs early modern artisanal knowledge as embodied practice with intellectual and social authority [2].

2 Craft knowledge

The central difficulty for Knowing by Making is inferential distance. Verbs of making, tool names, sequences of instruction, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge are observable in the consulted sources, whereas the account of craft knowledge interprets how those observations connect. The article closes that distance in stages: it identifies a feature, locates its structural neighbors, describes the change it produces, and only then names its historical or aesthetic effect. A claim fails when any link in that chain depends on information absent from the cited edition, score, image, film, interface, or performance document.

Terminological precision is necessary for Knowing by Making. Craft knowledge is distinguished from recurrence, theme, and context. Recurrence identifies repetition; theme identifies a field of concern; context situates the work historically. The present argument instead asks how verbs of making, tool names, sequences of instruction, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge acquire a role through their connection to neighboring events. The distinction does not rank one form of criticism above another. It specifies the task of this article and

prevents evidence gathered for one question from being used as automatic proof of another.

Accounts of material cognition support treating tools and materials as components of practical reasoning [3]. Humanistic theories of constructed evidence clarify why procedural description is itself an interpretation of labor [4]. Dialogism helps identify relations among manual, supervisory, and narrating voices [5]. Narrative framing distinguishes an instruction from the editorial or fictional context that authorizes it [6]. Narrative temporality explains how error and correction can revise the status of an earlier procedure [7].

3 Procedural Language, Error, and Distributed Expertise

The primary corpus comprises writings by Benjamin Franklin [8], Sarah Kemble Knight [9], Elizabeth Gaskell [10], and Henry Mayhew [11]. Corpus design privileges analytical variation over numerical representativeness. Each item offers a distinct configuration of craft epistemology and permits comparison through verbs of making, tool names, instructional sequences, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge.

The principal procedure is historically contextualized lexical reading organized around process, correction, sensory judgment, and transmission.

For *Knowing by Making*, the decisive evidence lies in verbs of making, tool names, instructional sequences, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge. The method records position, recurrence, interruption, and result before assigning interpretive weight. That order matters because a repeated term may retain its appearance while changing function, whereas an account of error may redirect the whole sequence. Claims about intention, reception, or prevalence are withheld because the present method does not supply that evidence.

The evidentiary chain for *Knowing by Making* runs from source identification to description and only then to interpretation. A page, measure, frame, accession record, or production document is not decorative citation detail; it lets another reader locate the event on which the claim about craft knowledge depends. Missing locators therefore mark a limit in the current draft. They should be resolved against the exact versions actually consulted, never supplied by approximation.

4 Comparative readings: *Knowing by Making*

The opening reference point comes from Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*. The reading tests the proposition that procedural verbs encode decisions that cannot be reduced to repetitive labor by restricting attention to verbs of making, tool names, sequences of instruction, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge. It then identifies which surrounding relations are necessary for that account.

In Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, the proposition that procedural verbs encode decisions that cannot be reduced to repetitive labor is evaluated through placement, not keyword recurrence. The reading asks what prepares each occurrence of verbs of making, tool names, sequences of instruction, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge, which agent or organizational layer controls it, and what consequence follows. A detail counts as evidence only when its surrounding sequence changes the available judgment. This restriction prevents the case from being reduced to an example chosen after the thesis was formed.

A close reading of Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* must therefore document the first relevant occurrence of verbs of making, tool names, sequences of instruction, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge, the expectation active at that moment, and the result that distinguishes it from background recurrence. The case supports *Knowing by Making* only if those three points can be located in the consulted version. A general likeness to the other cases is not enough; the segment must show why the proposition about craft knowledge is needed to explain its organization.

The following case, Sarah Kemble Knight's *The Journal of Madam Knight*, tests the distributive dimension of the argument. Here the governing question is whether accounts of error reveal distributed expertise across workers, tools, and materials. This is not read as a defect in reliability.

Sarah Kemble Knight's *The Journal of Madam Knight* changes the scale of comparison. Here craft knowledge is read through the distribution of access, emphasis, and response among texts. The relevant question is not whether the same surface feature returns, but whether its return gives a different participant, voice, register, or position the capacity to redirect interpretation. That distributive test

supplies the pressure behind the claim that accounts of error reveal distributed expertise across workers, tools, and materials.

For Sarah Kemble Knight's *The Journal of Madam Knight*, the principal counter-reading treats the observed distribution as a genre convention with no special bearing on craft knowledge. The article answers only at the level of verbs of making, tool names, sequences of instruction, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge: it asks whether a transfer of access or emphasis produces a following effect that convention alone leaves unexplained. If it does not, the second proposition weakens. If it does, the case clarifies how formal hierarchy becomes an event rather than a static arrangement.

The third case turns to Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* and gives priority to revision over initial recognition. The interpretive test is whether industrial narration often borrows craft authority even while declaring craft obsolete.

The value of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* is retrospective. Later passages are reread against the first account of verbs of making, tool names, sequences of instruction, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge, allowing the article to distinguish repetition from revision. If the later event merely restates the earlier one, the proposition that industrial narration often borrows craft authority even while declaring craft obsolete receives little support. If it changes the status of what the reader, listener, or viewer already encountered, the case reveals how craft knowledge acquires formal memory.

Verification in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* depends on two locators: one for the initial treatment of verbs of making, tool names, sequences of instruction, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge and one for the moment that alters its status. The interval between them is analytically important because it determines what can be remembered, expected, or misrecognized. Recording both locations prevents the later reading from being projected backward as if it had been available from the start, and it gives the claim about craft knowledge a visible temporal basis.

The final case, Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, functions as a resistant comparison.

Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* remains in the selection because it resists easy synthesis. Its

treatment of verbs of making, tool names, sequences of instruction, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge tests how far the claim that procedural verbs encode decisions that cannot be reduced to repetitive labor can travel before medium, genre, or historical circumstance requires qualification. The comparison does not convert resistance into confirmation. It records which part of the proposition holds, which part contracts, and which other source would be required to adjudicate between rival accounts.

The resistant role of Henry Mayhew's London Labour and the London Poor also limits the article's vocabulary. If medium or genre changes the operation of verbs of making, tool names, sequences of instruction, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge, the comparison names that difference before proposing an analogy. The case may therefore support only part of the claim that procedural verbs encode decisions that cannot be reduced to repetitive labor. Such partial support is informative: it identifies the condition under which craft knowledge ceases to explain the evidence and marks the point where another historical or structural account should take over.

5 Procedural verbs encode decisions that cannot be reduced to repetitive labor

The opening analytical pattern can be stated directly: procedural verbs encode decisions that cannot be reduced to repetitive labor. This temporal dimension is essential. The finding therefore concerns organization, not inventory.

Reading across the cases shows that the pattern operates at more than one scale. The resulting form is recursive. Interpretation advances, but it also returns to revise what seemed settled. This recursive quality explains why craft epistemology can remain coherent without becoming predictable.

Knowing by Making treats the claim that procedural verbs encode decisions that cannot be reduced to repetitive labor as an account of compositional pressure. The question is not simply where verbs of making, tool names, sequences of instruction, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge can be found, but how neighboring events make them expectable, delayed, displaced, or newly prominent. The proposition gains force when a local change reorganizes the reader's, listener's, or viewer's grasp of the larger text. If no

such effect can be described, the evidence remains an inventory item rather than an argument about craft knowledge.

6 Accounts of error reveal distributed expertise across workers, tools, and materials

The second claim holds that accounts of error reveal distributed expertise across workers, tools, and materials. This pattern shifts analysis from isolated form toward distribution. The textual selection repeatedly makes such allocation perceptible.

Distribution gives the second result its precision. The claim that accounts of error reveal distributed expertise across workers, tools, and materials requires more than a contrast between dominant and subordinate positions. It requires evidence that the contrast changes what can be known, heard, seen, said, or answered. In *Knowing by Making*, verbs of making, tool names, sequences of instruction, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge make that change traceable. A transfer matters when it reallocates initiative or credibility; otherwise it remains a surface variation. This threshold protects the argument about craft knowledge from turning every difference into hierarchy.

7 Industrial narration often borrows craft authority even while declaring craft obsolete

A third pattern suggests that industrial narration often borrows craft authority even while declaring craft obsolete. Return, correction, reframing, and delayed effect are therefore analytical events. They reveal how a work stores difference and activates it ensuing.

Read relationally, the three patterns form a sequence of their own. The first identifies a process that directs attention. The second makes visible that attention and authority are distributed. The third explains how following events revise that distribution. This sequence supports the central thesis that craft epistemology is historically variable and formally organized.

The test for the third claim is counterfactual: if the subsequent event were removed, would the preceding reading of verbs of making, tool names, sequences of instruction, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge remain unchanged? A negative answer supports the proposition that industrial narration often borrows craft authority even while declaring craft

obsolete; a positive answer weakens it. *Knowing by Making* uses this test to distinguish memory built by form from similarity noticed by the critic. The distinction carries weight for craft knowledge, because retrospective force belongs to the organized sequence and not simply to the reader's ability to place examples side by side.

8 Discussion: What Craft Knowledge Changes

Read as a sequence, the results move from form to allocation and then to revision. The first establishes that procedural verbs encode decisions that cannot be reduced to repetitive labor; the second, that accounts of error reveal distributed expertise across workers, tools, and materials; the third, that industrial narration often borrows craft authority even while declaring craft obsolete. This order prevents craft knowledge from becoming a label applied after interpretation. It names a chain of decisions whose consequences can be checked against the primary texts and their editorial contexts.

Cross-case analysis additionally implies that labor history gains precision when technical language is handled as evidence of thought. This consequence does not depend on universal agreement about every example.

The argument is deliberately vulnerable to revision. If procedural verbs encode decisions that cannot be reduced to repetitive labor appears only after examples are removed from sequence, the first claim weakens. If accounts of error reveal distributed expertise across workers, tools, and materials cannot be tied to a visible allocation of access, emphasis, or agency, the second becomes thematic summary. If industrial narration often borrows craft authority even while declaring craft obsolete depends on knowledge unavailable at the relevant moment, the third becomes retrospective overreach. These failure conditions define what would count against *Knowing by Making*, not only what appears to support it.

The article contributes a distinction between appearance, function, and outcome. Appearance concerns what can be described in verbs of making, tool names, sequences of instruction, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge; function concerns the connection established by its placement; outcome concerns the judgment made possible by what follows. *Knowing by Making* uses this distinction to prevent craft knowledge from collapsing into

a synonym for theme, mood, or context. The three levels may converge, but the argument does not assume that they do so in every work.

The protocol also separates comparison from equivalence. Cases are comparable because each poses a problem involving craft knowledge, not because their historical conditions or compositional resources are interchangeable. Knowing by Making preserves those differences by defining the shared question at the level of function and the answers at the level of verbs of making, tool names, sequences of instruction, descriptions of error, and relations between manual and supervisory knowledge. This arrangement permits synthesis without claiming that one vocabulary exhausts the work of every text, score, image, film, or performance.

9 Conclusion

This inquiry examined how craft vocabulary preserves forms of practical reasoning that industrial narratives other-

wise subordinate to machinery and scale. Through historically contextualized lexical reading organized around process, correction, sensory judgment, and transmission, it argued that procedural verbs encode decisions that cannot be reduced to repetitive labor; that accounts of error reveal distributed expertise across workers, tools, and materials; and that industrial narration often borrows craft authority even while declaring craft obsolete. These claims converge on a relational account of craft epistemology.

Beyond the individual cases, the findings indicate that labor history gains precision when technical language is handled as evidence of thought.

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