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# The Logic of Practice

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It is not easy to speak of practice other than negatively – especially those aspects of practice that are seemingly most mechanical, most opposed to the logic of thought and discourse. All the automatic reflexes of ‘thinking in couples’ tend to exclude the idea that the pursuit of conscious goals, in whatever area, can presuppose a permanent dialectic between an organizing consciousness and automatic behaviours. The usual obligatory choice between the language of consciousness and the language of the mechanical model would perhaps be less compelling if it did not correspond to a fundamental division in the dominant world-view. Those who have the monopoly on discourse about the social world think differently when they are thinking about themselves and about others (that is, the other classes): they are readily spiritualist as regards themselves, materialist towards others, liberal for themselves and dirigiste for others, and, with equal logic, teleological and intellectualist for themselves and mechanist for others. This is seen in economics, where writers oscillate between the tendency to credit economic agents, or rather the ‘entrepreneur’, with the capacity to assess objective chances rationally, and the tendency to credit the self-regulating mechanisms of the market with the absolute power to determine preferences.<sup>1</sup> As for the anthropologists, they would have been less inclined to use the language of the mechanical model if, when considering exchange, they had thought not only of *potlatch* or *kula*, but also of the games they themselves play in social life, which are expressed in the language of tact, skill, dexterity, delicacy or *savoir-faire*, all names for practical sense; and if they had set aside the exchange of gifts and words and considered exchanges in which hermeneutic errors are paid for instantly, such as the exchange of blows, discussed by George H. Mead (1962: 42–3), in which each stance of the opponent’s body contains cues which the fighter has to grasp while they are still incipient, reading in the hint of a blow or a sidestep the future it contains, that is, the blow or a ‘dummy’. Returning to the seemingly most mechanical and ritualized of exchanges, such as polite conversation, a stereotyped linking of stereotypes, they would have discovered the unceasing vigilance that is needed to manage this interlocking of prepared gestures and words; the attention to every sign that is indispensable, in the use of the most ritual pleasantries, in order to be

carried along by the game without getting carried away by the game beyond the game, as happens when simulated combat gets the better of the combatants; the art of playing on the equivocations, innuendoes and unspoken implications of gestural or verbal symbolism that is required, whenever the right objective distance is in question, in order to produce ambiguous conduct that can be disowned at the slightest sign of withdrawal or refusal, and to maintain uncertainty about intentions that always hesitate between recklessness and distance, eagerness and indifference. One thus only has to go back to one's own games, one's own playing of the social game, to realize that the sense of the game is at once the realization of the theory of the game and its negation *qua* theory.

When one discovers the theoretical error that consists in presenting the theoretical view of practice as the practical relation to practice, and more precisely in setting up the model that has to be constructed to give an account of practice as the principle of practice, then simultaneously one sees that at the root of this error is the antinomy between the time of science and time of action, which tends to destroy practice by imposing on it the intemporal time of science. The shift from the practical scheme to the theoretical schema, constructed after the event, from practical sense to the theoretical model, which can be read either as a project, plan or method, or as a mechanical programme, a mysterious ordering mysteriously reconstructed by the analyst, lets slip everything that makes the temporal reality of practice in process. Practice unfolds in time and it has all the correlative properties, such as irreversibility, that synchronization destroys. Its temporal structure, that is, its rhythm, its tempo, and above all its directionality, is constitutive of its meaning. As with music, any manipulation of this structure, even a simple change in tempo, either acceleration or slowing down, subjects it to a deconstruction that is irreducible to a simple change in an axis of reference. In short, because it is entirely immersed in the current of time, practice is inseparable from temporality, not only because it is played out in time, but also because it plays strategically with time and especially with tempo.

Science has a time which is not that of practice. For the analyst, time disappears: not only because, as has often been repeated since Max Weber pointed it out, arriving after the battle, the analyst cannot have any uncertainty as to what can happen, but also because he has the time to totalize, that is, to overcome the effects of time. Scientific practice is so detemporalized that it tends to exclude even the idea of what it excludes. Because science is only possible in a relation to time which is the opposite of that of practice, it tends to ignore time and so to detemporalize practice. A player who is involved and caught up in the game adjusts not to what he sees but to what he fore-sees, sees in advance in the directly perceived present; he passes the ball not to the spot where his team-mate is but to the spot he will reach – before his opponent – a moment later, anticipating the anticipations of the others and, as when 'selling a dummy', seeking to confound them. He decides in terms of objective probabilities, that is, in response to an overall, instantaneous assessment of the whole set of his

opponents and the whole set of his team-mates, seen not as they are but in their impending positions. And he does so 'on the spot', 'in the twinkling of an eye', 'in the heat of the moment', that is, in conditions which exclude distance, perspective, detachment and reflexion. He is launched into the impending future, present in the imminent moment, and, abdicating the possibility of suspending at every moment the ecstasis that projects him into the probable, he identifies himself with the imminent future of the world, postulating the continuity of time. He thereby excludes the supremely real and quite theoretical possibility of sudden reduction to the present, that is, to the past, the abrupt severing of the commitments and attachments to the future which, like death, casts the anticipations of interrupted practice into the absurdity of the unfinished. Urgency, which is rightly seen as one of the essential properties of practice, is the product of playing in the game and the presence in the future that it implies. One only has to stand outside the game, as the observer does, in order to sweep away the urgency, the appeals, the threats, the steps to be taken, which make up the real, really lived-in, world. Only for someone who withdraws from the game completely, who totally breaks the spell, the *illusio*, renouncing all the stakes, that is, all the gambles on the future, can the temporal succession be seen as a pure discontinuity and the world appear in the absurdity of a future-less, and therefore senseless, present, like the Surrealists' staircases opening on to the void. The 'feel' (*sens*) for the game is the sense of the imminent future of the game, the sense of the direction (*sens*) of the history of the game that gives the game its sense.

Thus one has no chance of giving a scientific account of practice – and in particular of the properties it derives from the fact that it unfolds in time – unless one is aware of the effects that scientific practice produces by mere totalization. One only has to think of the synoptic diagram, which owes its scientific efficacy precisely to the synchronizing effect it produces (after much labour and *time*) by giving an instantaneous view of facts which only exist in succession and so bringing to light relationships (including contradictions) that would otherwise go unnoticed. As is seen in the case of ritual practices, the cumulation and juxtaposition of relations of opposition and equivalence which are not and cannot be mastered by any one informant, never in any case at the same time, and which can only be produced by reference to different situations, that is, in different universes of discourse and with different functions, is what provides the analyst with the privilege of totalization, that is, the capacity to possess and put forward the synoptic view of the totality and the unity of the relationships that is the precondition of adequate decoding. Because he has every likelihood of ignoring the social and logical conditions of the change in nature that he imposes on practice and its products and therefore the nature of the logical transformations he imposes on the information that has been gathered, the analyst is liable to fall into all the errors that flow from the tendency to confuse the actor's point of view with the spectator's point of view, for example looking for answers to a spectator's questions that practice never asks because it has no need to ask them, instead of

wondering if the essence of practice is not precisely that it excludes such questions.

The paradigm of this fundamental epistemological error can be found in the 'perversity' of those writers who, according to T. E. Lawrence, attribute the viewpoint of 'a man sitting in an armchair' to 'a man entirely taken up by his task'. Maxime Chastaing, who quotes this text, continues: 'Ramuz converts the peasants' toil into apparent movements of the landscape. When the digger painfully stoops, it is not the earth that rises: either he is digging and he does not see the earth rising; or the earth seems to rise, and it is no longer the peasant who is looking but the cine camera of some vacationing artist that is mysteriously substituted for his eyes. Ramuz confuses work and leisure' (Chastaing 1951: 86). It is no accident that the novel oscillates between these two poles, with which social science is also familiar: on the one hand, the absolute viewpoint of an omnipresent and omniscient God who possesses the truth about his characters (denouncing their lies, explaining their silences) and who, like the objectivist anthropologist, interprets and explains; on the other, the viewpoint, presented as such, of a Berkeleyan spectator.

The privilege of totalization presupposes on the one hand the practical (and therefore implicit) neutralization of practical functions – that is, in the case in point, the bracketing of the practical use of temporal reference-points – a neutralization that the inquiry relationship itself produces, by setting up a situation of 'theoretical' questioning which presupposes the suspension of practical investments; and on the other hand, recourse to instruments of eternization – writing and all the other techniques for recording and analysing, theories, methods, diagrams, etc. – that have been accumulated in the course of history and take time to acquire and to implement. In the diagram of the calendar, the complete series of the temporal oppositions which are deployed successively by different agents in different situations, and which can never be practically mobilized together because the necessities of practice never require such a synoptic apprehension but rather discourage it through their urgent demands, are juxtaposed in the simultaneity of a single space. The calendar thus creates *ex nihilo* a whole host of relations (of simultaneity, succession or symmetry, for example) between reference-points at different levels, which, never being brought face to face in practice, are practically compatible even if they are logically contradictory.

In contrast to practice – 'an essentially linear series', like discourse, whose 'mode of construction obliges us to use a successive, linear series of signs to express relationships which the mind perceives or ought to perceive simultaneously and in a different order' – scientific schemas or diagrams, 'synoptic tables, trees, historical atlases, kinds of double-entry tables', makes it possible, as Cournot (1922: 364) points out, 'to use the surface area more or less successfully to represent systematic relations and links that would be difficult to make out in the sequence of discourse'. In other words, the synoptic diagram enables one to apprehend simultaneously and in a single glance, *uno intuitu et tota simul*, as Descartes put it, 'monothetically', as Husserl (1931: 335–6) put it, meanings that are

produced and used polythetically, that is, not only one after another, but one by one, step by step. Furthermore, the sine-wave diagram which makes it possible to show the relations of opposition or equivalence among the elements by distributing them (as in a calendar) according to the laws of succession (that is, (1) 'y follows x' excludes 'x follows y'; (2) if y follows x and z follows y, then z follows x; (3) either y follows x or x follows y), while presenting in a simple way the fundamental oppositions between up and down, right and left, makes it possible to verify the relations between the successive reference-points and divisions, giving rise to all kinds of relations (some of them violating the laws of succession) which are excluded from practice because the different divisions or subdivisions that the observer may combine are not systematically conceived and used as moments in a succession but enter, according to the context, into oppositions at different levels (from the broadest, between the culminating points of summer and winter, to the narrowest, between two points in a subdivision of one of these periods).

Like genealogy, which substitutes a space of univocal, homogeneous relationships, established once and for all, for a spatially and temporally discontinuous set of strands of kinship, that are valued and organized in accordance with the needs of the moment and brought spasmodically into existence, or like the map which substitutes the homogeneous, continuous space of geometry for the discontinuous, patchy space of practical pathways, the calendar substitutes a linear, homogeneous, continuous time for practical time, which is made up of islands of incommensurable duration, each with its own rhythm, a time that races or drags, depending on what one is doing, that is, on the functions assigned to it by the actions that are performed in it. By distributing the reference-points of ceremonies or tasks along a continuous line, the calendar turns them into points of division, artificially creating the question of the intervals and correspondences between points that are metrically and no longer topologically equivalent.

Depending on how precisely an event has to be situated, on the nature of the event, and on the social status of the agent concerned, practice will draw on different systems of oppositions. For example, the 'period' known as *eliali*, far from being defined, as in a perfectly ordinate series, in relation to the moment that precedes it and the moment that follows it, and only in relation to them, can be opposed to *esmaïm* as well as to *el h'usum* or *thimgharine*; it can also be opposed, as 'eliali of December', to 'eliali of January', or again, by a different logic, be opposed as 'the great nights' to the 'lesser nights of *furar*' and the 'lesser nights of *maghres*'. One sees the artificiality and even unreality of the calendar which assimilates and aligns units of different levels and very unequal importance. Since all the divisions and subdivisions that the observer may record and cumulate are produced and used in different situations, separated in time, the question of how each of them relates to the unit at a higher level or, *a fortiori*, to the divisions or subdivisions of the 'periods' to which it is opposed, never arises in practice. The relationship between the series of moments distributed according to the laws of succession that is constructed by the observer, unconsciously guided by the model of the calendar, and the temporal oppositions successively put into practice, is similar to the relationship between the continuous, homogeneous political space

of graduated scales of opinion and practical political positions. The latter are always taken up in response to a particular situation and to particular interlocutors or adversaries, and they activate oppositions at different levels depending on the political distance between the interlocutors (left : right :: left of the left : right of the left :: left of the left of the left : right of the left of the left :: etc.) in such a way that the same agent may find himself successively on his own right and on his own left in the 'absolute' space of geometry, contradicting the third law of succession.

The same analysis can be applied to the terminologies serving to designate social units. Ignorance of the uncertainties and ambiguities that these products of a practical logic owe to their functions and to the conditions in which they are used leads to the production of artefacts as impeccable as they are unreal. Nothing is more suspect than the ostentatious rigour of so many diagrams of social organization offered by anthropologists. Thus, the pure, perfect model of Berber society as a series of interlocking units, which ethnologists from Hanoteau to Jeanne Favret, and including Durkheim, have put forward, cannot be accepted unless one ignores, first, the arbitrariness of all the divisions (varying, in any case, from one place to another) that are made in the continuum of kinship relations (a continuity that is manifested for example by the imperceptible gradation of obligations in the case of bereavement) beyond the extended family (*akham*) and below the level of the clan (*adhrum* or *thakharubth*); then, the unceasing dynamics of units that are constantly made and unmade in history, in accordance with the logic of annexations and fusions (thus at Aït Hichem, the Aït Isaad combine several diminished clans – *thakharubth* – in a single clan) or scissions (in the same place, the Aït Mendil, originally united, have divided into two clans); and, finally, the fuzziness that is inseparable from native notions in their practical use (as opposed to the semi-academic artefacts that the situation of inquiry, here as elsewhere, invariably produces), because it is both the condition and the product of their functioning. Even more than with the temporal taxonomies of the agrarian calendar, the use of words or oppositions that serve to classify, that is, to produce groups, depends on the situation and, more precisely, on the function pursued through the production of classes, whether mobilization or division, annexation or exclusion.

Without entering into a detailed discussion of the schematic presentation that Jeanne Favret gives of the terminology collected by Hanoteau (Favret 1966, 1968), it can be pointed out that in the case of the village of Aït Hichem (see Bourdieu 1962c: 14–20) and in many other places, the hierarchy of the fundamental social units, those designated by the words *thakharubth* and *adhrum*, is the opposite of what Favret, following Hanoteau, puts forward. A few cases can indeed be found in which, as Hanoteau maintains, *thakharubth* encompasses *adhrum*, probably because terminologies collected at particular places and times designate the outcome of different histories, marked by the splitting up, the (no doubt frequent) disappearance and the annexation of lineages. It also often happens that the words are used indifferently to designate the same social division. This is the case in the Sidi Aïch region, in which the following units, starting with the most restricted, are distinguished: (a) *el h'ara*, the undivided family (called *akham*, the house, at



Aït Hichem, e.g. *akham n'Aït Ali*); (b) *akham*, the extended family, covering all the people bearing the name of the same ancestor (to the third or fourth generation) – *Ali ou X*, sometimes also designated by a term that is probably suggested by topography, since the path bends as one passes from one *akham* to another: *thaghamurth*, the elbow; (c) *adhrum*, *akharub* (or *thakharubth*) or *aharum*, bringing together the people whose common origin goes back beyond the fourth generation; (d) the *s'uff*, or more simply 'those above' and 'those below'; (e) the village, a purely local unit, here grouping the two leagues. The synonyms, to which must be added *thaârifth* (from *âarf*, to know one another), a group of acquaintances, equivalent to *akham* or *adhrum* (elsewhere, *thakharubth*), may not have been used haphazardly, since they emphasize either integration and internal cohesion (*akham*, *adhrum*) or opposition between groups (*thaghamurth*, *aharum*). *S'uff*, used to suggest an 'arbitrary' unit, a conventional alliance as opposed to the other terms which denote individuals bearing a common name (Aït . . . ), is often distinguished from *adhrum*, with which it coincides at Aït Hichem and in other places.

Practice has a logic which is not that of the logician. This has to be acknowledged in order to avoid asking of it more logic than it can give, thereby condemning oneself either to wring incoherences out of it or to thrust a forced coherence upon it. Analysis of the various but highly interdependent aspects of what might be called the theorization effect (forced synchronization of the successive, fictitious totalization, neutralization of functions, substitution of the system of products for the system of principles of production, etc.) brings out, in negative form, certain properties of the logic of practice which by definition escape theoretical apprehension. This practical logic – practical in both senses – is able to organize all thoughts, perceptions and actions by means of a few generative principles, which are closely interrelated and constitute a practically integrated whole, only because its whole economy, based on the principle of the economy of logic, presupposes a sacrifice of rigour for the sake of simplicity and generality and because it finds in 'polythesis' the conditions required for successful use of polysemy. In other words, symbolic systems owe their practical coherence – that is, on the one hand, their unity and their regularities, and on the other, their 'fuzziness' and their irregularities and even incoherences, which are both equally necessary, being inscribed in the logic of their genesis and functioning – to the fact that they are the product of practices that can fulfil their practical functions only in so far as they implement, in the practical state, principles that are not only coherent – that is, capable of generating practices that are both intrinsically coherent and compatible with the objective conditions – but also practical, in the sense of convenient, that is, easy to master and use, because they obey a 'poor' and economical logic.

Because of the successive apprehension of practices that are only performed in succession, the 'confusion of spheres', as the logicians call it, resulting from the highly economical but necessarily approximate application of the same schemes to different logical universes, is able to pass unnoticed. No one takes the trouble to systematically record and compare the successive products of the application of the generative schemes.

These discrete, self-sufficient units owe their immediate transparency not only to the schemes that are realized in them but also to the situation apprehended through these schemes in a practical relationship. The principle of the economy of logic, whereby no more logic is mobilized than is required by the needs of practice, means that the universe of discourse in relation to which a given class (and therefore the complementary class) is constituted can remain implicit, because it is implicitly defined in each case in and by the practical relationship to the situation. Since it is very unlikely that two contradictory applications of the same schemes will be brought face to face in what we must call a universe of practice (rather than a universe of discourse), the same thing may, in different universes of practice, have different things as its complementary term and may therefore receive different, even opposed, properties depending on the universe of practice.<sup>2</sup> Thus, as has been seen, the house as a whole is defined as female, damp, etc., when considered from outside, from the male point of view, that is, in opposition to the external world, but can be divided into a male-female part and a female-female part when it ceases to be seen by reference to a universe of practices co-extensive with *the* universe, and is treated instead as a universe (of practice as well as discourse) in its own right, which for the women it indeed is, especially in winter.<sup>3</sup>

The universes of meaning corresponding to different universes of practice are both self-enclosed – and therefore protected against logical control through systematization – and objectively adjusted to all the others in so far as they are loosely systematic products of a system of practically integrated generative principles that function in the most diverse fields of practice. In the approximate, ‘fuzzy’ logic which immediately accepts as equivalents the adjectives ‘flat’, ‘dull’ and ‘bland’, favourite terms in aesthetic or professorial judgement, or, in the Kabyle tradition, ‘full’, ‘closed’, ‘inside’, and ‘below’, the generative schemes are interchangeable in practice. This is why they can only generate systematic products, but with an approximate, fuzzy coherence that cannot withstand the test of logical criticism. *Sympatheia tôn holôn*, as the Stoics called it, the affinity among all the objects of a universe in which meaning is everywhere, and everywhere superabundant, has as its basis, or its price, the indeterminacy or overdetermination of each of the elements and each of the relationships among them: logic can be everywhere only because it is truly present nowhere.

Ritual practice performs an uncertain abstraction which brings the same symbol into different relationships by apprehending it through different aspects, or which brings different aspects of the same referent into the same relationship of opposition. In other words, it excludes the Socratic question of the respect in which the referent is apprehended (shape, colour, function, etc.), thereby obviating the need to define in each case the criterion governing the choice of the aspect selected and, *a fortiori*, the need to keep to that criterion at all times. Because the principle opposing the terms that have been related (for example, the sun and the moon) is not defined and usually comes down to a simple contrariety, analogy

(which, when it does not function purely in the practical state, is always expressed elliptically – ‘woman is the moon’) establishes a relation of homology between relations of opposition (man : woman :: sun : moon), which are themselves indeterminate and overdetermined (hot : cold :: male : female :: day : night :: etc.), applying generative schemes different from those that can be used to generate other homologies into which one or another of the terms in question might enter (man : woman :: east : west, or sun : moon :: dry : wet).

This uncertain abstraction is also a false abstraction which sets up relationships based on what Jean Nicod calls ‘overall resemblance’ (Nicod 1961: 43–4). This mode of apprehension never explicitly limits itself to any one aspect of the terms it links, but takes each one, each time, as a whole, exploiting to the full the fact that two ‘realities’ are never entirely alike in all respects but are always alike in some respect, at least indirectly (that is, through the mediation of some common term). This explains, first, why among the different aspects of the indeterminate yet overdetermined symbols it manipulates, ritual practice never clearly opposes aspects symbolizing something to aspects symbolizing nothing, which might therefore be disregarded (such as colour or size in the case of letters of the alphabet). For example, while one of the different aspects through which a ‘reality’ like gall can be connected with other (equally equivocal) ‘realities’ – viz. bitterness (it is equivalent to oleander, wormwood or tar, and opposed to honey), greenness (it is associated with lizards and the colour green) and hostility (inherent in the two previous qualities) – necessarily comes to the forefront, it does not cease to be attached, like the keynote to the other sounds in a chord, to the other aspects which persist as undertones, through which it can be opposed to other aspects of another referent in other relationships. Without wishing to push the musical metaphor too far, one might suggest that a number of ritual sequences could be seen as modulations. Occurring with particular frequency because the specific principle of ritual action, the concern to stack all the odds on one’s own side, favours the logic of development, with its variations against a background of redundancy, these modulations play on the harmonic properties of ritual symbols, whether duplicating one of the themes with a strict equivalent in all respects (gall evoking wormwood, which similarly combines bitterness with greenness), or modulating into remoter tonalities by playing on the associations of the secondary harmonics (lizard → toad) (for similar observations see Granet, 1929 *passim*, esp. p. 352).

Another modulation technique is association by assonance, which can lead to connections without mythico-ritual significance (*aman d laman*, water is trust) or, on the other hand, to symbolically overdetermined connections (*azka d azqa*, tomorrow is the grave). The double link, through sound and sense, creates a crossroads, a choice between two rival paths, either of which may be taken without contradiction at different moments, in different contexts. Ritual practice makes maximum possible use of the polysemy of the fundamental actions, mythic ‘roots’ that the linguistic roots partially reflect. Although imperfect, the correspondence

between linguistic roots and mythic roots is sufficiently strong to provide the analogical sense with one of its most powerful supports, through the verbal associations, sometimes sanctioned and exploited by sayings and maxims, which, in their most successful forms, reinforce the necessity of a mythical connection with the necessity of a linguistic connection.<sup>4</sup> Thus the scheme open–close finds partial expression in the root *FTH* which can equally well mean, figuratively as well as literally, *to open* (transitive) a door or a path (in ritual and extra-ordinary contexts), the heart ('opening one's heart'), a speech (for example, with a ritual formula), an assembly meeting, an action, a day, etc., *to be open*, applied to a 'door' in the sense of the beginning of any series, the heart (that is, the appetite), a bud, the sky, or a knot, *to open* (intransitive), applied to a bud, a face, a shoot, an egg, and therefore, more generally, to inaugurate, bless, make easy, place under good auspices ('May God open the doors'), – a cluster of senses covering virtually all the meanings attached to spring. But the mythical root is broader and vaguer than the linguistic root and lends itself to richer and more varied play: the scheme of opening–being opened makes it possible to set up associations among a whole set of verbs and nouns that go far beyond simple morphological affinity. Thus it can evoke the roots *FSU*, to unbind, untie, resolve, open, appear (used of young shoots, hence the name *thafsuth* given to spring); *FRKh*, to blossom, give birth (hence *asafrurakh*, blossoming, and *lafrakh*, the shoots that appear on trees in spring, and more generally, offspring, the outcome of any undertaking), to proliferate, multiply; *FRY*, to form, be formed (applied to figs), to begin to grow (applied to wheat or a baby), to multiply (a nestful of birds: *ifruri el âach*, the nest is full of fledglings), to shell or be shelled (peas and beans), and thus, to enter the period when fresh beans can be picked (*lah'lal usafruri*); and *FLQ*, to break, burst, split, deflower, to be split open like the egg or pomegranate broken at the time of marriage or ploughing.

One would only have to let oneself be carried along by the logic of associations in order to reconstruct the whole network of synonyms and antonyms, synonyms of synonyms and antonyms of antonyms. The same term could thus enter an infinity of relationships if the number of ways of relating to what is not itself were not limited to a few fundamental oppositions linked by relations of practical equivalence. At the degree of precision (that is, imprecision) at which they are defined, the different principles that practice applies successively or simultaneously in relating objects and selecting the relevant aspects are practically equivalent, so that this taxonomy can classify the same realities from several different viewpoints without ever classifying them in a totally different way.

But the language of overall resemblance and uncertain abstraction is still too intellectualist to be able to express a logic that is performed directly in bodily gymnastics, without passing through explicit apprehension of the 'aspects' chosen or rejected, the similar or dissimilar 'profiles'. By inducing an identity of reaction in a diversity of situations, impressing the same posture on the body in different contexts, the practical schemes can produce the equivalent of an act of generalization that cannot be accounted for without recourse to concepts – and this despite the fact that the enacted, unrepresented generality that arises from acting in a similar way in similar circumstances, but without 'thinking the similarity independently of the similar', as Piaget puts it, dispenses with all the operations required by the construction of a concept. Practical sense 'selects' certain objects or actions, and consequently certain of their aspects, in relation to 'the matter in

hand', an implicit and practical principle of pertinence; and, by fixing on those with which there is something to be done or those that determine what is to be done in the given situation, or by treating different objects or situations as equivalent, it distinguishes properties that are pertinent from those that are not. Just as one has difficulty in apprehending simultaneously, as dictionaries do, the different meanings of a word that one can easily mobilize in the succession of particular utterances produced in particular situations, so the concepts that the analyst is forced to use (for example, the idea of 'resurrection' or 'swelling') to give an account of the practical identifications that ritual acts perform, are quite alien to practice, which knows nothing of such groupings or partial enactments of the same scheme and is concerned not with relationships such as up and down or dry and wet, nor even with concepts, but with tangible things, considered absolutely even as regards the properties that seem most typically relational.

To be persuaded that the different meanings produced by the same scheme exist in the practical state only in their relationship with particular situations, one only has to assemble, as in a dictionary, some applications of the opposition between 'in front' and 'behind'. Behind is where things one wants to get rid of are sent. For example, in one of the rites associated with the loom, these words are used: 'May the angels be before me and the Devil behind me'; in another rite, to protect against the evil eye, a child is rubbed behind the ear so that he will send evil 'behind his ear'. (To cast behind is also, at a more superficial level, to neglect, despise - 'to put behind one's ear' - or, more simply, not to face, not to confront). Behind is where ill fortune comes from: a woman on her way to market to sell a product of her labour, a blanket, yarn, etc., or of her husbandry, hens, eggs, etc., must not look behind her or the sale will go badly; according to a legend recorded by Galand-Pernet, the whirlwind attacks from behind the man who prays facing the *qibla*. 'Behind' is naturally associated with 'inside', with the female, (the eastern, front door is male, the back door is female), with all that is private, secret and hidden; but it is thereby also associated with that which follows, trailing behind on the earth, the source of fertility, *abruâ*, the train of a garment, a good-luck charm, happiness: the bride entering her new house strews fruit, eggs and wheat behind her, symbolizing prosperity. These meanings are defined by opposition to all those that are associated with 'in front', going forward, confronting (*qabel*), going towards the future, eastward, towards the light.

The logicism inherent in the objectivist viewpoint inclines one to ignore the fact that scientific construction cannot grasp the principles of practical logic without forcibly changing their nature. Objectification converts a practical succession into a represented succession, an action oriented in relation to a space objectively constituted as a structure of demands (things 'to be done') into a reversible operation performed in a continuous, homogeneous space. This inevitable transformation is inscribed in the fact that agents can adequately master the *modus operandi* that enables them to generate correctly formed ritual practices, only by making it work practically, in a real situation, in relation to practical functions. An agent who possesses a practical mastery, an art, whatever it may be, is capable of applying in his action the disposition which appears to him only in

action, in the relationship with a situation (he can repeat the feint which strikes him as the only thing to do, as often as the situation requires). But he is no better placed to perceive what really governs his practice and to bring it to the order of discourse, than the observer, who has the advantage over him of being able to see the action from outside, as an object, and especially of being able to totalize the successive realizations of the *habitus* (without necessarily having the practical mastery that underlies these realizations or the adequate theory of this mastery). And there is every reason to think that as soon as he reflects on his practice, adopting a quasi-theoretical posture, the agent loses any chance of expressing the truth of his practice, and especially the truth of the practical relation to the practice. Academic interrogation inclines him to take up a point of view on his own practice that is no longer that of action, without being that of science, encouraging him to shape his explanations in terms of a theory of practice that meshes with the juridical, ethical or grammatical legalism to which the observer is inclined by his own situation. Simply because he is questioned, and questions himself, about the reasons and the *raison d'être* of his practice, he cannot communicate the essential point, which is that the very nature of practice is that it excludes this question. His remarks convey this primary truth of primary experience only by omission, through the silences and ellipses of self-evidence. And even this occurs only in the most favourable cases, when by skilful questioning the questioner persuades the informant to give free rein to the language of familiarity. This language, which recognizes only particular cases and details of practical interest or anecdotal curiosity, which always uses the proper names of people and places, which minimizes the vague generalities and *ad hoc* explanations appropriate for strangers, leaves unsaid all that goes without saying. It is akin to the discourse of Hegel's 'original historians' who, living 'in the spirit of the event', take for granted the presuppositions of those whose story they tell. Through its very obscurity and the absence of the spurious clarity of semi-enlightened remarks for the benefit of outsiders, it gives some chance of discovering the truth of practice as a blindness to its own truth.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to logic, a mode of thought that works by making explicit the work of thought, practice excludes all formal concerns. Reflexive attention to action itself, when it occurs (almost invariably only when the automatisms have broken down), remains subordinate to the pursuit of the result and to the search (not necessarily perceived in this way) for maximum effectiveness of the effort expended. So it has nothing in common with the aim of explaining how the result has been achieved, still less of seeking to understand (for understanding's sake) the logic of practice, which flouts logical logic. Scientific analysis thus encounters and has to surmount a practical antinomy when it breaks with every form of operationalism that tacitly accepts but cannot objectify the most fundamental presuppositions of practical logic, and when it seeks to understand, in and for itself, and not to improve it or reform it, the logic of practice which understands only in order to act.

The idea of practical logic, a 'logic in itself', without conscious reflexion or logical control, is a contradiction in terms, which defies logical logic. This paradoxical logic is that of all practice, or rather of all practical sense. Caught up in 'the matter in hand', totally present in the present and in the practical functions that it finds there in the form of objective potentialities, practice excludes attention to itself (that is, to the past). It is unaware of the principles that govern it and the possibilities they contain; it can only discover them by enacting them, unfolding them in time.<sup>6</sup> Rites, even more than most practices, might almost be designed to demonstrate the fallacy of seeking to contain in concepts a logic that is made to do without concepts; of treating practical manipulations and bodily movements as logical operations; of speaking of analogies and homologies (as one has to in order to understand and explain) when it is simply a matter of practical transfers of incorporated, quasi-postural schemes.<sup>7</sup> A rite, a performative practice that strives to bring about what it acts or says, is often simply a practical *mimesis* of the natural process that is to be facilitated.<sup>8</sup> As opposed to metaphor and analogy, mimetic representation links phenomena as different as the swelling of grain in the cooking-pot, the swelling of a pregnant woman's belly and the sprouting of wheat in the ground, in a relationship that implies no spelling-out of the properties of the terms thus related or the principles applied in relating them. The most characteristic operations of its 'logic' – inverting, transferring, uniting, separating, etc. – take the form of bodily movements, turning to right or left, putting upside down, going in or coming out, tying or cutting, etc.

This logic which, like all practical logics, can only be grasped in action, in the temporal movement that disguises it by detemporalizing it, sets the analyst a difficult problem, which can only be solved by recourse to a theory of theoretical logic and practical logic. The professional dealers in *logos* want practice to express something that can be expressed in discourse, preferably logical. They find it hard to conceive that one can rescue a practice from absurdity and identify its logic other than by making it say what goes without saying and projecting on to it an explicit thought that it excludes by definition. One can imagine the philosophical or poetic effects that a mind trained by a whole educational tradition to cultivate Swedenborgian 'correspondences' would not fail to draw from the fact that ritual practice treats adolescence and springtime, with their advances towards maturity followed by sudden regressions, as equivalents, or that it counterposes male and female roles in production and reproduction as the discontinuous and the continuous.<sup>9</sup>

Probably the only way to give an account of the practical coherence of practices and works is to construct generative models which reproduce in their own terms the logic from which that coherence is generated; and to devise diagrams which, through their synoptic power of synchronization and totalization, quietly and directly manifest the objective systematicity of practice and which, when they make adequate use of the properties of space (up/down, right/left), may even have the merit of speaking directly



the body schema (as all those who have to transmit motor skills are well aware). At the same time, one has to be aware that these theoretical replications transform the logic of practice simply by making it explicit. Just as, in the time of Lévy-Bruhl, there would have been less amazement at the oddities of the 'primitive mentality' if it had been possible to conceive that the logic of magic and 'participation' might have some connection with the most ordinary experience of emotion or passion (anger, jealousy, hatred, etc.), so nowadays there would be less astonishment at the 'logical' feats of the Australian aborigines if the 'savage mind' were not unconsciously credited, in a kind of inverted ethnocentrism, with the relationship to the world that intellectualism attributes to every 'consciousness', and if anthropologists had not kept silent about the transformations leading from operations mastered in the practical state to the formal operations isomorphic with them and failed, by the same token, to inquire into the social conditions of that transformation.

The science of myth is entitled to describe the syntax of myth in the language of group theory, but only so long as it is not forgotten that, when it ceases to be seen as a convenient translation, this language destroys the truth that it makes accessible. One can say that gymnastics is geometry so long as this is not taken to mean that the gymnast is a geometer. There would be less temptation to treat agents implicitly or explicitly as logicians if one went back from the mythic logos to the ritual praxis which enacts, in the form of real actions, that is, body movements, the operations that theoretical analysis discovers in mythic discourse, an *opus operatum* that masks the constituting moment of 'mythopœic' practice under its reified significations. So long as mythico-ritual space is seen as an *opus operatum*, as an order of coexistent things, it is never more than a theoretical space, in which the only landmarks are the reference-points provided by relations of opposition (up/down, east/west, etc.) and where only theoretical operations can be effected, that is, logical displacements and transformations, which are as remote from really performed movements and actions, like falling or rising, as a celestial hound from a real, barking dog. Having established, for example, that the space inside the Kabyle house receives a symmetrically opposite meaning when it is re-placed in the total space outside, one is justified in saying that each of these two spaces, inside and outside, can be derived from the other by means of a semi-rotation, but only on condition that the language of mathematics is brought back to its basis in practice, so that terms like displacement and rotation are given their practical senses as movements of the body, such as walking forwards or backwards, or turning on one's heels. If this 'geometry in the tangible world', as Jean Nicod puts it, a practical geometry, or rather, geometric practice, makes so much use of inversion, it is surely because, like a mirror bringing to light the paradoxes of bilateral symmetry, the human body functions as a practical operator which reaches to the left to meet the right hand it has to shake, puts its left arm in the sleeve which was on the right until the garment was picked up, or reverses right and left, east and west, simply by turning about to 'face' someone' or 'turn its back' on him, or



turns 'upside down' things that were 'the right way up' – all movements which the mythic view of the world charges with social significance and which rites exploit intensively. 'I find myself defining threshold / As the geometrical place / Of the comings and goings / In my Father's House' (quoted by Bachelard 1969: 223).

The poet immediately identifies the principle of the relationship between the internal space of the house and external space in the opposing movements (opposed in both direction and meaning) of going in and coming out. As a belated small-scale producer of private mythologies, it is easier for him to cut through dead metaphors and go straight to the principle of mythopœic practice, that is, to the movements and actions which, as in a sentence of Albert the Great's, picked up by René Char, can reveal the duality underlying the seeming unity of the object: 'In Germany, there once lived twins, one of whom opened doors by touching them with his right arm, and the other who closed them by touching them with his left arm' (quoted by Bachelard 1969: 224).

Thus one has to move from *ergon* to *energeia* (in accordance with the opposition established by Wilhelm von Humboldt), from objects or actions to the principle of their production, or, more precisely, from the *fait accompli* and dead letter of already effected analogy or metaphor ( $a : b :: c : d$ ) that objectivist hermeneutics considers, to analogical practice understood as a transfer of schemes that the *habitus* performs on the basis of acquired equivalences, facilitating the substitutability of one reaction for another and enabling the agent to master all problems of a similar form that may arise in new situations, by a kind of practical generalization. To grasp the mythopœic act as the constituting moment, through myth understood as the constituted reality, does not mean, as idealists suppose, looking in consciousness for the universal categories of what Cassirer calls a 'mythopœic subjectivity' or, in Lévi-Strauss's terms, 'the fundamental structures of the human mind', which are supposed to govern all the empirical configurations realized, regardless of social conditions. Rather, it means reconstructing the socially constituted system of inseparably cognitive and evaluative structures that organizes perception of the world and action in the world in accordance with the objective structures of a given state of the social world. If ritual practices and representations are practically coherent, this is because they arise from the combinatorial functioning of a small number of generative schemes that are linked by relations of practical substitutability, that is, capable of producing results that are equivalent in terms of the 'logical' requirements of practice. This systematicity remains loose and approximate because the schemes can receive the quasi-universal application they are given only in so far as they function in the practical state, below the level of explicit statement and therefore outside the control of logic, and in relation to practical purposes which require of them and give them a necessity which is not that of logic.

The discussions that have developed about systems of classification, both among ethnologists (ethnoscience) and sociologists (ethnomethodology), have one thing in common: they forget that these cognitive instruments

fulfil, as such, functions that are not purely cognitive. Produced by the practice of the successive generations, in a particular type of conditions of existence, these schemes of perception, appreciation and action, which are acquired through practice and implemented in the practical state without attaining explicit representation, function as practical operators through which the objective structures of which they are the product tend to be reproduced in practices. Practical taxonomies, cognitive and communicative instruments which are the precondition of the constitution of meaning and consensus on meaning, exert their structuring efficacy only in so far as they are themselves structured. This does not mean that they are amenable to a purely internal ('structural', 'componential', etc.) analysis which artificially isolates them from their conditions of production and use and so cannot understand their social functions.<sup>10</sup> The coherence that is observed in all the products of the application of the same *habitus* has no other basis than the coherence that the generative principles constituting that *habitus* derive from the social structures (the structure of relations between the groups, the sexes or the generations, or between the social classes) of which they are the product and which they tend to reproduce in a transformed, misrecognizable form, by inserting them into the structure of a system of symbolic relations.<sup>11</sup>

To react, as Lévi-Strauss (1968: 207) does, against external readings that cast myth into 'primitive stupidity' (*Urdummheit*) by directly relating the structure of symbolic systems to social structures, must not lead one to forget that magical or religious actions are fundamentally 'this-worldly' (*diesseitig*), as Weber puts it; being entirely dominated by the concern to ensure the success of production and reproduction, in a word, survival, they are oriented towards the most dramatically practical, vital and urgent ends. Their extraordinary ambiguity stems from the fact that, in the pursuit of the tragically real and totally unrealistic ends that emerge in situations of distress (especially when it is collective), such as the desire to triumph over death or misfortune, they apply a practical logic, produced without any conscious intention by a structured, structuring body and language which function as automatic generators of symbolic acts. It is as if ritual practices were wishes or supplications of collective distress, expressed in a language that is (by definition) collective (in which respect they are very closely related to music) – forlorn attempts to act on the natural world as one acts on the social world, to apply strategies to the natural world that work on other men, in certain conditions, that is, strategies of authority and reciprocity, to signify intentions, wishes, desires or orders to it, through performative words or deeds which make sense without any signifying intention.<sup>12</sup> The least inappropriate way of 'understanding' this practice might be to compare it to the private rites that situations of extreme distress, like the death of a loved one or the anxious waiting for a deeply desired event, lead one to invent, which, though they have no other purpose than to say or do something rather than nothing, inevitably borrow the logic of a language and a body which, even (and especially) when they change nothing, make common sense, generating words or

actions that are both senseless and sense-full.

So one sees both the ordinary errors and their basis in an object which, like rite or myth, lends itself, by its very ambiguity, to the most contradictory readings. On the one hand, there is the lofty distance which objectivist hermeneutics seeks to keep between itself and elementary forms of thought, treated as pretexts for exercises in interpretative virtuosity, and of which the disenchantment and even aesthetic horror of Leiris's *L'Afrique fantôme* in fact represents the limiting case. On the other hand, there is the exalted participation and de-realizing enchantment of the great initiates of the gnostic tradition, who make common sense function as *lived meaning* and make themselves the inspired subjects of an objective meaning.<sup>13</sup> Objectivist reduction can bring to light what it calls the objective function which myths or rites fulfil (for Durkheim, functions of moral integration; for Lévi-Strauss, functions of logical integration); but, by separating the objective meaning that it brings to light from the agents who make it work, and therefore from the objective conditions and practical purposes by reference to which their practice is defined, it makes it impossible to understand how these functions are fulfilled.<sup>14</sup> 'Participant' anthropology, for its part – when not merely inspired by nostalgia for agrarian paradises, the principle of all conservative ideologies – regards the anthropological invariants and the universality of the most basic experiences as sufficient justification for seeking eternal answers to the eternal questions of cosmologies and cosmogonies in the practical answers which the peasants of Kabylia or elsewhere have given to the practical, historically situated problems that were forced on them in a given state of their instruments for material and symbolic appropriation of the world.<sup>15</sup> By cutting practices off from their real conditions of existence, in order to credit them with alien intentions, out of a false generosity conducive to stylistic effects, the exaltation of lost wisdom dispossesses them of everything that constitutes their reason and their *raison d'être*, and locks them in the eternal essence of a 'mentality'.<sup>16</sup> The Kabyle woman setting up her loom is not performing an act of cosmogony; she is simply setting up her loom to weave cloth intended to serve a technical function. It so happens that, given the symbolic equipment available to her for practically thinking her own practice – in particular her language, which constantly refers her back to the logic of ploughing – she can only think what she is doing in the enchanted, that is to say, mystified, form that spiritualism, thirsty for eternal mysteries, finds so enchanting.

Rites take place because, and only because, they find their *raison d'être* in the conditions of existence and the dispositions of agents who cannot afford the luxury of logical speculation, mystical effusions or metaphysical *Angst*. It is not sufficient to deride the most naive forms of functionalism to be rid of the questions of the practical functions of practices. It is clear that Kabyle marriage can in no way be understood on the basis of a universal definition of the functions of marriage as an operation intended to ensure the biological reproduction of the group in accordance with forms approved by the group. But, appearances notwithstanding, it would

scarcely be better understood on the basis of a structural analysis which ignored the specific functions of the ritual practices and which failed to consider the economic and social conditions of production of the dispositions generating both these practices and the collective definition of the practical functions that they serve. The Kabyle peasant does not react to 'objective conditions' but to these conditions as apprehended through the socially constituted schemes that organize his perception. To understand ritual practice, to give it back both its reason and its *raison d'être*, without converting it into a logical construction or a spiritual exercise, means more than simply reconstituting its internal logic. It also means restoring its practical necessity by relating it to the real conditions of its genesis, that is, the conditions in which both the functions it fulfils and the means it uses to achieve them are defined.<sup>17</sup> It means describing the most brutally material bases of the investment in magic, such as the weakness of the productive and reproductive forces, which causes a life dominated by anxiety about matters of life and death to be lived as an uncertain struggle against uncertainty. It means trying to name, even if one cannot really hope to make it felt, this collective experience of powerlessness which is at the basis of a whole view of the world and the future (it is expressed as much in the relation to work, conceived as an unconditional tribute, as in ritual practice) and which is the practical mediation through which the relationship is established between the economic bases and ritual actions or representations. The relationship between economic conditions and symbolic practices is indeed practically realized, not in some 'articulation' between systems, but through the function that is assigned to indissolubly ritual and technical practice in the complex relationship between a mode of production and a relatively autonomous mode of perception, and through the operative schemes employed to fulfil that function.<sup>18</sup> To give an idea of the complexity of this network of circuits of circular causality, which mean, for example, that technical or ritual practices are determined by the material conditions apprehended by agents endowed with schemes of perception that are themselves determined, negatively at least, by these conditions (translated into a particular form of the relations of production), it is sufficient to point out that one of the functions of rites – especially those accompanying marriage, ploughing or harvesting – is to overcome in practice the specifically ritual contradiction which the ritual taxonomy sets up by dividing the world into contrary principles and by causing the acts most indispensable to the survival of the group to appear as acts of sacrilegious violence.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- ARSS = *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*  
BEI = *Bulletin de l'enseignement des indigènes*  
FDB = Fichier de documentation berbère (published at Fort-National)  
RA = *Revue africaine*

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