

Maaïke Lauwaert &
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Facing Value

Radical
perspectives
from the arts

Valiz

1. Be unproductive

2. Hesitate and question

3. Share

4. Improvise

5. Invite and participate

6. Embrace the void

7. Play!

8. Support

9. Unite

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'MAKING DO': USES AND TACTICS

Michel de Certeau

where does personal space fit into all of this? → PUBLIC HOME LOCAL
DIGITAL PHYSICAL GLOBAL

In spite of measures taken to repress or conceal it, *la perruque* (or its equivalent) is infiltrating itself everywhere and becoming more and more common. It is only one case among all the practices which introduce *artistic* tricks and competitions of accomplices into a system that reproduces and partitions through work or leisure. Sly as a fox and twice as quick: there are countless ways of 'making do.'

From this point of view, the dividing line no longer falls between work and leisure. These two areas of activity flow together. They repeat and reinforce each other. Cultural techniques that camouflage economic reproduction with fictions of surprise ('the event'), of truth ('information') or communication ('promotion') spread through the workplace. Reciprocally, cultural production offers an area of expansion for rational operations that permit work to be managed by dividing it (analysis), tabulating it (synthesis) and aggregating it (generalization). A distinction is required other than the one that distributes behaviors according to their place (of work or leisure) and qualifies them thus by the fact that they are located on one or another square of the social checkerboard—in the office, in the workshop, or at the movies. There are differences of another type. They refer to the modalities of action, to the formalities of practices. They traverse the

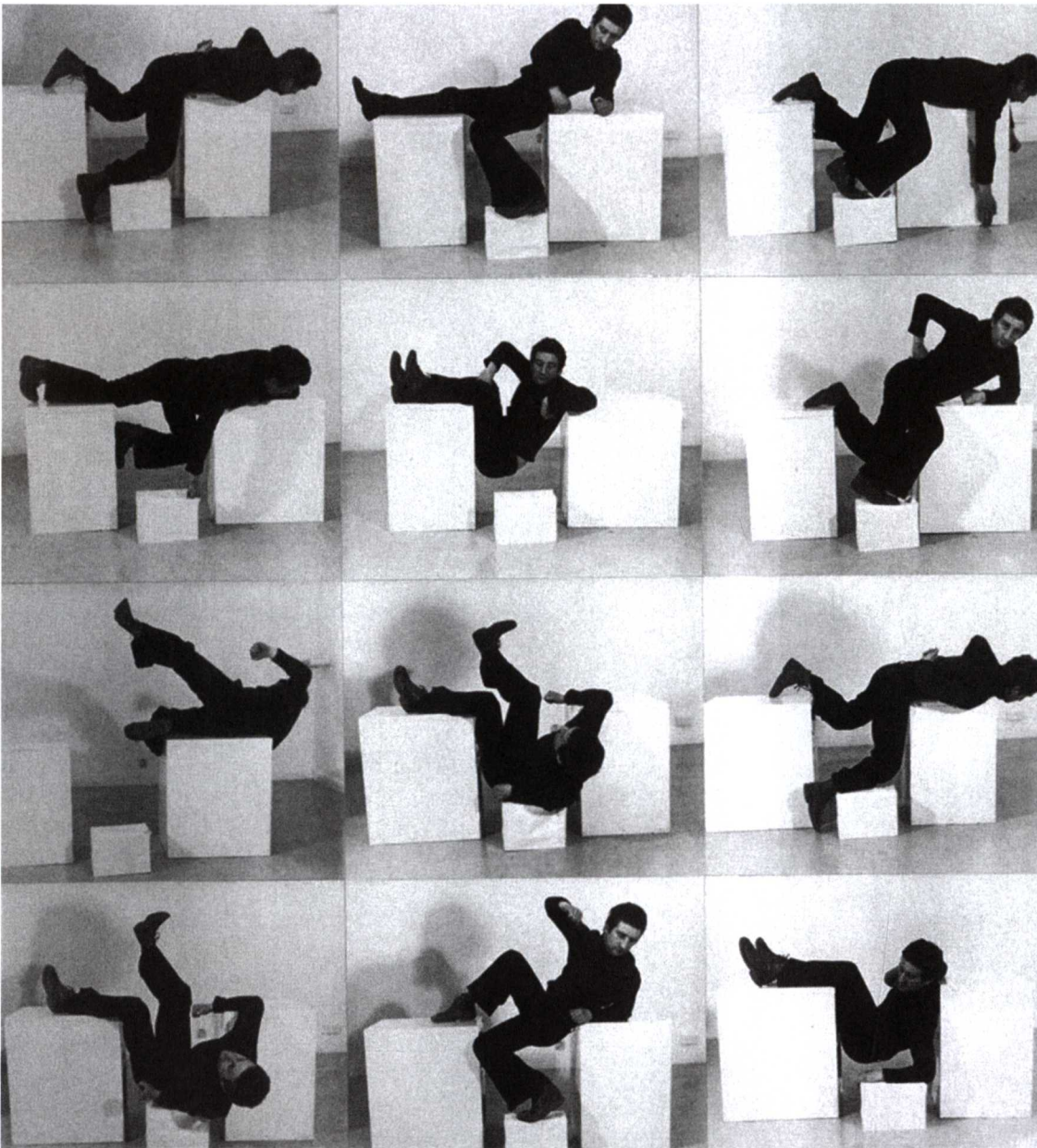
frontiers dividing time, place, and type of action into one part assigned for work and another for leisure. For example, *la perruque* grafts itself onto the system of the industrial assembly line (its counterpoint, in the same place), as a variant of the activity which, outside the factory (in another place), takes the form of *bricolage*.

Although they remain dependent upon the possibilities offered by circumstances, these transverse tactics do not obey the law of the place, for they are not defined or identified by it. In this respect, they are not any more localizable than the technocratic (and scriptural) strategies that seek to create places in conformity with abstract models. But what distinguishes them at the same time concerns the types of operations and the role of spaces: strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces, when those operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces.

We must therefore specify the operational schemas. Just as in literature one differentiates 'styles' or ways of writing, one can distinguish 'ways of operating'—ways of walking, reading, producing, speaking, etc. These styles of action intervene in a field which regulates them at a first level (for example, at the level of the factory system), but they introduce into it a way of turning it to their advantage that obeys other rules and constitutes something like a second level interwoven

action environment through the creation of an alternative system of coded organization that operates outside of the right of the first rule in law

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Bruce McLean, *Pose Work for Plinths 3*, 1971

1 BE UNPRODUCTIVE: Reprinted texts

into the first (for instance, *la perruque*). These 'ways of operating' are similar to 'instructions for use,' and they create a certain play in the machine through a stratification of different and interfering kinds of functioning. Thus a North African living in Paris or Roubaix (France) insinuates into the system imposed on him by the construction of a low-income housing development or of the French language the ways of 'dwelling' (in a house or a language) peculiar to his native Kabylia. He superimposes them and, by that combination, creates for himself a space in which he can find ways of using the constraining order of the place or of the language. Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of plurality and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation.

These modes of use—or rather re-use—multiply with the extension of acculturation phenomena, that is, with the displacements that substitute manners or 'methods' of transiting toward an identification of a person by the place in which he lives or works. That does not prevent them from corresponding to a very ancient art of 'making do.' I give them the name of uses, even though the word most often designates stereotyped procedures accepted and reproduced by a group, its 'ways and customs.' The problem lies in the ambiguity of the word, since it is precisely a matter of recognizing in these 'uses' 'actions' (in the military sense of the word) that have their own formality and inventiveness and that discreetly organize the multiform labor of consumption.

USE, OR CONSUMPTION

In the wake of the many remarkable works that have analyzed 'cultural products,' the system of their production,¹ the geography of their distribution and the situation of consumers in that geography,² it seems possible to consider these products no longer merely as data on the basis of which statistical tabulations of their circulation can be drawn up or the economic functioning of their diffusion understood, but also as parts of the repertory with which users carry out operations of their own. Henceforth, these facts are no longer the data of our calculations, but rather the lexicon of users' practices. Thus, once the images broadcast by television and the time spent in front of the TV set have been analyzed, it remains to be asked what the consumer makes of these images and during these hours. The thousands of people who buy a health magazine, the customers in a supermarket, the practitioners of urban space, the consumers of newspaper stories and legends—what do they make of what they 'absorb,' receive, and pay for? What do they do with it?

The enigma of the consumer-sphinx. His products are scattered in the graphs of televised, urbanistic, and commercial production. They are all the less visible because the networks framing them are becoming more and more tightly woven, flexible, and totalitarian. They are thus protean in form, blending in with their surroundings, and liable to disappear into the colonizing organizations whose products leave no room where the consumers can mark their activity. The child still scrawls and daubs on his schoolbooks; even if he is punished for this crime, he has made a space for himself and signs his existence as an author on it. The televi-

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sion viewer cannot write anything on the screen of his set. He has been dislodged from the product; he plays no role in its apparition. He loses his author's rights and becomes, or so it seems, a pure receiver, the mirror of a multiform and narcissistic actor. Pushed to the limit, he would be the image of appliances that no longer need him in order to produce themselves, the reproduction of a celibate machine.³

In reality, a rationalized, expansionist, centralized, spectacular and clamorous production is confronted by an entirely different kind of production, called 'consumption' and characterized by its ruses, its fragmentation (the result of the circumstances), its poaching, its clandestine nature, its tireless but quiet activity, in short by its quasi-invisibility, since it shows itself not in its own products (where would it place them?) but in an art of using those imposed on it.

The cautious yet fundamental inversions brought about by consumption in other societies have long been studied. Thus the spectacular victory of Spanish colonization over the indigenous Indian cultures was diverted from its intended aims by the use made of it: even when they were subjected, indeed even when they accepted their subjection, the Indians often used the laws, practices, and representations that were imposed on them by force or by fascination to ends other than those of their conquerors; they made something else out of them; they subverted them from within—not by rejecting them or by transforming them (though that occurred as well), but by many different ways of using them in the service of rules, customs or convictions foreign to the colonization which they could not escape.⁴ They metaphorized the dominant order: they made it function in another register.

They remained other within the system which they assimilated and which assimilated them externally. They diverted it without leaving it. Procedures of consumption maintained their difference in the very space that the occupier was organizing.

Is this an extreme example? No, even if the resistance of the Indians was founded on a memory tattooed by oppression, a past inscribed on their body.⁵ To a lesser degree, the same process can be found in the use made in 'popular' milieus of the cultures diffused by the 'elites' that produce language. The imposed knowledge and symbolisms become objects manipulated by practitioners who have not produced them. The language produced by a certain social category has the power to extend its conquests into vast areas surrounding it, 'deserts' where nothing equally articulated seems to exist, but in doing so it is caught in the trap of its assimilation by a jungle of procedures rendered invisible to the conqueror by the very victories he seems to have won. However spectacular it may be, his privilege is likely to be only apparent if it merely serves as a framework for the stubborn, guileful, everyday practices that make use of it. What is called 'popularization' or 'degradation' of a culture is from this point of view a partial and caricatural aspect of the revenge that utilizing tactics take on the power that dominates production. In any case, the consumer cannot be identified or qualified by the newspapers or commercial products he assimilates: between the person (who uses them) and these products (indexes of the 'order' which is imposed on him), there is a gap of varying proportions opened by the use that he makes of them.

¹ See in particular A. Huet et al., *La Marchandise culturelle* (Paris: CNRS, 1977), which is not satisfied merely with analyzing products (photos, records, prints), but also studies a system of commercial repetition and ideological reproduction.

² See, for example, *Pratiques culturelles des Français* (Paris: Secrétariat d'Etat à la Culture-SER, 1974), 2 vol. Alvin Toffler, *The Culture Consumers* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1965), remains fundamental and pioneering, although it is not statistically based and is limited to mass culture.

³ On the premonitory theme of the 'celibate machine' in the art (M. Duchamp, et al.) or the literature (from Jules Verne to Raymond Roussel) of the early twentieth century, see J. Clair et al., *Les Machines célibataires* (Venice: Alfieri, 1975).

⁴ See, for example, on the subject of the Aymaras of

Peru and Bolivia, J.-E. Monast, *On les croyait Chrétiens: les Aymaras* (Paris: Cerf, 1969).

⁵ See M. de Certeau, 'La Longue marche indienne,' in *Le Reveil indien en Amérique latine*, ed. Yves Materne and DIAL (Paris: Cerf, 1976), 119-135.

Use must thus be analyzed in itself. There is no lack of models, especially so far as language is concerned; language is indeed the privileged terrain on which to discern the formal rules proper to such practices. Gilbert Ryle, borrowing Saussure's distinction between 'langue' (a system) and 'parole' (an act), compared the former to a fund of capital L and the latter to the operations it makes possible: on the one hand, a stock of materials, on the other, transactions and uses.⁶ In the case of consumption, one could almost say that production furnishes the capital and that users, like renters, acquire the right to operate on and with this fund without owning it. But the comparison is valid only for the relation between the knowledge of a language and 'speech acts.' From this alone can be derived a series of questions and categories which have permitted us, especially since Bar-Hillel's work, to open up within the study of language (semi-osis or semiotics) a particular area (called pragmatics) devoted to use, notably to indexical expressions, that is, 'words and sentences of which the reference cannot be determined without knowledge of the context of use.'⁷

We shall return later to these inquiries which have illuminated a whole region of everyday practices (the use of language); at this point, it suffices to note that they are based on a problematics of enunciation.⁸ By situating the act in relation to its circumstances, 'contexts of use' draw attention to the traits that specify the act of speaking (or practice of language) and are its effects. Enunciation furnishes a model of these characteristics, but they can also be discovered in the relation that other

practices (walking, residing, etc.) entertain with non-linguistic systems. Enunciation presupposes: (1) a realization of the linguistic system through a speech act that actualizes some of its potential (language is real only in the act of speaking); (2) an appropriation of language by the speaker who uses it; (3) the postulation of an interlocutor (real or fictive) and thus the constitution of a relational contract or allocution (one speaks to someone); (4) the establishment of a present through the act of the 'I' who speaks, and conjointly, since 'the present is properly the source of time,' the organization of a temporality (the present creates a before and an after) and the existence of a 'now' which is the presence to the world.⁹

These elements (realizing, appropriating, being inscribed in relations, being situated in time) make of enunciation, and secondarily of use, a nexus of circumstances, a nexus adherent to the 'context' from which it can be distinguished only by abstraction. Indissociable from the present instant, from particular circumstances and from a faire (a peculiar way of doing things, of producing language and of modifying the dynamics of a relation), the speech act is at the same time a use of language and an operation performed on it. We can attempt to apply this model to many non-linguistic operations by taking as our hypothesis that all these uses concern consumption.

We must, however, clarify the nature of these operations from another angle, not on the basis of the relation they entertain with a system or an order, but insofar as power relationships define the networks

words'; in W.V. Quine, 'non-eternal sentences'; etc. A whole tradition is inscribed in this perspective. Wittgenstein belongs to it as well, the Wittgenstein whose slogan was 'Don't ask for the meaning; ask for the use' in reference to normal use, regulated by the institution that is language.

⁸ See 'The Proverbial Enunciation,' above, p. 18

⁹ See Emile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), II, 79-88.

spatial
achieve-weal

user interface is inherently
consumptive

in which they are inscribed and delimit the circumstances from which they can profit. In order to do so, we must pass from a linguistic frame of reference to a polemological one. We are concerned with battles or games between the strong and the weak, and with the 'actions' which remain possible for the latter.

STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Unrecognized producers, poets of their own affairs, trailblazers in the jungles of functionalist rationality, consumers produce something resembling the 'lignes d'erre' described by Deligny.¹⁰ They trace 'indeterminate trajectories'¹¹ that are apparently meaningless, since they do not cohere with the constructed, written, and prefabricated space through which they move. They are sentences that remain unpredictable within the space ordered by the organizing techniques of systems. Although they use as their material the vocabularies of established languages (those of television, newspapers, the supermarket or city planning), although they remain within the framework of prescribed syntaxes (the temporal modes of schedules, paradigmatic organizations of places, etc.), these 'traverses' remain heterogeneous to the systems they infiltrate and in which they sketch out the guileful ruses of different interests and desires. They circulate, come and go, overflow and drift over an imposed terrain, like the snowy waves of the sea slipping in among the rocks and defiles of an established order.

Statistics can tell us virtually nothing about the currents in this sea theoretically governed by the institutional frameworks that it in fact gradually erodes and displaces. Indeed, it is less a matter of a liquid circulating in the interstices

¹⁰ Fernand Deligny, *Les Vagabonds efficaces* (Paris: Maspero, 1970), uses this word to describe the trajectories of young autistic people with whom he lives, writings that move through forests, wanderings that can no longer make a path through the space of language.

of a solid than of different movements making use of the elements of the terrain. Statistical study is satisfied with classifying, calculating and tabulating these elements—'lexical' units, advertising words, television images, manufactured products, constructed places, etc.—and they do it with categories and taxonomies that conform to those of industrial or administrative production. Hence such study can grasp only the material used by consumer practices—a material which is obviously that imposed on everyone by production—and not the formality proper to these practices, their surreptitious and guileful 'movement,' that is, the very activity of 'making do.' The strength of these computations lies in their ability to divide, but this analytical ability eliminates the possibility of representing the tactical trajectories which, according to their own criteria, select fragments taken from the vast ensembles of production in order to compose new stories with them.

What is counted is what is used, not the ways of using. Paradoxically, the latter become invisible in the universe of codification and generalized transparency. Only the effects (the quantity and locus of the consumed products) of these waves that flow in everywhere remain perceptible. They circulate without being seen, discernible only through the objects that they move about and erode. The practices of consumption are the ghosts of the society that carries their name. Like the 'spirits' of former times, they constitute the multi-form and occult postulate of productive activity.

In order to give an account of these practices, I have resorted to the category of trajectory.¹² It was intended to suggest a temporal movement through space, that is, the unity of a diachronic succession

¹¹ See 'Indeterminate,' below, p. 199.

¹² Ibid.

coll. guiles

of points through which it passes, and not the figure that these points form on a space that is supposed to be synchronic or achronic. Indeed, this 'representation' is insufficient, precisely because a trajectory is drawn, and time and movement are thus reduced to a line that can be seized as a whole by the eye and read in a single moment, as one projects onto a map the path, taken by someone walking through a city. However useful this 'flattening out' may be, it transforms the temporal articulation of places into a spatial sequence of points. A graph takes the place of an operation. A reversible sign (one that can be read in both directions, once it is projected onto a map) is substituted for a practice indissociable from particular moments and 'opportunities,' and thus irreversible (one cannot go backward in time, or have another chance at missed opportunities). It is thus a mark in place of acts, a relic in place of performances: it is only their remainder, the sign of their erasure. Such a projection postulates that it is possible to take the one (the mark) for the other (operations articulated on occasions). This is a quid pro quo typical of the reductions which a functionalist administration of space must make in order to be effective.

A distinction between strategies and tactics appears to provide a more adequate initial schema. I call a strategy the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ According to John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern, *Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour*, 3rd ed. (New York: John Wiley, 1964), 'there is only strategy when the other's strategy is included.'

As in management, every 'strategic' rationalization seeks first of all to distinguish its 'own' place, that is, the place of its own power and will, from an 'environment.' A Cartesian attitude, if you wish: it is an effort to delimit one's own place in a world bewitched by the invisible powers of the Other. It is also the typical attitude of modern science, politics, and military strategy.

The establishment of a break between a place appropriated as one's own and its other is accompanied by important effects, some of which we must immediately note:

1 The 'proper' is a triumph of place over time. It allows one to capitalize acquired advantages, to prepare future expansions, and thus to give oneself a certain independence with respect to the variability of circumstances. It is a mastery of time through the foundation of an autonomous place.

2 It is also a mastery of places through sight. The division of space makes possible a panoptic practice proceeding from a place whence the eye can transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured, and thus control and 'include' them within its scope of vision.¹³ To be able to see (far into the distance) is also to be able to predict, to run ahead of time by reading a space.

3 It would be legitimate to define the power of knowledge by this ability to transform the uncertainties of history into readable spaces. But it would be more correct to recognize in these 'strategies' a specific type of knowledge, one sustained and determined by the power to provide oneself with one's own place. Thus mili-

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tary or scientific strategies have always been inaugurated through the constitution of their 'own' areas (autonomous cities, 'neutral' or 'independent' institutions, laboratories pursuing 'disinterested' research, etc.). In other words, a certain power is the precondition of this knowledge and not merely its effect or its attribute. It makes this knowledge possible and at the same time determines its characteristics. It produces itself in and through this knowledge.

By contrast with a strategy (whose successive shapes introduce a certain play into this formal schema and whose link with a particular historical configuration of rationality should also be clarified), a tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on arid with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to keep to itself at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection: it is a maneuver 'within the enemy's field of vision,' as von Bülow put it,¹⁴ and within enemy territory. It does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a district, visible, and objectifiable space. It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of 'opportunities' and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep. This nowhere gives a tactic mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the

¹⁴ 'Strategy is the science of military movements outside of the enemy's field of vision; tactics, within it' (von Bülow).

¹⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*; see *De la guerre* (Paris: Minuit, 1955), 212-213; *On War*, trans. M. Howard and P. Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976). This analysis can be found moreover in many

moment, and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment. It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse.

In short, a tactic is an art of the weak. Clausewitz noted this fact in discussing deception in his treatise *On War*. The more a power grows, the less it can allow itself to mobilize part of its means in the service of deception: it is dangerous to deploy large forces for the sake of appearances; this sort of 'demonstration' is generally useless and 'the gravity of bitter necessity makes direct action so urgent that it leaves no room for this sort of game.' One deploys his forces, one does not take chances with feints. Power is bound by its very visibility. In contrast, trickery is possible for the weak, and often it is his only possibility, as a 'last resort': 'The weaker the forces at the disposition of the strategist, the more the strategist will be able to use deception.'¹⁵ I translate: the more, the strategy is transformed into tactics.

Clausewitz also compares trickery to wit: 'Just as wit involves a certain legerdemain relative to ideas and concepts, trickery is a sort of legerdemain relative to acts.'¹⁶ This indicates the mode in which a tactic, which is indeed a form of legerdemain, takes an order by surprise. The art of 'pulling tricks' involves a sense of the opportunities afforded by a particular occasion. Through procedures that Freud makes explicit with reference to wit,¹⁷ a tactic boldly juxtaposes diverse elements in order suddenly to produce a flash shedding a different light on the language of a place and to strike the hearer. Cross-cuts,

other theoreticians, ever since Machiavelli. See Y. Delahaye, 'Simulation et dissimulation,' *La Ruse* (Cause Commune 1977/ 1) (Paris: UGE 10/ 18, 1977), 55-74.

¹⁶ Clausewitz, *De la guerre*, 212.

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. J. Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1960).

fragments, cracks and lucky hits in the framework of a system, consumers' ways of operating are the practical equivalents of wit.

Lacking its own place, lacking a view of the whole, limited by the blindness (which may lead to perspicacity) resulting from combat at close quarters, limited by the possibilities of the moment, a tactic is determined by the absence of power just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power. From this point of view, the dialectic of a tactic may be illuminated by the ancient art of sophistic. As the author of a great 'strategic' system, Aristotle was already very interested in the procedures of this enemy which perverted, as he saw it, the order of truth. He quotes a formula of this protean, quick, and surprising adversary that, by making explicit the basis of sophistic, can also serve finally to define a tactic as I understand the term here: it is a matter, Corax said, of 'making the worse argument seem the better'.¹⁸ In its paradoxical concision, this formula delineates the relationship of forces that is the starting point for an intellectual creativity as persistent as it is subtle, tireless, ready for every opportunity, scattered over the terrain of the dominant order and foreign to the rules laid down and imposed by a rationality founded on established rights and property.

In sum, strategies are actions which, thanks to the establishment of a place of power (the property of a proper), elaborate theoretical places (systems and totalizing discourses) capable of articulating an ensemble of physical places in which forces are distributed. They combine these three types of places and seek to master each by means of the others. They thus privilege

spatial relationships. At the very least they attempt to reduce temporal relations to spatial ones through the analytical attribution of a proper place to each particular element and through the combinatory organization of the movements specific to units or groups of units. The model was military before it became 'scientific.' Tactics are procedures that gain validity in relation to the pertinence they lend to time—to the circumstances which the precise instant of an intervention transforms into a favorable situation, to the rapidity of the movements that change the organization of a space, to the relations among successive moments in an action, to the possible intersections of durations and heterogeneous rhythms, etc. In this respect, the difference corresponds to two historical options regarding action and security (options that moreover have more to do with constraints than with possibilities): strategies pin their hopes on the resistance that the establishment of a place offers to the erosion of time; tactics on a clever utilization of time, of the opportunities it presents and also of the play that it introduces into the foundations of power. Even if the methods practiced by the everyday art of war never present themselves in such a clear form, it nevertheless remains the case that the two ways of acting can be distinguished according to whether they bet on place or on time.

THE RHETORICS OF PRACTICE, ANCIENT RUSES

Various theoretical comparisons will allow us better to characterize the tactics or the polemology of the 'weak.' The 'figures' and 'turns' analyzed by rhetoric are particularly illuminating in this regard. Freud already

in relation to the 'loci of apparent enthymemes,' see Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *Traité de l'argumentation* (Bruxelles: Université Libre, 1970), 607-609.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II, 24, 1402a: 'by making the worse argument seem the better'; trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: The Modern Library, 1954). The same 'discovery' is attributed to Tisias by Plato (Phaedrus, 273b-c). See also W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 178-179. On Corax's *techné* mentioned by Aristotle

noticed this fact and used them in his studies on wit and on the forms taken by the return of the repressed within the field of an order: verbal economy and condensation, double meanings and misinterpretations, displacements and alliterations, multiple uses of the same material, etc.¹⁹ There is nothing surprising about these homologies between practical ruses and rhetorical movements. In relation to the legalities of syntax and 'proper' sense, that is, in relation to the general definition of a 'proper' (as opposed to what is not 'proper'), the good and bad tricks of rhetoric are played on the terrain that has been set aside in this way. They are manipulations of language relative to occasions and are intended to seduce, captivate, or invert the linguistic position of the addressee.²⁰ Whereas grammar watches over the 'propriety' of terms, rhetorical alterations (metaphorical drifts, elliptical condensations, metonymic miniaturizations, etc.) point to the use of language by speakers in particular situations of ritual or actual linguistic combat. They are the indexes of consumption and of the interplay of forces. They depend on a problematic of enunciation. In addition, although (or because) they are excluded in principle from scientific discourse, these 'ways of speaking' provide the analysis of 'ways of operating' with a repertory of models and hypotheses. After all, they are merely variants within a general semiotics of tactics. To be sure, in order to work out that semiotics, it would be necessary to review arts of thinking and acting other than the one that the articulation of a certain rationality has founded on the delimitation of a proper: from the sixty-four hexagrams of the Chinese I-Ching²¹ or the Greek *metis*²² to the Arabic *hila*,²³ other 'logics' can be discerned.

I am not concerned directly here with the constitution of such a semiotics, but rather with suggesting some ways of thinking about everyday practices of consumers, supposing from the start that they are of a tactical nature. Dwelling, moving about, speaking, reading, shopping, and cooking are activities that seem to correspond to the characteristics of tactical ruses and surprises: clever tricks of the 'weak' within the order established by the 'strong,' an art of putting one over on the adversary on his own turf, hunter's tricks, maneuverable, poly-morph mobilities, jubilant, poetic, and warlike discoveries.

Perhaps these practices correspond to an ageless art which has not only persisted through the institutions of successive political orders but goes back much farther than our histories and forms strange alliances preceding the frontiers of humanity. These practices present in fact a curious analogy, and a sort of immemorial link, to the simulations, tricks, and disguises that certain fishes or plants execute with extraordinary virtuosity. The procedures of this art can be found in the farthest reaches of the domain of the living, as if they managed to surmount not only the strategic distributions of historical institutions but also the break established by the very institution of consciousness. They maintain formal continuities and the permanence of a memory without language, from the depths of the oceans to the streets of our great cities.

In any event, on the scale of contemporary history, it also seems that the generalization and expansion of technocratic rationality have created, between the links of the system, a fragmentation and explosive growth of these practices which were formerly regulated by stable

¹⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, on the techniques of wit*.

²⁰ See S. Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958); Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *Traité de l'argumentation*; J. Dubois et al., *Rhetorique générale* (Paris: Larousse, 1970); etc.

²¹ See I-Ching, *The Book of Changes*, which represents all the possible situations of beings in the course of

the universe's mutations by means of 64 hexagrams formed by 6 interrupted or full lines.

²² M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant, *Les Ruses de l'intelligence. La Metis des Grecs* (Paris: Flammarion, 1974).

²³ See M. Rodinson, *Islam et capitalisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1972); *Islam and Capitalism*, trans. B. Pearce (New York: Pantheon, 1973).

local units. Tactics are more and more frequently going off their tracks. Cut loose from the traditional communities that circumscribed their functioning, they have begun to wander everywhere in a space which is becoming at once more homogeneous and more extensive. Consumers are transformed into immigrants. The system in which they move about is too vast to be able to fix them in one place, but too constraining for them ever to be able to escape from it and go into exile elsewhere. There is no longer an elsewhere. Because of this, the 'strategic' model is also transformed, as if defeated by its own success: it was by definition based on the definition of a 'proper' distinct from everything else; but now that 'proper' has become the whole. It could be that, little by little, it will exhaust its capacity to transform itself and constitute only the space (just as totalitarian as the cosmos of ancient times) in which a cybernetic society will arise, the scene of the Brownian movements of invisible and innumerable tactics. One would thus have a proliferation of aleatory and indeterminable manipulations within an immense framework of socioeconomic constraints and securities: myriads of almost invisible movements, playing on the more and more refined texture of a place that is even, continuous, and constitutes a proper place for all people. Is this already the present or the future of the great city?

Leaving aside the multimillennial archeology of ruses as well as the possibility of their anthill-like future, the study of a few current everyday tactics ought not to forget the horizon from which they proceed, nor, at the other extreme, the horizon towards which they are likely to go. The evocation of these perspectives on the distant past or future at least allows

us to resist the effects of the fundamental but often exclusive and obsessive analysis that seeks to describe institutions and the mechanisms of repression. The privilege enjoyed by the problematics of repression in the field of research should not be surprising: scientific institutions belong to the system which they study, they conform to the well-known genre of the family story (an ideological criticism does not change its functioning in any way; the criticism merely creates the appearance of a distance for scientists who are members of the institution); they even add the disturbing charm of devils or bogey-men whose stories are told during long evenings around the family hearth. But this elucidation of the apparatus by itself has the disadvantage of not seeing practices which are heterogeneous to it and which it represses or thinks it represses. Nevertheless, they have every chance of surviving this apparatus too, and, in any case, they are also part of social life, and all the more resistant because they are more flexible and adjusted to perpetual mutation. When one examines this fleeting and permanent reality carefully, one has the impression of exploring the night-side of societies, a night longer than their day, a dark sea from which successive institutions emerge, a maritime immensity on which socioeconomic and political structures appear as ephemeral islands.

The imaginary landscape of an inquiry is not without value, even if it is without rigor. It restores what was earlier called 'popular culture,' but it does so in order to transform what was represented as a matrix-force of history into a mobile infinity of tactics. It thus keeps before our eyes the structure of a social imagination in which the problem constantly takes different forms and begins anew. It also

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wards off the effects of an analysis which necessarily grasps these practices only on the margins of a technical apparatus, at the point where they alter or defeat its instruments. It is the study itself which is marginal with respect to the phenomena studied. The landscape that represents these phenomena in an imaginary mode thus has an overall corrective and therapeutic value in resisting their reduction by a lateral examination. It at least assures their presence as ghosts. This return to

another scene thus reminds us of the relation between the experience of these practices and what remains of them in an analysis. It is evidence, evidence which can only be fantastic and not scientific, of the disproportion between everyday tactics and a strategic elucidation. Of all the things everyone does, how much gets written down? Between the two, the image, the phantom of the expert but mute body, preserves the difference.

The Practice of Everyday Life. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988 (1984), pp. 29-42

Michel de Certeau (1925-1986) was a French scholar whose work combined history, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and social sciences and covered diverse areas. His best known and most influential work has been *The Practice of Everyday Life* in which he distinguished between strategy (institutions and power structures that produce) and tactics (individual consumers and users).