

Advanced Methods of Interpretation

Lecture VI

Artifacts and Practices

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Advanced Methods of Interpretation
in Cultural Sociology (soc 575)
Spring 2017





Summary of Lecture IV and V: Structural Hermeneutics

Structural Hermen.	Strong Program	Mannheim	Documentary Method	Objective Hermeneutics
Surface	Discourse	Objective meaning	Immanent or literal meaning	Objective or literal meaning
Subject	“Performance” as strategy and effect	Expressive meaning		Subjective or manifest meaning
Depth	Symbolic codes	Documentary meaning	Documentary or implicit meaning	–
	“Myth”		–	Latent objective meaning



Webb Keane: Materiality of Signs

- Linguistic bias in sociology → symbol as arbitrary sign vs. icon and index as motivated signs
- Icon: similarity as a matter of interpretation and as a function of materiality
- Index: indicates a material or causal connection
- Semiotic ideologies: cultural patterns that shape the way we perceive and interpret signs
- “Protestant Ethic” and material culture



Alfred Gell: Objects as Indices

- Anthropological (and anti-semiotic) theory of art
- Art object as an index connected to artist (producer), prototype and recipient
- Abduction: inferring from the art work to the other elements of the “art nexus”
- Intentional causality and distributed agency (active/passive binary)
- No room for cultural structures?

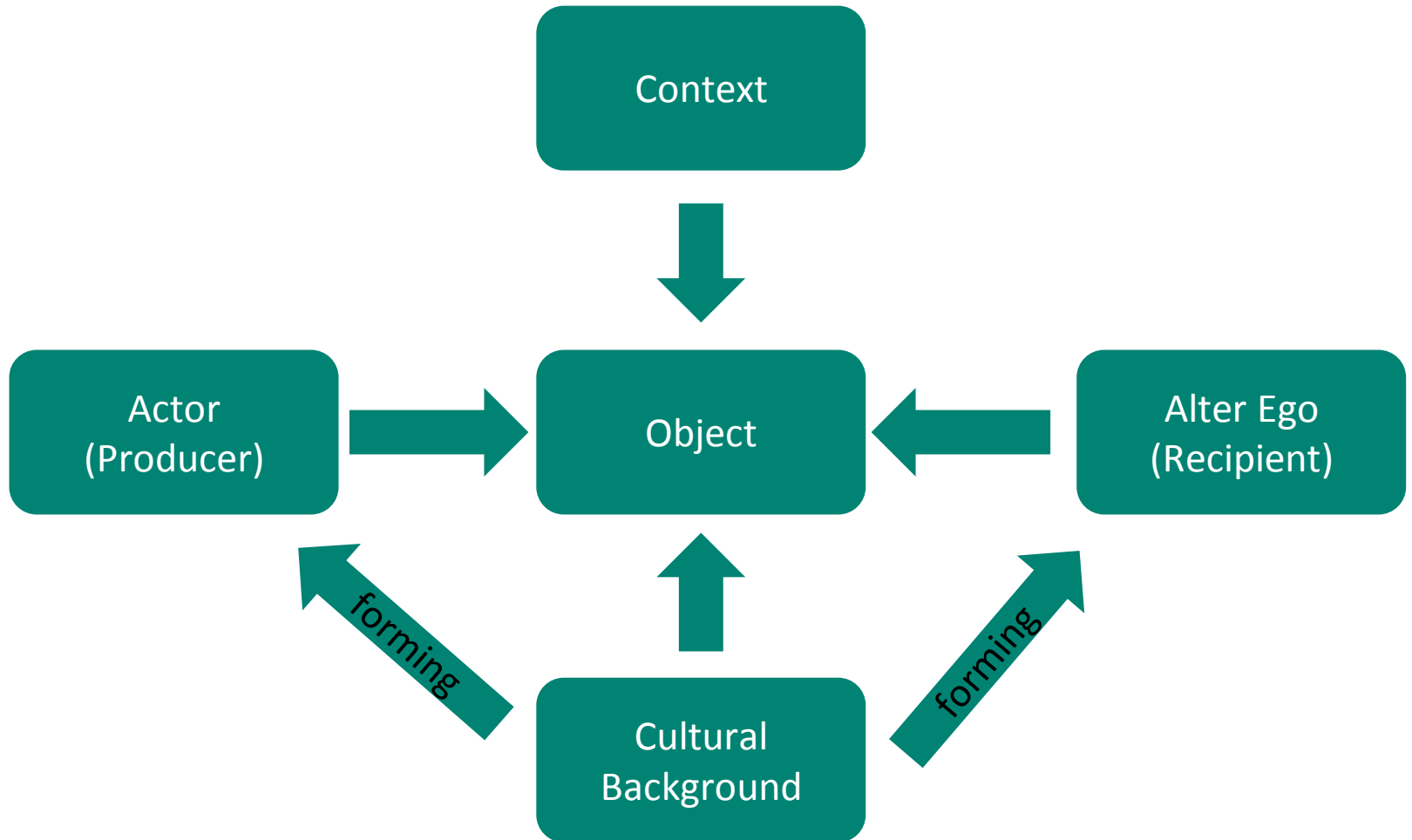


		AGENT			
		Artist	Index	Prototype	Recipient
P A T I E N T	Artist	Artist as source of creative act Artist as witness to act of creation	Material inherently dictates to artist the form it assumes	Prototype controls artist's action, appearance of prototype imitated by artist. Realistic art.	Recipient cause of artist's action (as patron)
	Index	Material stuff shaped by artist's agency and intention	Index as cause of itself: 'self-made' Index as a 'made thing'	Prototype dictates the form taken by index	Recipient the cause of the origination and form taken by the index
	Prototype	Appearance of prototype dictated by artist. Imaginative art	Image or actions of prototype controlled by means of index, a locus of power over prototype	Prototype as cause of index Prototype affected by index	Recipient has power over the prototype. Volt sorcery.
	Recipient	Recipient's response dictated by artist's skill, wit, magical powers, etc. Recipient captivated.	Index source of power over recipient. Recipient as 'spectator' submits to index.	Prototype has power over the recipient. Image of prototype used to control actions of recipient. Idolatry.	Recipient as patron Recipient as spectator

The Art Nexus

- Causalities that shape art works (and objects)
- Realistic vs. imaginative art
- Author vs. contract work
- Styles and codes?

Gell (1998: 29)





Mannheim: Interpretation of Artifacts

In contrast to natural objects, cultural artifacts have several layers of meaning:

- Objective meaning
 - refers to material qualities and social types
- Subjective meaning
 - refers to mental processes
- Documentary meaning
 - refers to cultural dispositions

So, as a supplement to Lévi-Strauss, one is tempted to propose that shit can also serve as a *matière-à-penser*: the three basic types of toilet form an excremental correlative-counterpoint to the Lévi-Straussian triangle of cooking (the raw, the cooked and the rotten). In a traditional German toilet, the hole into which shit disappears after we flush is right at the front, so that shit is first laid out for us to sniff and inspect for traces of illness. In the typical French toilet, on the contrary, the hole is at the back, i.e. shit is supposed to disappear as quickly as possible. Finally, the American (Anglo-Saxon) toilet presents a synthesis, a mediation between these opposites: the toilet basin is full of water, so that the shit floats in it, visible, but not to be inspected.

Žižek 2004



It is clear that none of these versions can be accounted for in purely utilitarian terms: each involves a certain ideological perception of how the subject should relate to excrement.

Hegel was among the first to see in the geographical triad of Germany, France and England an expression of three different existential attitudes: reflective thoroughness (German), revolutionary hastiness (French), utilitarian pragmatism (English).

Žižek 2004



Žižek on Toilets and Weltanschauung

Žižek's puzzle: How to account for the difference of toilets in Britain, France and Germany?

- The design of toilets is arbitrary and thus has to reflect (or document) ideological or cultural structures

Problems of Žižek's interpretation and explanation:

- The interpretation is too "big" and too general
- It is unclear how *Weltanschauung* shapes toilet design
- Middle-range interpretations seem to be more plausible: e.g., the German discourse on hygiene



Artifacts and Effects

In addition to and partially independent of their social meanings artifacts produce certain effects:

- Sensual experience and emotional charge → Durkheim's theory of the "totem"
- Functions: intended uses
- Affordances: potentiality of uses (practice, play)
- Theory of iconicity: cultural meanings and material qualities are intertwined (Alexander & Bartmanski)



How Toilets Shape Practices

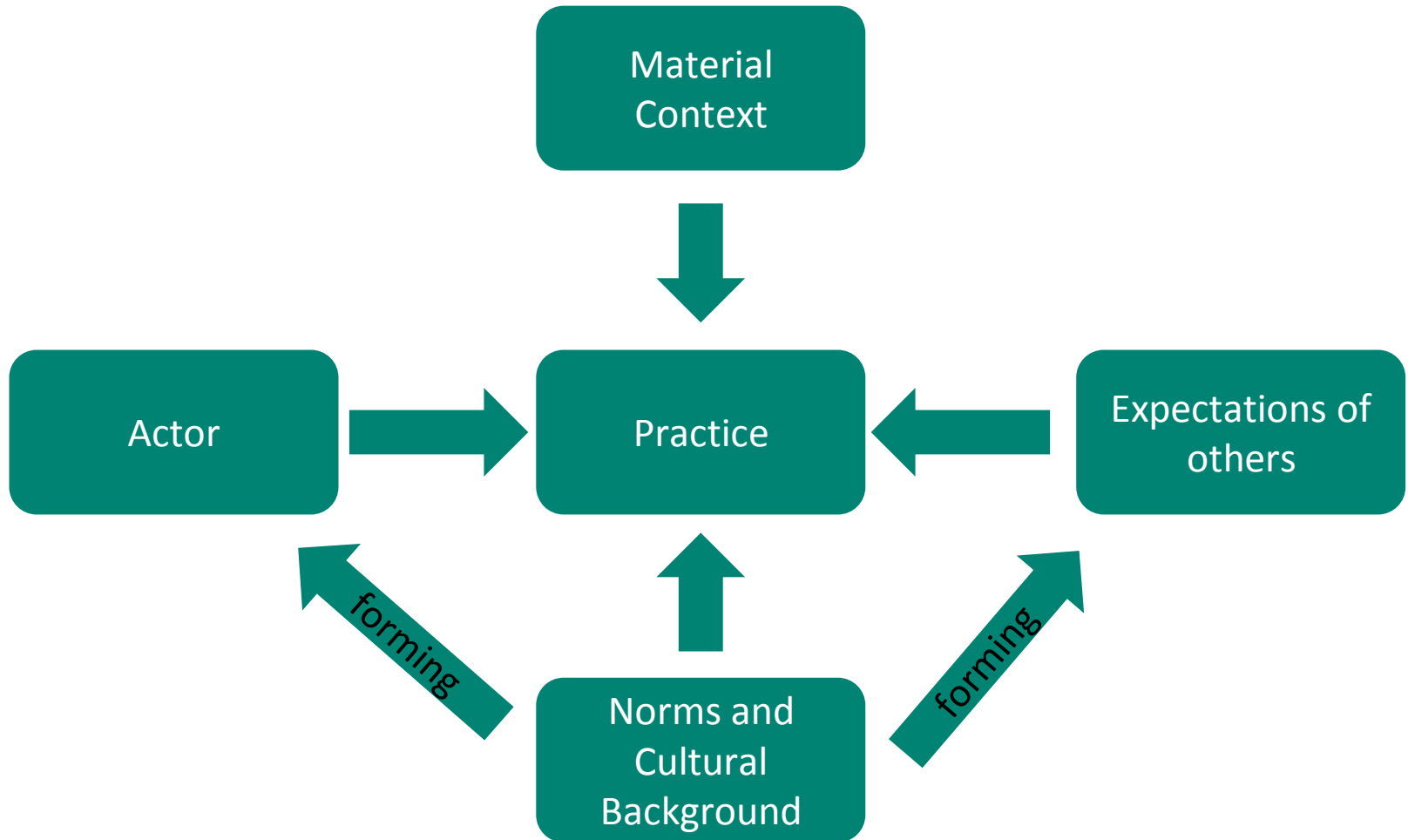
- As Peach noted, the design and the material structure of the German toilet made certain practices and social norms necessary





How Toilets Shape Practices

- As Peach noted, the design and the material structure of the German toilet made certain practices and social norms necessary
- Because of the plateau, men should always sit on the toilet, even when urinating
- Hysteresis effect (Bourdieu): Even though in Germany classical German toilets become less and less popular, the social norm (men should sit on the toilet) remains





Japanese Toilets I

- Japanese style toilets vs. Western style toilets



HOW TO USE JAPANESE STYLE TOILET

일본식 화장실의 사용법
日本式トイレの用法

1

FRONT
전
在前面

BACK
후
背后

2

FLUSH
물을 흘린다
冲水

- Please make sure you flush any used toilet paper.
- Please do not flush items other than the toilet paper provided, as they may cause the toilet to become blocked.
- 사용하신 화장지는 꼭 변기 앞에 버려 주시기 바랍니다.
- 준비해 놓은 화장지 이외의 것만 버릴 수 있으므로 절대 변기 안에 버리지 마십시오.
- 使用したの紙は、请您务必用水冲走。
- 如果您使用了备用手纸以外的纸张，则有可能造成堵塞，请千万不要用水冲走。



Japanese Toilets I

- Japanese style toilets vs. Western style toilets
- In Japan, the room of the toilet is considered to be unclean, so a different pair of shoes has to be used
- The Western style toilet documents the eagerness of Japanese to adapt and perfect foreign technology



Tap to wash your hands

Buttons for sounds, flushing, shower etc.

Heated seat



止
STOP

おしり
SPRAY

ビデ
BIDET

音姫
FLUSHING SOUND



水勢

WATER PRESSURE

音量

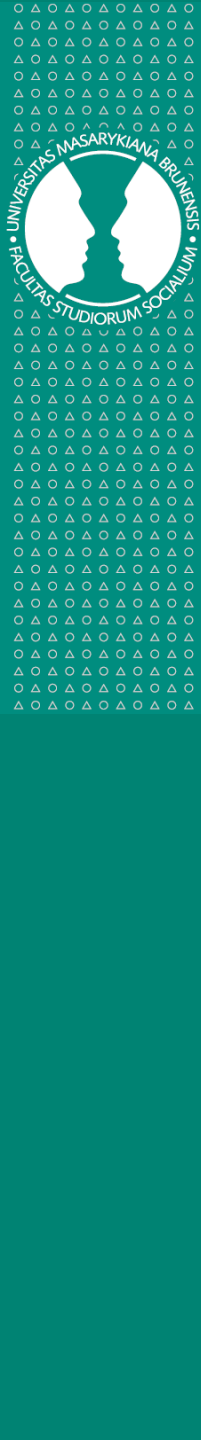
VOLUME



パワ-脱臭
POWERFUL DEODORIZER



- 音姫
FLUSHING SOUND
- ノズルクリーン
NOZZLE CLEAN
- 温水
WARM WATER
- 便座
WARM SEAT
- 節電中
ENERGY SAVER



Japanese Toilets II

- Not only the space of the toilet, but also bodily noises associated with its use are considered to be unclean and shameful in Japan (especially for women)
- *Otohime*, the “noise princess”, is a device that simulates the sound of flushing to cover this noise
- According to a poll, 92% of all Japanese women have used this device, 87% of those who used it claim they would have flushed repeatedly, if it hadn't been there





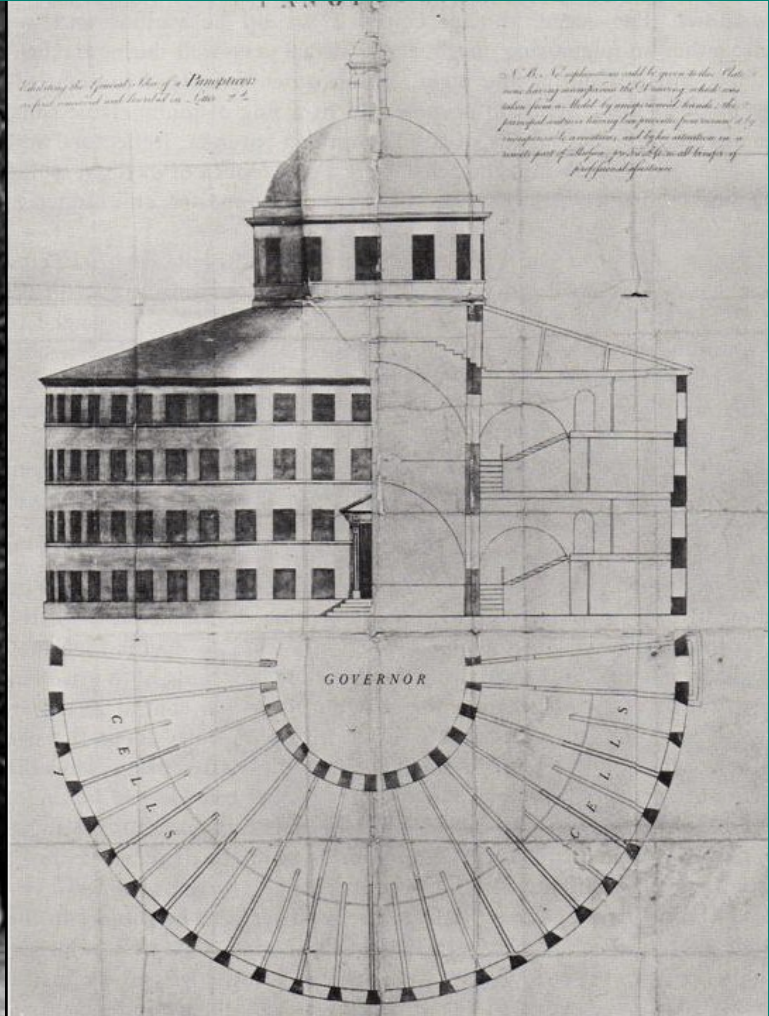
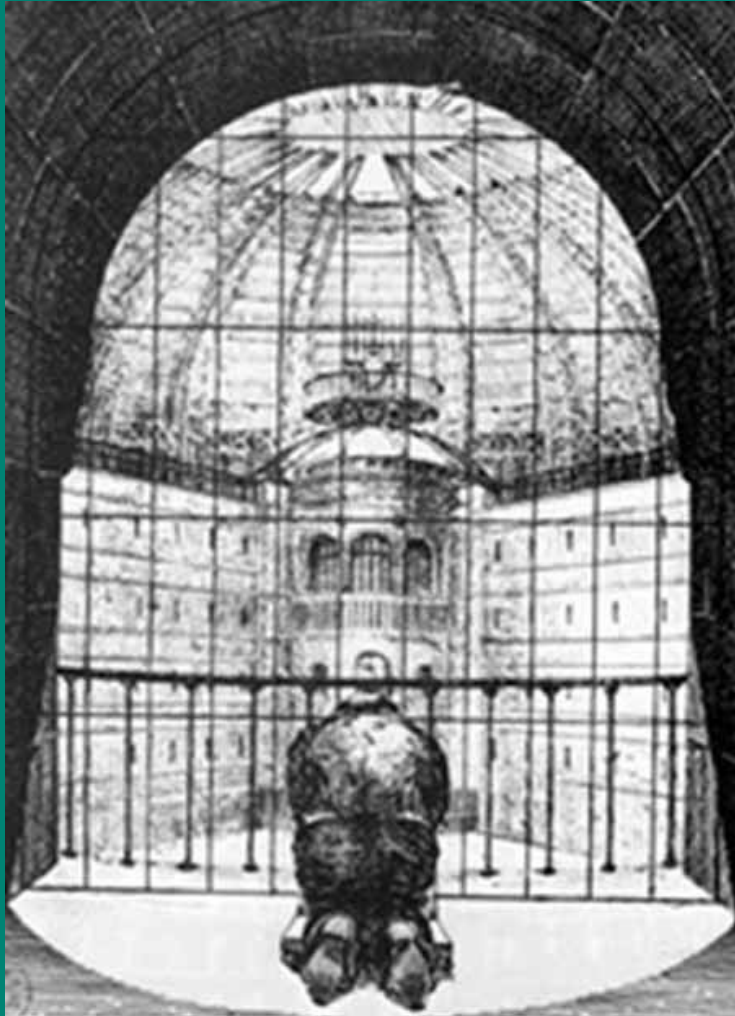
Case Study: Berlin Key

- The material qualities of the “Berlin key” force it’s user to lock the door behind him at night and prevent him locking the door during the day
- The “Berlin key” replaces certain social norms (to keep the door open during day and closed at night)
- Artifacts do not express, but shape social relations
- Nevertheless: cultural conditions of the “Berlin key”
- Nowadays, the “Berlin key” is rarely used, but became a popular Berlin souvenir (thanks to Latour?)



Foucault: Disciple and Punish

- Beyond linguistic utterances: Extension of discourse analysis to bodies, artifacts and practices
- Corporeal punishment as a pre-modern ritual of sovereignty
- Modern punishment as disciplinary action → drill of the body and habitualization of behavior (practices)
- Time regulation and management (schedules, clock)
- Material-spatial arrangements





Foucault's Panopticon

- Architecture as idea, metaphor and material structure
- Bentham's invented the Panopticon as prison structure
- Panopticon as artifact and material structure:
asymmetry of looking → possibility of being looked at
→ internalization
- Social power: maximum control with minimal effort
- Bentham's Panopticon was never built
- Foucault's Panopticon is a symbol of the modern disciplinary society; it exemplifies its structure



Practice Theory

Practice theory focusses on the continuous, a-theoretical and material character of human agency:

- Neo-Wittgensteinian accounts: “practice as nexus of sayings and doings” (Schatzki, Reckwitz)
- Giddens theory of structuration: agency and structure
- Bourdieu’s theory of practices: habitus as embodied and cultural principle of action



Bourdieu: Objectivism vs. Subjectivism

Objectivism:

- Structuralism
- Criticism: Logic of theory instead of logic of practice
- Reflexivity: Objectify objectification

Subjectivism:

- Existentialism (Sartre), phenomenology
- Ignores the objective conditions of subjective mental acts and experiences



Bourdieu: The Logic of Practice

- Logic of practice vs. theoretical logic of science
- Underlying practice is an implicit, a-theoretical “know how” (instead of “know that”)
- Habitus as the embodied cultural principle of action
- The “habitus” of an actor is acquired by socialization and adapted to its objective circumstances
- Logic of practice as “fuzzy”, inconsistent logic
- The fuzziness of practice allows for utilitarian strategies



The Logic of Practice among Kabyles

- The Logic of practice as “system of oppositions”
- Distinction between “man” and “woman” as master binary associated with “high” and “low”
- The binary expresses itself in bodily posture and behavior, but also in daily practices
- Harvest of olives: Man shakes olives from the tree, the woman has to collect them
- The master binary men/women structures all spheres of daily life



Epistemological Critique of Bourdieu

- “Habitus” and “practice” are not treated as theoretical constructs, but as facts
- Distinction between Bourdieu’s “logic” of practice and the logic of “practice”
- The reconstruction of practical knowledge remains always a construction by the sociological observer
- Objectified objectification?



Thank you for your
attention, criticism and
further suggestions!

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