

A blurred street scene with people walking and signs in the background. The text "tactics or strategies" is overlaid in the center.

**tactics or
strategies**

On The Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life

MICHEL DE CERTEAU

I. READING THE ANONYMOUS

This essay is dedicated to the ordinary man. The common hero. Disseminated character. Untold wanderer. In invoking, at the outset of my narratives, this absent being who gives them their beginning and necessity, I question myself as to the desire of which he figures the impossible object. When we dedicate to him documents which formerly were offered in homage to divinities or to inspirational muses, what do we ask of this oracle merged with the rumor of history that will authorize us to speak or make believable what we say?

This anonymous hero comes from way back. He is the murmur of societies. Always he precedes texts. He doesn't even wait for them. He pays no attention to them. But in written representations he gets along. Little by little he occupies the center of our scientific scenarios. The cameras have deserted the actors who dominated proper names and social emblems in order to turn themselves toward the chorus of extras massed on the sidelines, then finally to fix themselves on the crowd of the public. The sociologization and anthropologization of research privilege the anonymous and the everyday where close-ups isolate metonymic details—parts taken for the whole. Slowly the representatives who previously symbolized families, groups, and orders are effaced from the scene where they reigned during the time of the *name*. Number has arrived, the time of democracy, of the big city, of bureaucracies, of cybernetics. It is a supple and continuous crowd, woven tightly like a fabric without tear or seam, a multitude of quantified heroes who lose their names and faces while becoming the mobile language of calculations and rationalities which belong to no one. Ciphred currents in the street.

Popular cultures, proverbs, tales, folk wisdom, have long seemed to be the place in which such a hero might be sought and reidentified. Yet it is not possible to confine the operative models of a popular culture to the past, the countryside, or to primitive peoples. They exist in the strongholds of the contemporary economy. This is the case with *ripping-off* [*la perruque*: “wiggling”]. This phenomenon spreads everywhere, even if management penalizes it or “looks the other way” in order to know nothing of it.¹ Accused of stealing, or retrieving material for their own profit, of using the machines for their own ends, workers who “rip off” subtract time from the factory (rather than goods, for only scraps are used) with a view to work that is free, creative, and precisely without

The present text is an excerpt from Michel de Certeau's forthcoming book, *Pratiques quotidiennes. Pour une sémiotique de la culture ordinaire*. The first section was abridged from his article, “Une culture très ordinaire,” in *Esprit* 10 (October 1978), pp. 3-26. The author is a member of the *École freudienne* and teaches in the Department of Literature at the University of California-San Diego. He has written *La prise de la parole* (1968), *L'Absent de l'histoire* (1973), *La Culture au pluriel* (1974), and *L'Écriture de l'histoire* (2nd ed., 1978).

¹See Miklos Haraszti, *Salaire aux pièces* (Paris, 1976), pp. 136-145.

De Certeau, M., Jameson, F., & Lovitt, C. (1980). On the oppositional practices of everyday life. *Social Text*, (3), 3-43.



1925

1986

**THE
PRACTICE
OF
EVERYDAY
LIFE**

MICHEL de CERTEAU

1980

strategies

belong to states, economic
power and scientific rationality

tactics

improvised in their nature and take
advantage of all opportunities at hand

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Strategies are therefore actions which, dependent on a space of power (or one's own spatial "property"), are able to project theoretical spaces (totalizing systems and types of discourse) which can articulate the ensemble of physical places where force is distributed. Strategies combine these three types of space—power, theory, and praxis—and aim at combinations of them which will assure mastery; they thereby foreground spatial relations, or at least attempt to reduce temporal relations to spatial ones by an analysis which attributes a proper place to each particular element and by a systemic organization of the types of movement characteristic of each type of unity. The model of strategy was evidently a military one before it was used to organize "science" and knowledge.

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Tactics are meanwhile operations whose specific value derives from their stress on time as such—on the circumstances which a punctual intervention transforms into a favorable situation or conjuncture, on the rapidity of movements which can change the very organization of space, on the relations between the successive moments of a particular tactical move, on the overlap or intersection between various *durées* or unequal temporal rhythms, etc. In this sense, the difference between these two very

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territory

temporality



new ways of working in the affective domain
(intensification)

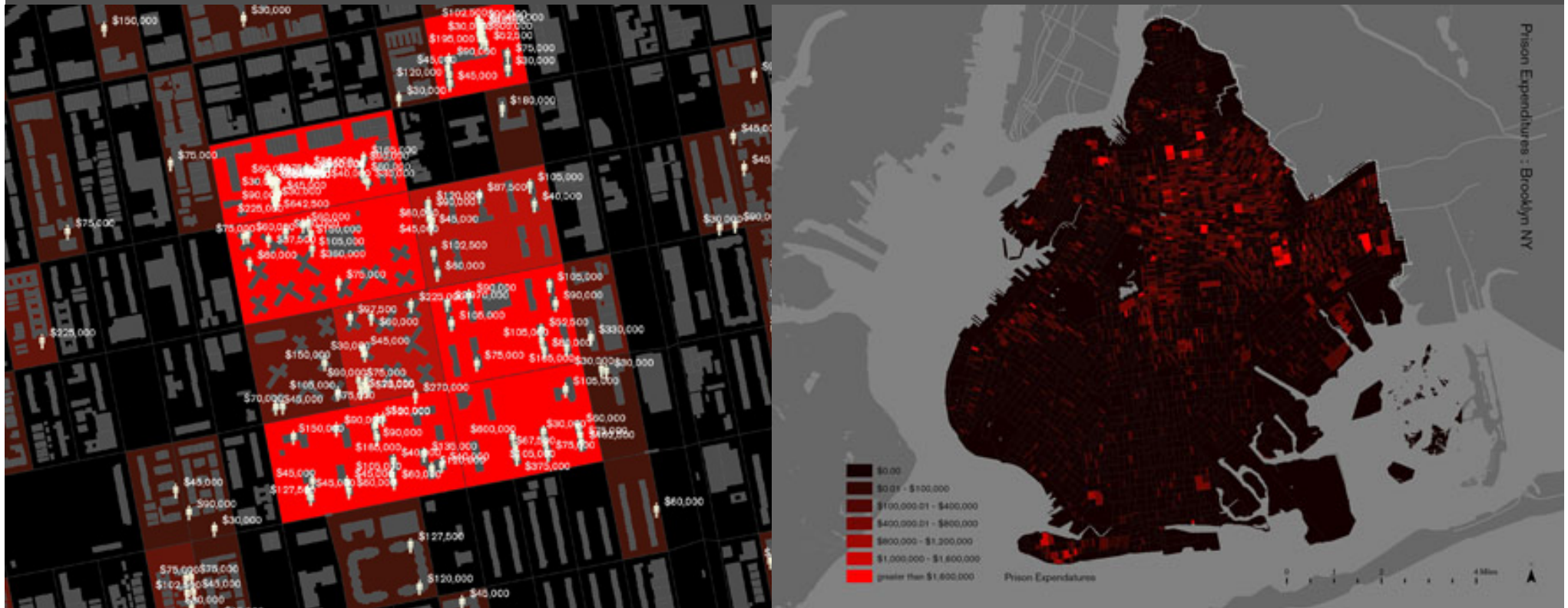
linking concerns and objects (co-articulation)

open-endedness and on-going interactions
(temporality)

new spaces and scales for the material and
human (territorialisation)

	Action	Definition (101)	Case Study	Other Examples
Strategies	Mapping	Labelling, drawing attention to, sometimes reframing.	Iconoclastas	Million Dollar Block, New York
	Reframing	Changing the way by which something is perceived or categorised.	Margins in the City, Leeds	Copenhagen Cycle Chic
	Prefiguring	Prototyping an alternative politics in real life.	Città Slow	Dodo, Helsinki
	Infrastructuring	Creation of platforms, ensembles, resourcing for participatory development.	Fixperts	Craftivism: Pink Beanies
Tactics	Intensification	Shifting bodily cognition that affects outlooks or attitudes.	Design Studio for Social Intervention	Santiago Cirugeda, Recetas Urbanas
	Co-articulation	Marrying practices with concerns, a.k.a. 'material participation'	En Torno a la Silla, Barcelona	Equipo Mazzanti: El Bosque de la Esperanza, Bogotá
	Temporality	Changing horizons and speeds, e.g. from fixed to open-endedness, fast to slow, future value to current value.	Alejandro Arevana: Elemental Housing, Chile	Kalliala, M. et al (2011). <i>Solution 239-246: Finland, the Welfare Game</i> . Sternberg Press.
	Territorialisation	Considering scales, boundaries, spatial connections.	Transition Towns	Alpine Cartographies of Climate Change

Mapping_



Project: Architecture and Justice

Place: New York, USA

Team: Spatial Information Design Lab, Columbia University

Weblink:

<http://www.spatialinformationdesignlab.org/projects.php?id=16>

Infrastructuring_



Knitting for Good!

A Guide to Creating Personal, Social,
and Political Change, Stitch by Stitch

BETSY GREER

<https://www.knittycitynyc.com/blog/6/30/2017-craftivism-panel-with-pink-persistence-and-sandra-markus>





Intensification_



Santiago Cirugeda 'Recetas Urbanas',
Seville, 1997





Co-articulation





**Ayuda
en
Acción**
C o l o m b i a

Toda la
Alcaldía
de **Soacha**
para vivir
mejor



SOL OMNIBUS LUCET
SUACHA

FUNDACION
P**ES**
DESCALZOS



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