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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 *Ésprit* 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.

profit. In the very places where reigns the machine they must serve, they inveigle for the pleasure of inventing gratuitous products intended solely to signify their own know-how by their work and to respond to the fellowship of workers with a gift. With the complicity of other workers (who thus put a check on the competition fomented between them by the factory), one effects some blows within the domain of the established order. Far from being a regression toward handicraft or individual units of production, ripping-off reintroduces into the industrial space (that is to say, into the present order) the “popular” tactics of other times or places.

Any number of examples could testify to the widespread existence of such practices in the most normative institutions of modern times. With the appropriate modifications, equivalents of ripping-off flourish within bureaucratic or commercial administrations just as much as in factories. They are doubtless today as extensive as ever (and as little studied in their own right), fully as much the object of deep suspicion, censure, and omission. Nor is it only on shop floors and offices that this happens, but also in museums and specialized journals, where such practices are debased and often consigned to oblivion. Thus the institutions of ethnological or folklore research tend to retain from such practices and activities the merest physical or linguistic *objects*, which are then labelled according to their thematics and their places of origin, placed under glass, offered up for exegesis, and asked to disguise, beneath the peasant “values” proposed for the edification or the curiosity of citydwellers, the legitimation of an order which its custodians consider to be immemorial and “natural.” In other cases, from the *languages* of such social operations, they extract tools and products to be ranged in exhibits of technical gadgets, spread out inertly along the borders of an untroubled system.

Yet it is very precisely the effective order of things which is subverted by just such “popular” tactics for their own ends, without any illusions as to their ultimate practical effects. Where dominating powers exploit the order of things, where ideological discourse represses or ignores it, tactics fool this order and make it the field of their art. Thereby the institution one is called to serve finds itself infiltrated by a style of social exchange, a style of technical invention, and a style of moral resistance—that is, by an economy of the “gift” (generosities which are also ways of asking for something in return), by an aesthetic of “moves,” “trumphs,” or “strikes” [*coups*] (operations which are forms of artistic expression), and by an ethic of *tenacity* (so many thousands of ways to deny the established order any legitimacy, whether of law, meaning, or even fatality). This is what “popular” culture really is, and not some alien corpus, anatomized for the purposes of exhibit, prepared and “quoted” by a system which reduplicates upon these objects the same situation it has prepared for its living subjects.

The increasing compartmentalization of time and space, the disjunctive logic of the specializations of labor, finds no adequate counterbalance in the conjunctive rituals of mass communications. Yet the empirical *fact* of this organization cannot be transformed into the *law* of living human subjects, individual or collective. It can indeed be outsmarted by services which, emulating the “gifts” of our masters, offer in exchange products drawn from the storehouse of the very institutions which isolate and program those who work in them. This practice of economic *embezzlement* in reality marks the return of a sociopolitical ethic within the economic system. It is thereby no doubt related to Mauss’ notion of the *potlatch*, that game of voluntary prestation which obliges to

reciprocity and organizes a whole social circuit around the “obligation to give in return.” This kind of emulation is of course no longer the economic law of our own societies: the basic unit of liberalism is the abstract individual, and exchanges between such units are organized around money as a universal equivalent. Today, indeed, this fundamental postulate of individualism returns as a question which unsettles the liberal system as a whole: thus an a priori of western history is transformed into its point of implosion. Meanwhile, *potlatch* seems to persist within western economy as something like the trace of a different mode of production: it survives on into our own system, but on the margins, or in the interstices. It even knows development, however illegitimate, in advanced liberalism itself. The politics of the “gift” thereby *also* becomes a tactic of subversion. By the same token, what in the economy of the gift was a willed loss and an intentional waste is within the profit economy transformed into a transgression, standing as the figure for excess (spoilage), for contestation (the repudiation of profit), or for crime (violation of private property).

II. ON TACTICS

An initial approach to the understanding of the oppositional practices of everyday life may be made through the distinction between strategy and tactics. I call strategy the calculus (or the manipulation) of relations of force which becomes possible whenever a subject of will and power (a business enterprise, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. Strategy postulates a *place* susceptible of being circumscribed as a *propre* and of being the base from where relations can be administered with an *exteriority* of targets or threats (clients or competitors, enemies, the countryside surrounding a city, the objectives and objects of research, etc.). As in management, all “strategic” rationalization begins by distinguishing its “appropriate” place from an “environment,” that is, the place of its own power and will. A Cartesian gesture, if you will: to circumscribe one’s own in a world bewitched by the invisible powers of the Other. A gesture of scientific, political, or military modernity.

The establishment of a caesura between an appropriated place and its other is accompanied by considerable effects, some of which must be noted immediately:

(1) The *proper* place is a *victory of place over time*. It permits one to capitalize on acquired advantages, to prepare for future expansions and to give itself thus an independence in relation to the variability of circumstances. It is a mastery of time by the founding of an autonomous place.

(2) It is also a mastery of places by vision. The partition of space permits a *panoptic practice* in which the look transforms strange forces into objects which one can observe and measure, therefore controlling and “including” them in one’s vision.² To see (from a distance) will be equally to foresee, to anticipate time by the reading of a space.

(3) It would be legitimate to define *the power of knowing* by this capacity to transform the uncertainties of history into readable spaces. But it is more exact to recognize in these “strategies” a specific type of knowing, one which upholds and determines the power of giving itself a proper place. Moreover military or scientific strategies have always been

²“Strategy exists only when it includes the strategy of the other.” John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern, *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* (New York, 1964).

inaugurated by the constitution of “proper” fields (autonomous cities, “neutral” or “independent” institutions, “disinterested” research laboratories, etc.) In other words, power is the precondition of this knowledge, and not only its effect or its attribute. It permits and governs the characteristics. It produces them in itself.

In contrast to strategies (whose successive figures stir this too formal schema and whose connection with a particular historical configuration of rationality would also need to be made precise) I call *tactics* the calculated action which is determined by the absence of a proper place. Thus no delimitation of exteriority furnishes it a condition of autonomy. Tactics has no place except in that of the other. Also it must play with the terrain imposed on it, organized by the law of a strange force. It does not have the means of containing itself in itself, in a position of retreat, of anticipating, of gathering itself: it is movement “in the enemy’s field of vision” as von Bülow said it, and in the space controlled by him.³ It does not have, therefore, the possibility of giving itself a global project nor of totalizing the adversary in a distinct space, visible and objectifiable. It operates blow by blow. It profits from and depends upon “occasions” without a base in which to stock supplies, to augment a proper space, and to anticipate sorties. What it gains cannot be held. This non-space doubtless permits mobility, but requires amenability to the hazards of time, in order to seize the possibilities that a moment offers. It must vigilantly utilize the gaps which the particular combination of circumstances open in the control of the proprietary power. It poaches there. It creates surprises. It is possible for it to be where no one expects it. It is wile.

In sum it is an art of the weak. Clausewitz noted it with respect to wile in his treatise *On War*. The more a power grows, the less it can allow itself to mobilize a part of its means in order to produce the effects of deception: it is in effect dangerous to employ considerable forces for appearances’ sake, at a time when this kind of demonstration is generally vain and when the seriousness of bitter necessity renders direct action so urgent that it does not make room for this game. One distributes his forces, one does not risk them in pretending. Power is bound by its visibility. On the other hand, ruse is possible for the weak and often only it, as a last recourse: “The weaker the forces which are subjected to strategic direction, the more they will be vulnerable to wile.”⁴ I translate it thus: the more it changes into *tactics*.

Clausewitz also compares the ruse to verbal wit: “Just as a witticism performs a sleight-of-hand with preexisting ideas and conceptions, so also the military ruse performs a sleight-of-hand of in the realm of action.”⁵ This suggest the privileged way in which the sleight-of-hand of tactics introduces its surprise effects into an established order. The art of gamesmanship, of “scoring” on your adversary, is at one with a sense of timing. Its techniques—and Freud gives us a whole inventory of them in his book on wit⁶—boldly restructure the initial data in order to transfigure the normal language of a given space with an alien flash, thereby stupefying the recipient. Cracks, glints, slippages, brainstorm within the established grids of a given system: such are the style of these

³“Strategy is the science of military movements beyond the field of vision of the enemy; tactics, that of movements within his field of vision” (von Bülow).

⁴Karl von Clausewitz, *De la Guerre* (Paris, 1955), pp. 212-213. This analysis can be found in many other theoreticians from Machiavelli on.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁶Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*.

tactical practices, which are the equivalent in the realm of action of wit and the witticism in the realm of language.

Bereft of any proper space of its own, without any globalizing vision, as blind and intuitive as one must be in immediate hand-to-hand combat, ruled by temporal chance and luck, tactics are thus essentially determined by the *absence of power* fully as much as strategy is organized by power as a precondition. In this sense, the dialectic specific to tactics might well be illuminated by the ancient art of sophistry. As the founder of a great “strategic” system, Aristotle was greatly interested in the techniques of this particular enemy, whose mission, as he considered, lay in the perversion of the order of Truth. Indeed, from this protean, dextrous, and unpredictable adversary, he quotes a formulation of the dynamics of sophistry which can henceforth stand as an admirable definition of tactics in our present sense: the point, according to the sophist Corax, is “to turn the weakest position into the strongest one.”⁷ The paradoxical conclusion of this phrase at once reveals the relationship of forces at work in the principle of intellectual creativity which is our present object of study: as stubborn as it is subtle, tireless, remobilized on all occasions, propagated throughout the strongholds of the dominant order, and utterly alien to the rules and methods imposed by a rationality based on the rights of self-identical space.

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.

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 distinct types of practice is one of two distinct historical options with respect to action and security, options which evidently have more to do with situational constraints than with free choice as such: strategies gamble on the resistance which the establishment of a place or locus offers to the wear and tear of time; tactics on the contrary put their faith in a skillful utilization of time, and of the opportunities it offers as well as the play it can introduce into the very foundations of power. Even if the methods employed in this guerilla warfare of everyday life can never be distinguished in quite so clear-cut a way, the fact remains that they are characterized by spatial and temporal wagers respectively.

⁷Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II, chapter 24, 1402a: “Make the weaker argument the stronger” (edition Budé, 1967, Vol. 2, p. 131). The same “discovery” is attributed to Tisias by Plato (*Phaedrus*, 273 b-c). See also W.K. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 178-179. On Cortax’s *texne*, which Aristotle mentions in connection with the “places of apparent enthymemes,” see C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *Traité de l’argumentation* (Brussels, 1970), pp. 607-609.

The tactics or the polemology of the weak or powerless may now be illuminated by a variety of theoretical references. Relevant, for example, are the various “figures” or “tropes” analyzed by *rhetoric* (and exhaustively inventoried by Freud in his work on wit and in his studies of the return of the repressed: verbal economy and condensation, multiple meanings and misunderstanding, displacement and alliteration, overdetermination of content, etc.).⁸ There is indeed nothing astonishing in such homologies between the ruses of practice and operations of a rhetoric. Rhetorical figures play their successful or unsuccessful moves out on a restricted terrain which is precisely that of self-identity, namely, of rule-governed syntax and of the “literal” or “proper” meaning in just that sense evoked above: that is, a lawful space of identity and exclusion defined against its external other. Rhetoric offers the possibility of a manipulation of language dependent on the appropriate occasion and aiming to seduce, entrap, or invert the linguistic position of the receiver.⁹ Thus, where grammar has the function of policing the “proper” use of terms, rhetorical play and transformation (metaphoric drift, elliptical condensation, metonymic miniaturization, etc.) marks the determinate appropriation of language in situations of ritual or actual linguistic combat. Such rhetorical procedures, the indications of consumption and of a play of forces, are part of a whole problematic of enunciation; and this is why, although (and perhaps because) they are in principle excluded from a “properly” scientific discourse, these “manners of speaking” offer a whole repertory of models and hypotheses for a study of analogous modes of action. In the final analysis, and in any *general* semiotics of tactics as such, the former are only so many variants of the latter. Obviously, the elaboration of such a semiotics would require a rather different emphasis than has necessarily been that of the research which presently bears that name, and which is oriented around the rationality of proper meaning. In particular, it would impose the study of quite different arts of thinking and action, such as the sixty-four hexagrams of the Chinese I-Ching,¹⁰ or the *metis* (“intelligence”) of ancient Greece,¹¹ or of the Arabic *hila*,¹² or of any number of other forms of “logic” now alien to us.

I will not here be concerned to construct such an alternate semiotics, but rather merely to suggest a certain number of ways in which we may think afresh the daily practices of consumers when they are of a tactical type. Dwelling, walking, spelling, reading, shopping, cooking—such activities present many of the characteristics of tactical ruses and surprises: tricks of the “weak” within the order established by the “strong,” an art of scoring within the realm of the other, hunters’ wisdom, polymorphous maneuvers and mobilities, jubilatory, poetic, and military inventions.

Such activities perhaps correspond to a timeless art which has not merely survived the institutions of successive sociopolitical orders but reaches back well before our own histories and finds strange solidarities beyond the very frontiers of humanity. Indeed, such practices present curious analogies—as though in immemorial intelligence—with

⁸Freud, op. cit.

⁹See Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge, 1958); C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *Traité*, op. cit.; and J. Dubois, et al., *Rhétorique générale* (Paris, 1970).

¹⁰See the *I-Ching* (*Chou-I*), or *Book of Changes*, whose 64 hexagrams (formed by 6 broken or full lines) represent all possible configurations of existents in the course of the mutations of the universe.

¹¹Marcel Détienné and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1978).

¹²See M. Rodinson, *Islam et le capitalisme* (Paris, 1972).

the simulation, strikes, and tricks that certain fish or certain plants execute with prodigious virtuosity. The procedures of such art can thus be found as far as life itself exists, as though they transcended not merely the strategic separations of historical institutions but also the very break inaugurated by the institution of consciousness itself. They thus assure the formal continuities and the permanency of a memory without language, from the ocean's depths all the way to the streets of today's megalopolis.

In any case, on the scale of contemporary history, it would seem that the generalization and the expansion of technocratic rationalization has produced a proliferation, in the interstices of the system, of just such practices which were formerly controlled by stable local unities. More and more, tactics swing out of their orbits. Loosed from those traditional communities which once circumscribed their functioning, they begin to wander throughout a space increasingly homogenized and extended. Consumers are transformed into immigrants. The system in which they circulate is too vast to localize them, yet too infinitely spread out for them to be able to escape it and to find a place "elsewhere." There is no elsewhere. The "strategic" model thereby is also transformed, as though lost by its own success: it depended on a "proper place" distinct from everything else; it now becomes "everything else." It is conceivable that little by little the strategic model may exhaust its own possibilities of transformation and come to constitute the very space (as totalitarian as the cosmos of old) of cybernetic society, given over to the Brownian movements of innumerable and invisible tactics. This would mean a proliferation of random and unpredictable manipulations within an immense gridwork of constraints and socio-economic precautions: myriads of quasi-invisible movements, playing across the ever finer texture of a homogeneous and continuous space "proper" to everyone. Is this already the present or still the future of our big cities?

Leaving aside the multimillenary archeology of ruses, as well as the possibility of their anthill-swarmling future, the present study of everyday tactics must nonetheless never forget the horizon from which they come nor, at the other extreme, the horizon they may someday reach. The evocation of these horizons will at least allow us to resist some of the less happy effects of the fundamental but often one-sided and obsessive contemporary analysis of the institutions and the mechanisms of *repression* as such. That the problematic of repression should play so predominant a role in contemporary research is no great surprise: scientific and research institutions are indeed themselves part of the very system they analyze; their analysis conforms to the well-known genre of the family history (a critical ideology failing to change anything in its operation, the critique simply creating the illusion of distance within a genus to which it belongs itself). Such institutions tend to add the disquieting charm of those devils or werewolves whose stories are told in the evening by the hearth. Yet this elucidation of the apparatus of repression by itself presents a signal defect, namely *not being able to see* those heterogeneous practices which it believes itself to have repressed. Yet they have every chance of surviving this particular apparatus, and in any case they are *also* themselves a part of social life, all the more resistant in their very suppleness and capacity to adjust to perpetual changes. Surveying this fleeting yet permanent reality, one has the impression of exploring the nighttime of societies, a night longer than their days, a dim surface in which successive institutions are profiled, a virtually maritime immensity in which socio-economic and political apparatuses come to seem ephemeral insularities.

The imaginary landscape of a particular research is not insignificant, even where it

lacks rigor. It restores what used to be called “popular culture” only to transform what used to seem a matrix-force of history into a mobile infinity of tactics, thus maintaining the structure of a social “imaginary” whose fundamental questions constantly take on new shapes and arise anew. By the same token, it forestalls the effects of an analysis which can necessarily grasp such practices only in function of a particular technical apparatus, as the transformation of or interference with the latter’s instruments. Here the analysis is itself marginal with respect to its own objects of study. The landscape which stages these phenomena in the imaginary mode thus has the function of a global and therapeutic rectification, a defense against their reduction by lateral inspection. It thus ensures their continuing presence, if only as ghosts. This return to another stage thereby recalls the relationship between the experience of such practices and what an analysis can tell about them: it is the witness—a fantasmatic one at best, non-scientific—of the disproportion between daily tactics and their strategic elucidation. What can be written about what everybody does? Between the two things, the image, ghost of an expert but silent body, preserves the difference.

III. MICHEL FOUCAULT, OR, TECHNOLOGIES IN DISSEMINATION

We must begin with the problem of the relationship of some procedures to discourse. For these procedures do not have the fixed and repetitive structure of rituals, customs, or types of instinctive knowledge which no longer have to be articulated in discourse or have not yet found their expression. The mobility of this kind of procedure adapts to a variety of objectives or effects, but does not depend on verbal elucidation. Their separation from discourse must not be overestimated. In fact, tactics *within* discourse can, as we have seen above, be correlated with nonverbal tactical acts. Indeed, the implicit thought invested in these kinds of action constitutes a peculiar—and massive—instance of the relationship between practices and theory.

In *Discipline and Punish*, a work in which he examines the organization of penal, academic, and medical “surveillance” at the beginning of the 19th century, Michel Foucault attempts to approximate an impossible proper noun through a proliferation of synonyms and poetic evocations: “apparatus,” “instrumentations,” “techniques,” “mechanisms,” “machineries,” and so on.¹³ This very uncertainty and terminological instability is already suggestive. Yet the basic story the book has to tell—that of an enormous quidproquo or socio-historical deal—postulates a fundamental dichotomy between ideologies and procedures, and charts their respective evolutions and intersections. In fact, what Foucault analyzes is a chiasmus: how the place occupied by humanitarian and reformist projects at the end of the 18th century is then “colonized” or “vampirized” by those disciplinary procedures which have since increasingly organized the social realm itself. This mystery story of a substitution of corpses would have pleased Freud.

As always for Foucault, the drama is played out between two forces whose relationship to one another is inverted by the ruse of history. On the one hand, there is the ideology of the Enlightenment, with its revolutionary approach to the matter of penal

¹³Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Paris, 1975); on Foucault’s earlier work, see M. de Certeau, *L’Absent de l’histoire* (Paris, 1974), pp. 115-132.

justice. The reformist projects of the 18th century aim essentially at doing away with the “ordeal” of the *ancien régime*, with that bloody ritualization of hand-to-hand combat intended to dramatize the symbolic triumph of royalty over the appropriate criminals; such projects involved the equalization of penalties, their gradation according to the crime, and their educational value both for the criminals and for society itself.

In actual fact, however, disciplinary procedures evolved in the army and in the schools rapidly come to prevail over the vast and complex judicial apparatus elaborated by the 18th century Enlightenment, and the new techniques are refined and applied without recourse to any overt ideology: the development of a cellular grid (whether for students, soldiers, workers, criminals, or sick people) transforms space itself into an instrument which can be used to discipline, to program, and to keep under observation any social group. In such procedures, the refinement of technology and attention to minute detail triumph over theory, and result in the universalization of a single, uniform punishment—prison itself—which undermines the revolutionary institutions of the Enlightenment from within and everywhere substitutes the penitentiary for penal justice.

Foucault thus distinguishes between two heterogeneous systems. He describes the superiority won by a political technology of the body over an elaborated system of doctrine. Yet he does not stop here: in his description of the institution and triumphant proliferation of this particular “minor instrumentality”—the penal grid—he also tries to determine the scope of such an opaque power, which is the property of no individual subject, which has no privileged locus, no superiors and no inferiors, which is neither repressive nor dogmatic in its action, and whose efficacy is quasi-autonomous and functions through its capacity to distribute, classify, analyze, and spatially individuate any given object. (Meanwhile, ideology continues to produce mere words and ideas as usual!) Through a series of clinical—and splendidly “panoptical”—tableaux, Foucault then in his turn attempts to name and to classify the “methodological rules,” the “functional conditions,” the “techniques” and the “processes,” the distinct “operations” and “mechanisms,” “principles” and “elements” which would constitute something like a “microphysics of power.”¹⁴ This exhibit thus has a dual function: to diagram a particular stratum of nonverbal practices and also to found a discourse *about* those practices.

How are such practices to be described? In a characteristic strategy of indirection, Foucault isolates the gesture which organizes discursive space—not, as in *Madness and Civilization*, the epistemological and social gesture of confining an outcast in order to create the space of reason itself—but rather a minute gesture, everywhere reproduced, by which visible space is partitioned in order to subject its inhabitants to surveillance and report. The procedures which repeat, amplify, and perfect this gesture then in their turn organize that discourse which takes the form of the so-called “human sciences” or *Geisteswissenschaften*. We have thereby identified a *nonverbal gesture*—a gesture which has been privileged, for historical and social reasons which remain to be described, and which then is articulated through the discourse of contemporary science.

Alongside the novel perspectives opened up by this analysis¹⁵—and it might also have

¹⁴See Foucault, *op. cit.*, pp. 28, 96-102, 106-116, 143-151, 159-161, 185, 189-194, 211-217, 238-251, 274-275, 276, etc.: a series of theoretical “tableaux” punctuates the book and profiles a historical object for which it invents an adequate discourse.

¹⁵See in particular Gilles Deleuze, “Ecrivain, non: un nouveau cartographe,” in *Critique*, no. 343 (December 1975), pp. 1207-1227.

been prolonged into a whole stylistics, a whole method for analyzing the nonverbal kinesics and rhythms of the text of thought itself—several questions relating to our present project may be raised:

(1) In his archeology of the human sciences—Foucault's explicit project since *The Order of Things*—and in his search for that common “matrix”—the “technology of power”—which could be found to organize both the penal code—the punishment of human beings—and the human sciences—the knowledge of human beings—Foucault is led to make a selective choice from among the totality of procedures which form the fabric of social activity in the 18th and 19th centuries. He begins with a single proliferating system, essentially a scientific or juridical technology, and then, through a kind of surgical operation, isolates the cancerous growth from the social body as a whole, thereby explaining its contemporary dynamic by way of its *genesis* in the two preceding centuries. Drawing on an immense mass of historiographic materials (penal, military, academic, medical), this method disengages the optical and panoptical procedures which can increasingly be found to proliferate within it, thereby to identify the at first disguised indices of an apparatus whose structure gradually becomes more precise, complex, and determinate within the density of the social fabric as a whole.

This remarkable historiographic “operation” raises two distinct questions at one and the same time: on the one hand, the decisive role of technological procedures and apparatuses in the organization of a society; on the other, the exceptional development or privileged status of one particular category among such apparatuses. We must therefore now ask:

(a) How do we explain the privileged development of that particular series constituted by Foucault's panoptical apparatuses?

(b) What happened to all those other types of series or procedures which in their unremarked itineraries failed to give rise either to a specific discursive configuration or to a technological systematization? They might well be looked on as an immense reserve containing the seeds or the traces of alternate developments which never took place.

It is in any case impossible to reduce the functioning of a whole society to a single, dominant type of procedure. Recent studies (such as that of Serge Moscovici on urban organization,¹⁶ or Pierre Legendre on the medieval juridical apparatus¹⁷) have revealed other kinds of technological apparatuses, which know an analogous interplay with ideology and prevail for a time, before falling back into the storehouse of social procedures as a whole, at which point other apparatuses replace them in their function of “informing” a whole system.

On this view, then, a society would be composed by certain practices which, selectively withdrawn and externalized, now organize its normative institutions, alongside innumerable other practices which, having remained “minor,” do not organize discourse itself but merely persist, preserving the premises or the remnants of institutional or scientific hypotheses that differ from one society to another. It is then within the latter—a multitudinous and silent “reserve” of procedures—that the practices of consumption should be sought, practices which present that double characteristic underscored by Foucault of being able to organize both space and language in dominant or subordinate ways.

¹⁶Serge Moscovici, *Essai sur l'histoire humaine de la nature* (Paris, 1968).

¹⁷Pierre Legendre, *L'Amour du censeur. Essai sur l'ordre dogmatique* (Paris, 1974).

(2) It is the final formation or “full” form—in this instance the whole contemporary technology of surveillance and discipline—which serves as the point of departure for Foucault’s archeology: the impressive coherence of his findings is thereby explained. But can we really assume that all procedures themselves had this coherence? A priori, no. The exceptional and even cancerous development of panoptical procedures would seem to be indistinguishable from their historic role as a weapon against heterogeneous practices and a means of controlling the latter. Thus, their coherence is the effect of a particular historic success, and not a characteristic of all technological practices. Thus, behind the “monotheism” of the dominant panoptical procedures, we might suspect the existence and survival of a “polytheism” of concealed or disseminated practices, marginalized but not obliterated by the historical triumph of one of their number.

(3) What is the status of a particular apparatus when it has become the organizing principle of a technology of power? What is the effect upon it of the process that has isolated it from the rest, privileged, externalized, and transformed it into a dominant? What new kind of relation does it maintain with the dispersed ensemble of other procedures when it has at length been institutionalized as their own penitentiary and scientific system? It might well be that an apparatus privileged in this fashion could lose that efficacy which, according to Foucault, it originally owed its own mute and minuscule technical advances. On emerging from that obscure stratum where Foucault locates the determining mechanisms of society, it might well find itself in the position of an institution itself imperceptibly colonized by other, still more silent procedures. Indeed, it will be one of the hypothesis of the present essay that this system of discipline and surveillance which was formed in the 19th century on the basis of procedures that preexisted it, is today in the process of being vampirized by still other ones which remain to be described.

(4) Can we go still further? Is not the very fact that, as they evolve, the apparatuses of surveillance have themselves become the object of elucidation, and a part of the very language of Enlightenment rationality, a sign that they have ceased to determine discursive institutions? Insofar as it is itself an effect produced by underlying organizing apparatuses, discourse would tend to betray those which no longer fill that role by its own articulation of them. At that point—unless we are to suppose that, by analyzing the practices from which it is itself derived, *Discipline and Punish* surmounts its own basic distinction between “ideologies” and “procedures”—we would have to ask what apparatus articulates this discourse in turn, an apparatus which must by definition escape the latter’s detection.

Such questions—for which only provisional answers can be found here—may at least serve to measure the extent of the changes Foucault has brought to the study of the practices of everyday life, as well as the new perspectives he has opened. By showing, in a single case, the heterogeneous and equivocal relations between apparatuses and ideologies, he has constituted a new object of historical study: that zone in which technological procedures have specific effects of power, obey logical dynamisms which are specific to them, and produce fundamental modifications in the juridical and scientific institutions. But we do not yet know what to make of other, equally infinitesimal procedures which remained unprivileged by history and which yet continue to flourish in the interstices of the institutional technologies. This is most particularly the case of procedures which lack the essential precondition indicated by Foucault, namely, the possession of a locus or

specific space of their own on which the panoptical machinery can function. Such equally operative, yet initially seemingly powerless techniques are very precisely those “tactics” discussed above, of which I will suggest that they provide formal clues as to the nature of everyday consumer practices in general.

IV. PIERRE BOURDIEU, OR, “KNOWING IGNORANCE”

Yet it would seem that such “tactics” can only be analyzed by way of a long detour through another society: pre-revolutionary or 19th century France, in Foucault; Kabylia or Béarn in the work of Pierre Bourdieu; ancient Greece, in that of Marcel Détienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, etc. It is as though, marginalized by the development of occidental rationality, tactics need to return from another scene in order to take on the necessary visibility and articulation. Thus other lands restore to us what our own culture has seen fit to exclude from its own discourse. But are not these tactics precisely defined from the outset as what we ourselves have repressed or lost? As in Lévi-Strauss’ *Tristes Tropiques*,¹⁸ we must travel afar to discover those very things unrecognizable in our own midst.

For Kabylia to constitute a kind of Trojan Horse of a “theory of practice” for Bourdieu; for the three admirable texts dedicated to this region to stand as a multiple preface to a lengthy epistemological statement; for these three ethnological chapters to lead, like poems, into a theory which is their own prose commentary and to serve as the latter’s fascinating and infinitely quotable and reexaminable basis; for their referential and poetic *place* to vanish from the final title, and, disseminated through its discursive effects, to be slowly effaced, like a sun from the speculative landscape still lit by it: such features already suggest a specific positioning of practice within theory.¹⁹

This is of course no accident: indeed, all of Bourdieu’s work, which since 1972 is devoted to “practical meaning,”²⁰ is with one exception organized along the same lines.²¹ With one variation: his work on matrimonial strategies and genealogical economy substitutes the reference to Béarn for that of Kabylia.²² Two referential *loci* rather than one: can we decide which is the mere double of the other? Both project ordered “familiarities” which are nonetheless haunted, the one by exile, the other by cultural difference. Still, it would seem that the homeland, Béarn, as *in-fans* or speechless

¹⁸Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques* (Paris, 1958); see especially the pages on the “return,” a meditation on travel which is transmuted into an investigation of memory.

¹⁹Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (Geneva, 1972). The title of the book is that of the second, or theoretical, part. On Bourdieu, unlike Foucault, French-language critiques are not very numerous: is this the simultaneous effect of the fear and admiration generated by a Béarnais empire? The “ideological” character of Bourdieu’s position is objected to by R. Boudon (in *L'Inégalité des chances* or in *Effets pervers et ordre social*). In a Marxist perspective: Baudelot & Establet (*L'École capitaliste en France*); Jacques Bidet (“Questions à P. Bourdieu,” in *Dialectiques* no. 2); L. Pinto (“La Théorie de la pratique,” in *La Pensée*, April 1975), etc. From an epistemological point of view, see L. Marin, “Champs théorique et pratique symbolique,” in *Critique* no. 321 (February 1974). W. Paul Vogt presents Bourdieu’s theses in “The Inheritance and Reproduction of Cultural Capital,” in *The Review of Education* (Summer 1978), pp. 219-228.

²⁰P. Bourdieu, “Les stratégies matrimoniales dans le système de reproduction,” in *Annales E.S.C.* (July-October 1972), pp. 1105-1127; “Le langage autorisé,” in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* (November, 1975), no. 5-6, pp. 183-190; “Le sens pratique,” *ibid.*, Feb. 1976, no. 1, pp. 43-86.

²¹“Avenir de classe et causalité du probable,” *Revue française de sociologie*, XV, 1974, pp. 3-42.

²²“Les stratégies matrimoniales,” *op. cit.*

as any origin, which needed the reduplication of the Kabyle scene (for Bourdieu, so analogous) to find its own articulation. Only by way of this objectification can a real foundation (but also an imaginary one: “où sont les Béarnais d’antan?”) be made within the human sciences for the concept of the *habitus*, which constitutes Bourdieu’s personal mark on theory. The specificity of the original experience is then effaced behind its power to organize a more generalizing discourse.

Divided in two sections (each of which enables the other), *The Outline of a Theory of Practice* is first and foremost a practice of interdisciplinarity. It thus projects a metaphor, insofar as it offers the passage from one genre to another, from ethnology to sociology. Yet things are not quite so simple as this, and the book is hard to classify. Is it meant to be work in the kind of interdisciplinary confrontation formerly sponsored by Bourdieu,²³ in which each discipline seeks to analyze and to render explicit the presuppositions belonging to each specialty? Such confrontations sought a mutual epistemological elucidation, and strove to display their implicit foundations in that broad daylight of consciousness which is both the ambition and the myth of science itself. Here, perhaps, the stakes are somewhat different, and the *Outline of a Theory of Practice* rather seems to interrogate this new insight which a discipline gains when it turns back toward the darkness that surrounds it—not in order to put that darkness to flight, but rather because it is constitutive and ineradicable. Theory would then come into being whenever a science, not content with correcting its own rules of production or determining its own limits of validity, starts thinking its relationship to this inevitable exteriority. Whether or not this is the direction of Bourdieu’s current discourse, it is in any case beyond disciplinary boundaries in the opaque reality of practices themselves that the theoretical question appears.

Explicitly called by him “strategies,” the practices studied by Bourdieu involve such things as the systems of inheritance in Béarn, the physical layout of the interior of the Kabyle house, the rhythms and organization of the Kayble year, and so forth. These are but a few genuses of a species which includes the “strategies” of fecundity, inheritance, hygiene, education, social or economic investment, marriage, etc., as well as those strategies of “reconversion” which arise during discrepancies between practices and situations.²⁴ In each case, concrete differences allow some of the properties of a “logic of practice” to be specified.

(1) Genealogical tables or “family trees,” surveys and geometric maps of habits, the linear cycles of calendars are all totalizing and homogeneous productions, effects of the observer’s distance and “neutralization,” in comparison to the strategies themselves which form into “city blocks” either the kinship relations actually practiced because of usefulness, or the places which are distinguished by the inverse and successive movements of the body, or the durations of actions accomplished step by step at their own pace and at rates incommensurate with each other.²⁵ Where the synoptic map, essentially an instrument of summation and a mastery by vision, levels and classes all the collected “given,” practice organizes discontinuities, nuclei of heterogeneous operations. Kinship,

²³This is the confrontation urged by P. Bourdieu, J.-C. Passeron and J.-C. Chamboredon, in *Le Métier de sociologue* (Paris, 1968), pp. 112-113.

²⁴See “Avenir de classe . . .,” pp. 22, 33-34, 42, etc.

²⁵*Esquisse*, op. cit., pp. 211-227; “Les stratégies matrimoniales,” op. cit., pp. 1107-1108; “Le sens pratique,” op. cit., pp. 51-52; etc.

space, and time are therefore *not the same* on the one hand and on the other.

(I would add that this difference is situated at the frontier of two ruses. With these synthetic tables, the scientist hides the operation of retreat and power which made them possible. On their side, while furnishing the “given” solicited by the investigators, the practitioners necessarily conceal the practical difference created between them by the operations which use them (or not), and they thus collaborate in the production of general tables which hide their tactics from the observer. The knowledge of practices would be the result of this double deception.)

(I would add that this distinction marks the boundary between two distinct types of ruse. The synthesizing tables and graphs of the scientist mask the distanciation and the mastery which made them possible in the first place. Meanwhile, the subjects of such studies, the ethnic “practitioners” themselves, by the very data they furnish, pass over in silence the role of actual practice in differentiating between such data: they thus themselves collaborate in the production of global tableaux and schemata in order to hide their own tactics from the observer in question. Knowledge about practices would then be a combined result of these twin deceptions.)

(2) “Strategy” in Bourdieu’s sense (marrying one of your children, for example) is the equivalent of “taking a trick in a card game,” and depends preeminently on the quality of the game, as a result of the cards you are dealt and the way you play them.²⁶ The act of taking a trick thus depends on the postulates which determine the “play-field,” on the rules which confer on a given hand its meaning and assign to the player a certain number of possible plays, and on that particular skill in maneuver with which a first-class player will increase his capital during the game. This complex structure can, however, be resolved into various qualitatively distinct functions:

(a) There are a certain number of implicit principles (thus, in Béarn, the superiority of husbands to wives, or elders to youths—principles which ensure and protect patrimony in an economy poor in cash flow); yet the fact that such principles are never explicitly defined opens up margins of tolerance and the possibility of playing one principle off against the other.

(b) There are explicit rules (for instance, the *adot*: “compensation to younger brothers for their renunciation of the inheritance”), but these are accompanied by limits which reverse them (as in the *tournadot*, which requires the *adot* to be returned in the event of childless marriages). Every implementation of such rules must therefore take into account this omnipresent possibility of reversal which is linked to circumstances.

(c) “Strategies,” meanwhile, tricks and stratagems (“l’agir est retors”), must “navigate” these rules, and “exploit all the possibilities offered by the traditions in question,” choosing this one rather than that, compensating that one with this one, etc. The soft appearance of a rigid reality allows them to structure a given network according to their own priorities. More importantly, strategies shift and slip from one function to another, short-circuiting divisions between the economic, the social, and the symbolic. Thus, for instance, a lack of children (biological fecundity) will compensate for a bad marriage (a bad choice in terms of money or station), while the retention of an unmarried younger brother at home as unpaid domestic labor (economic investment as well as restriction of biological fecundity) presents the added advantage of avoiding paying him the *adot* (institu-

²⁶“Les stratégies matrimoniales,” op. cit., p. 1109; etc.

tional benefit). Strategies do not simply “apply” preexisting rules and principles; they select the repertory of their own operations from out of the latter.²⁷

(3) As they shift from one genre to another, such practices can be assimilated to the Freudian concept of “transference” and to the rhetorical one of “metaphorization,” and thus imply a specific “logic” of their own. Bourdieu exercises his own “ruse” in order to outsmart the labyrinthine developments of these ruses of practice and to underscore the following essential procedures:²⁸

(a) *polythetism* or multifunctionality: the same thing has different applications and properties which vary according to its position in a particular combination;

(b) *substitutability*: one thing can always be replaced by another, given the kinship with all the other terms in the particular totality it represents;

(c) *euphemization*: it is important to conceal the fact that action tends to disrupt the dichotomies and antinomies represented by any given symbolic system. The union of contraries in ritual may serve as the model for such euphemization.

Ultimately, all such procedures, essentially transgressions of the symbolic order (but camouflaged transgressions, metaphors which apparently respect the established linguistic distinctions in the very act of violating them), may be summed up under the primacy of *analogy*. From this standpoint, recognizing the authority of rules is the very opposite of applying them—a fundamental chiasmus which would have to be reversed in contemporary society in the sense in which we apply laws whose authority we no longer recognize. In any case, Bourdieu suggests that the ultimate principle of all such practices is to be found in that very “analogical mode” which scientists such as Duhem, Bachelard, and Campbell, saw at the very source of theoretical innovation.²⁹

(4) These practices are all governed in the last analysis by what I have called above *the economy of the proper locus*. In Bourdieu’s work, this economy tends to be represented in two distinct and equally fundamental, but unthematized ways: on the one hand, as the maximization of capital (material and symbolic goods) which constitutes a given *patrimony*; and on the other, as the development of the *body* itself, both individual and collective, the producer of time (through its fecundity) and of space (through its displacements). All subsequent ruses, and their success or failure, are to be traced back to an economy which seeks to reproduce and to augment these dual yet complementary forms of the Kabyle “house”³⁰ itself: goods and bodies, land and lineage. A politics of “locus” thus underlies such strategies.

Whence two features which so strongly connect those practices with the “enclosed place” where Bourdieu considered them (the Béarn family or the Kabyle house) and with the type of observation to which he submits them:

(a) He always presupposes the twin link of all practices with a particular place (patrimony) and a particular type of collective administration (the family or the group). But suppose one or the other of these preconditions is missing? This is significantly the case, for example, with contemporary technocratic societies, by comparison with which the proprietary and familial enclaves of yesteryear or of other cultures have become

²⁷See “Les stratégies matrimoniales,” *op. cit.*

²⁸See in particular “Les sens pratique,” *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 54-75.

²⁹*Le métier de sociologue*, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-299.

³⁰As is well known, the “house,” in traditional societies, designates both the dwelling (goods) and the family itself (the genealogical body).

veritable utopias or lost worlds, let alone *robinsonnades*. Yet when Bourdieu comes upon these same practices within a contemporary petty bourgeoisie, or among today's housewives, he treats them as "short-term and near-sighted strategies," as "anarchic reactions" which reveal a "disparate collection of half-baked ideas," a "cultural *sabir*," "a hodge-podge of decontextualized notions."³¹ Yet the same fundamental logic is at work in both these contemporary practices and those of Kabylia or Béarn: the difference is that the contemporary ones now operate independent of the *locus* which governed their use in traditional societies. What becomes problematical in the *Outline of a Theory of Practice* is thus not the notion of practice which it adumbrates but rather that of space or place which it presupposes.

(b) Yet there is a similar problem with the use of the term "strategy" by Bourdieu. The term is justified by the idea that practices constitute so many responses to particular conjunctures. At the same time, however, Bourdieu insists that these are not really strategies at all in the stricter sense of the word: there can, for example, be no choice among various possibilities (and thus no "strategic intention"); there can be no readjustment on the basis of improved information (and thus no genuine assessment and calculation as such); there can be no forecast of future configurations but only a world presumed stable, a cyclical repetition of the past). In short, "it is because these subjects do not strictly speaking *know* what they are *doing*, that what they do has the possibility of meaning more than they are able to know."³² Hence, Bourdieu's characterization of such practices as "knowing ignorance,"³³ a craftiness that does not know itself.

With such "strategies"—governed by their specific locus, unconsciously intelligent—the most traditional form of ethnology tends to make its comeback. For the latter, indeed, its insular objects of study were characterized as ethnic units both *coherent* and *unconscious*, two features which are in fact inseparable. In order for coherence to be postulated, as the precondition of a scientific knowledge and of its epistemological position and model, such knowledge must be posited at a distance from the society in question. The unconsciousness of the group under study was the very price to be paid for its coherence (a price it was then made to pay). Society was able to be constituted as a system only if it was unaware of itself: thus justifying the inevitable corollary, that the ethnologist was needed in order to find out what such a society was without knowing it. Today, ethnologists would scarcely make such claims or even think them: how is it then possible for Bourdieu to do just that in the name of that other discipline which is sociology?

Sociology—to the degree that it defines "objective structures" on the basis of the "regularities" furnished by statistics (which are themselves derived from empirical research) and sees every "situation" or "objective conjuncture" as a "particular state" of one of these structures³⁴—must seek to account for the adaptation of a practice to a given structure or its discrepancy. How is it that it is generally the harmony between practices and structures (the latter being materialized into "particular configurations") which tends

³¹"Avenir de classe . . .," op. cit., pp. 11-12. Bourdieu in any case fails to take into account studies of individual consumers' strategies in our own societies. See for example (on A.O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* [Cambridge, 1970]) the above article, p. 8, note 11.

³²*Esquisse*, pp. 175-177 and 182; "Avenir de classe . . .," pp. 28-29; etc.

³³*Esquisse*, p. 202.

³⁴*Esquisse*, pp. 177-179.

to be observed and confirmed? In general, the reply to this question will posit some reflex or instinctive mechanism in the practices themselves, or attribute some objective skill or ingenuity to their practitioners. Bourdieu rightly rejects both such options, and substitutes his own “theory” for them, seeking to explain the adaptations of practice to structure through the former’s *genesis*.

It might of course be suggested that the terms of the problem have been stacked in advance. Of the three elements in question—structures, situations, and practices—only the last two (which correspond to one another) have been empirically observed, while the first is a hypothetical model constructed afterwards on the basis of statistics. Even before the matter of “theory” can be engaged, therefore, there are two preliminary epistemological questions to be addressed: (a) as to the alleged “objectivity” of the “structures” in question, an objectivity perpetuated mainly by the conviction that the sociologist’s discourse is the discourse of the real; and (b) as to the limits of the practices and situations under observation, and in particular of their statistical representations, when compared with the global systems that structural models are supposed to explain. These problems are, however, left unexamined in the haste to construct theory as such.

Under these circumstances, then, Bourdieu needs a concept which will adjust practice to structure at the same time that it can account for discrepancies between the two. He needs a supplementary rubric or term, and discovers it, appropriately enough, in the very process which is at the heart of his specialization as a sociologist of education, namely, *acquisition* as such. Acquisition proves to supply the necessary mediation between the structures which organize it in the first place and the various “dispositions” it can be supposed to produce. This “genesis” implies an internalization of structures through acquisition, and a subsequent externalization of what has been thus acquired (the so-called *habitus*) in daily practice. A temporal dimension is thereby introduced into the problem: practices (expressing what has been “acquired”) correspond adequately to situations (manifesting a given structure) if and only if, during this process of internalization/externalization, the structure in question has remained stable; if it has not, an inevitable discrepancy or misalignment of practices will result from their fidelity to the older state of the structure at the moment of its internalization, and its transformation into the *habitus*.

On such a view, structures can change and thus become a principle of social mobility, perhaps indeed the only such principle. For what is acquired *cannot* change and has no movement of its own, being the mere locus of the inscription of structure, the marble into which their history is carved. Nothing happens in the area of acquisition which is not somehow the result of some previous exteriority: as in traditional conceptions of primitive and/or peasant societies, nothing moves there, and there is no history save what external forces introduce. The immobility of this memory guarantees its theory that the socioeconomic system will continue to be faithfully reproduced in the various practices. In the long run, then, it is not acquisition or apprenticeship (visible phenomena) which play the central role in Bourdieu’s system, but rather what has been acquired, the *habitus*.³⁵ And the latter is there to serve as the underpinning of an explanation of society

³⁵The concept and the term *axis* (*habitus*) derive from Marcel Mauss (*Sociologie et anthropologie* [Paris, 1966], pp. 368-369); meanwhile, in well-known texts which Bourdieu quotes, Panofsky had underscored the theoretical and practical importance of the *habitus* in medieval society (see *Métier de sociologue*, pp. 287-289). In Bourdieu’s own work, the idea is an old one: see *Le Métier de sociologue* (pp. 11, 52, etc.) on sociological

in terms of its structures. Yet there is a heavy price to pay for such a “solution,” most notably in the fact that the hypothetical base or support in question, the *habitus*, must remain unverifiable and invisible.

What interests Bourdieu is the genesis of practices, the modes by which they are generated. Not, as with Foucault, on account of what they produce, but rather for the sake of what produces them. From the ethnological studies which examined such practices to the sociology that elaborates a theory of practice, there has thus been a fundamental displacement of discourse towards the *habitus*, whose synonyms (*exis*, *ethos*, *modus operandi*, “common sense,” “second nature”), definitions, and justifications begin to proliferate.³⁶ The hero of this particular narrative has changed, and a passive, nocturnal actor, the *habitus*, has been substituted for the cunning multiplicity of the earlier “strategies.”³⁷ Henceforth, as to their basic agent, the observable phenomena of a given society will be attributed to the former: indeed an essential character, since “he” enables a kind of circular movement within the theory—from “structures” we move to the *habitus* (always in italics), and thence to “strategies” which readjust to “conjunctures,” themselves reassimilated to the original “structures,” whose effects and determinate states they are.

In reality, however, this circle passes from a *construct* (“structure”) to a *hypothetical* reality (the *habitus*), and from there to an interpretation of empirically *observed* facts (strategies and conjunctures). What is even more striking than the heterogeneous status of these various elements in the theory is the role it assigns to the ethnological “fragments,” which are supposed to fill up the holes. The Other—whether Kabyle or Béarnais—thus supplies the missing ingredient that makes the theory work and helps it “to explain everything.” Indeed, this distant outsider presents all the features which defined the *habitus* itself: coherence, stability, absence of self-consciousness, and territoriality (the acquired knowledge, habit, etc., constituting the equivalent of patrimony). Thus, within Bourdieu’s theory, the ethnological “other” or native is represented by the *habitus* itself, that invisible space where, as in the Kabyle house, the structures are inverted as they are internalized, and where that “text” then is inverted a second time as it externalizes itself in the form of practices which merely look like free improvisations. The Kabyle house—the object of Bourdieu’s most brilliant ethnological analysis—is thus lodged within theory as its silent and “ultimately determining” memory, concealed beneath the metaphor of the *habitus* and conferring on the latter hypothesis something like a referential verification or a tangible reality and density. Yet its very metaphorization by theory turns this “reference” into the merest verisimilitude, and the Kabyle house lends *habitus* its form alone, and not its content. In any case, Bourdieu is more interested in showing the necessity and usefulness of such a hypothesis for theory than in demonstrating its reality. *Habitus* thereby becomes a place of dogma, if by that term we understand the affirmation of a certain “real” which discourse requires in order to make totalizing claims. It doubtless shares with most dogmas the heuristic function of displacing and renewing lines of research.

“schemata,” or *L’Amour de l’art* (Paris, 1969, p. 163) on “taste.” This notion is in his work today surrounded with an impressive battery of properly *scholastic* terms and axioms, interesting symptoms of a possible return of medieval order within contemporary technocracy.

³⁶See *Esquisse*, pp. 175, 178-179; “Avenir de classe . . .,” pp. 28-29; etc.

³⁷See the celebration of the hero, in “Avenir de classe . . .,” pp. 28ff. We may therefore now study the “strategies of the *habitus*” (*ibid.*, p. 30, italics mine).

These texts of Bourdieu use their analytic content to fascinate and their theoretical content to polemicize. As I read them, I feel the hold of a passion that they exasperate while arousing it. They are made of contrasts. By the scrupulous examination of practices and of their logic—with a rigor that doubtless has no equivalent since Mauss—they finally subsume the latter under a mystical reality—the *habitus*—whose function it is to provide the mechanism of their reproduction. Subtle descriptions of Béarnais or Kabyle tactics suddenly give onto abrupt truths, as though such lucidly pursued complexity needed the brutal counterpoint of a dogmatic reason. His style also knows its contrasts, perverse and labyrinthine in its pursuit, massively repetitive in its affirmations: a peculiar combination of an “I know, I know” (this proliferating and transgressive ruse) and a “still and all” (there *must* be some totalizing meaning). In order to escape this aggressive seduction, I will suppose (in my turn) that something essential for the analysis of tactics *must* be at stake in this contrast. The blanket characterization Bourdieu’s “theory” casts over these tactics, as though to extinguish their flames by certifying their subsumption under socio-economic rationality, or by declaring them unconscious and thus in some sense inoperative as agents, ought to teach us something about their relationship to all theory.

By their criteria and procedures, these tactics make so autonomous a use of institutional and symbolic organization that were we to take them seriously the scientific representation of society would be lost in them. The postulates and ambitions of the latter could not resist; normalities, generalities, divisions of material, all give before the transversal and “metaphorizing” proliferation of these *different* microactivities. Mathematics and exact sciences are involved in an interminable refinement of their specific logic in the attempt to follow the random microbial movements of non-human phenomena. As for the social sciences, however, whose object is even more “subtle” just as their instrumentation is cruder, there would remain as an ultimate option only to *defend* their models (or in other words, their will to mastery) by exorcizing such a proliferation. And in fact, following the tried and true methods of exorcism itself, they consider the latter a singular (or local) phenomenon, something unconscious (that is to say, alien in its very principle) and as revealing, unwittingly, the knowledge its judges have of it already. When the “observer” is locked securely enough into his judiciary institution, and thus is sufficiently blind, the operation is successful and the discourse it produces seems to hold good.

Nothing like this happens in Bourdieu, however. To be sure, at some (relatively obvious) level, he also seems to move out (in the direction of the tactics, the objects of study) only to return again (in a confirmation of professional rationality): a kind of false *sortie*, a mere textual “strategy.” But does this hasty retreat not suggest that he himself *knows* the (perhaps mortal) danger such overly intelligent practices offer to scientific knowledge? This would be some distantly Pascalian combination of the disintegration of reason and a dogmatic faith. Bourdieu knows too much about scientific knowledge and the power on which it is founded, just as he knows these tactics only too well, whose ruses he replays with such virtuosity in his own texts. He must therefore lock all these ruses up behind the bars of an unconscious and negate, through the fetish of the *habitus*, anything reason lacks to be other than the reason of the strongest. He will thus—with the doctrine of the *habitus*—affirm the *contrary* of what he *knows*—a most traditional popular tactic—and this defense (a homage paid to the authority of reason) will then afford him

the scientific possibility of observing tactics in carefully circumscribed places.

If this is the case (but *who* would be in a position to say so?), Bourdieu can teach us as much by his own “dogmatism” as by his “case-histories.” The discourse which conceals what he knows (rather than hiding what he does not know) would have the precise “theoretical” value of *practicing* that knowledge; it would thus be the result of a *conscious* relationship to its own ineradicable exteriority, and not merely the theater of an elucidation. Is it possible that such discourse thereby itself rejoins that “knowing ignorance,” accused of being knowledgeable without knowing it, precisely because it knows only too well what it neither says nor can say?

V. THE ARTS OF THEORY AND THE THEORY OF THE ARTS

When theory, instead as is so often the case of being discourse upon other, preexistent discourses, ventures into non- or preverbal domains in which there are only practices without any accompanying discourse, unique problems arise. There is a sudden shift, and the rockbottom of language is missing. The theoretical operation suddenly finds itself at the limits of its normal terrain, like a car at the edge of a cliff—beyond, nothing but the sea.

Foucault and Bourdieu work on the cliff when they attempt to invent a discourse that can speak of nondiscursive practices. Nor are they the first to do so: without going back to the flood, we can at least say that no theoretical research since Kant has been able to do without some overt statement as to its relationship to nonverbal, nondiscursive activity, to that immense “remnant” of everything in human experience which has not been tamed and symbolized by language. Only one science has been able to avoid this confrontation: setting a priori conditions for itself so as to lie in wait for things within that limited field where they can be “verbalized.” This is *experimental* science, which anticipates its objects within that grid of hypothesis and models which will “make them speak,” its battery of questions, like so many hunters’ traps, transforming the silence of things into answers, into language.³⁸ A genuinely theoretical inquiry, on the contrary, does not forget, cannot forget, that alongside the relationship of various scientific discourses among each other, there persists their mutual relationship to everything which has had to be excluded from such discourse in order to found it in the first place. Theoretical discourse thus retains its link to the proliferation of what does not (yet?) speak, among which must evidently be numbered the practices of everyday life itself. Theory is thus *the memory of this wordless remnant*, the Antigone of what is refused admittance to the halls of science. Theory constantly attempts to reintroduce this unfortunate reminder back into a scientific space where technical constraints have made its omission “politically” (and supposedly in a provisory way) necessary. But how can it manage to do so? By scandal or by strategem?

To answer this question we must return for a moment to Foucault and Bourdieu, whose important findings are significantly divergent, and indeed virtually mark the two poles of the present field of research. Still, they share a certain process of construction and a similar operational schema, in spite of their different objects of study, problematics,

³⁸Kant already said as much in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*: the scientist is a “judge who forces witnesses to reply to questions he has himself formulated.”

and perspectives. They may thus be said to constitute two distinct variants of a “recipe” for theories of practice. As in cooking, a recipe can be applied in quite different circumstances and for quite different purposes, and also has its tricks and its good and bad practitioners. Yet in the same way that a cooking recipe is punctuated with a certain number of action imperatives (blend, beat, bake . . .), so also the theoretical operation can be resumed in two steps: extract, and then reverse—first the “ethnological” isolation of an object, then its logical inversion.

The first step *disengages* particular practices from a seamless web, in order to constitute them into a distinct and separate corpus, a coherent *whole* which is nonetheless *alien* to the place in which theory is produced: Foucault’s panoptical procedures, or Bourdieu’s Kabyle or Béarnais “strategies.” Meanwhile, in both instances, the genre (for Foucault) or the place (for Bourdieu) thereby isolated is taken to be the metonymy of the whole species: a part, observable because it has been circumscribed, is used to represent the (undefinable) totality of practices in general. To be sure, in Foucault, this isolation is used to make sense out of the specific dynamics of a given technology; a certain *découpage* is thus generated by the historian’s work. In Bourdieu, an analogous isolation is supposedly imposed by the defense of patrimony around a given space, and is offered as a socioeconomic and a geographic fact. Yet the same ethnological and metonymic *découpage* is common to both analyses.

In the second step, the unity thus isolated is reversed: what was obscure, unspoken, and culturally alien, suddenly becomes the very element which throws light on the theory and upon which the discourse is founded. In Foucault, procedures embodied in the surveillance systems of school, army, or hospital, micro-apparatuses without any discursive legitimacy, techniques utterly foreign to the *Aufklärung*, have suddenly become the very rationale which makes sense of our own society as well as of the human sciences. Both as objects of study and as techniques, they allow Foucault and his discourse to become virtually panoptical in their turn, and to see everything. In Bourdieu, the distant space of subtle, polymorphous, and transgressive strategies is similarly inverted, coming to document and articulate a theory which now sees the same practices reproduced everywhere. Reduced to the habitus which they manifest, these essentially instinctive and unconscious strategies now allow Bourdieu to explain everything and to transform everything into consciousness. Thus, in spite of the emphasis by Foucault on the results of the procedures he examines, and that laid by Bourdieu rather on the “essential principle” of which his strategies are the effects, both perform the same operation, which consists in transforming secret and aphasic practices into the central axis of their theories, and making this essentially nocturnal population over into a mirror in which their explanatory discourse can shine forth.

This very “tactic” marks their theories as members of the same species of practice they analyze, even though their metonymic reduction of their own objects allows them to repress the very operation that generates their theories in the first place. Foucault, of course, already studies the determination of discourse by procedures in the case of the human sciences: his own analysis, however, betrays an apparatus analogous to those whose functioning it was able to reveal. We would have to study the differences between the panoptical procedures Foucault has told us about, and the twin gesture of his own narrative, which consists in isolating a *foreign* body of procedures and *inverting* its obscure content into a luminous text.

We must first examine this twin gesture in more detail, above and beyond the two theoretical works hitherto studied here. In fact, such procedures, far from being exceptional, amount to an ancient recipe for theory which is no less interesting for all that. We need only mention two well-known examples from the turn of the century: Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* and Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. They also, in constructing their theories of practice, situate such practices in a "primitive" and closed space, a realm which is properly "ethnological" in contrast to our own civilized societies: and in that obscure place they discover the theoretical formulation of their analysis. Thus, it is in the sacrificial practices of the Arunta of Australia—the most "primitive" of all primitive peoples—that Durkheim discovers the basis of a social theory and a social ethic appropriate for modern society: The restriction that sacrifice imposes on the unlimited will of the individual renders coexistence and mutually agreed conventions possible; thus, for Durkheim, renunciation and abnegation enable plurality and contracts, which is to say society itself: the acceptance of limits is the foundation of the social contract.³⁹ For Freud, meanwhile, the essential concepts of psychoanalysis may be detected in the practices of the primal horde: incest, castration, the emergence of Law from the death of the father.⁴⁰ Such detours are all the more striking in that no direct experience validates them. Neither Freud nor Durkheim had any occasion to observe the practices they discuss, and had as little first-hand experience of the terrain as Marx had of factories.⁴¹ How is it then that such practices become reconstituted into an enigmatic closure in which the ultimate secret of theory can be read, as it were, backwards?

Today, such practices in which we surprise the secret of our own existence are no longer distant and unfamiliar, but grow ever nearer with time itself. It would be vain to seek this ethnological reality in Australia or at the beginning of history, when it is lodged at the very heart of our own system (panoptical procedures) or on the outskirts, if not the very center, of our cities (Kabyle or Béarnais strategies), perhaps even closer still (the "unconscious" itself). Yet however close its content, the ethnological *form* persists. We must therefore first interrogate this form—a privileged figure of our modernity—in which practices housed at great distance from knowledge nonetheless hold the key to its secrets.

It is not exactly of its own free will that theoretical reflection keeps practice at a distance, in order to be forced outside of itself to study this exterior object which it then only needs to invert to return it to its own house. Its procedural steps are in fact repetitions imposed on theory by history: the regions in which the nondiscursive procedures it studies are found were formed by the past and constituted by it into so many Indian reservations for enlightened science. Such regions came to function as something like a *frontier*, in the course of the establishment of the various scientific disciplines by the *Aufklärung*; and gradually came to stand as so many "resistances" and unassimilable differences within the scientific texts whose canons are established from the 18th century on. So it is that in the name of progress a new differentiation comes into being: that of the *arts* of doing, on the one hand, formulas for practical operations, increasingly inventoried in popular

³⁹Emile Durkheim, *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (Paris, 1968); and see also W.S.F. Pickering, *Durkheim on Religion* (London, 1975).

⁴⁰Freud, *Totem and Taboo*.

⁴¹See Fritz Raddatz, *Karl Marx, une biographie politique* (Paris, 1978).

literature;⁴² attractive to the “observers of man”;⁴³ and, on the other hand, that of the *sciences* which a new episteme brings into being.

This distinction no longer coincides with the traditional opposition between “theory” and “practice” (the “speculation” which deciphers the book of the cosmos, and its concrete “applications”), but rather now designates two quite distinct *operations*: one discursive, in and by language, the other lacking in discourse. Indeed, from the 16th century on, the idea of *method* revolutionizes the relationship between knowing and doing: legal and rhetorical practices, slowly transformed into discursive “operations” exercised on diversified fields and thus into techniques for transforming a specific milieu, gradually impose the fundamental schema of method itself: a *discourse* which organizes a way of *thinking* into a form of *doing*, the rationalized administration of a certain production and an operation designed for specific fields. Such is “method,” the very source of contemporary scientificity. And in a sense, it constitutes the systematization of that *art* which Plato, in the *Gorgias*, assigns to the realm of activity.⁴⁴ Yet method now organizes its technical knowledge by way of discourse. The boundaryline no longer runs between two hierarchical types of knowledge, one speculative, the other attached to particularities, the one absorbed in reading the order of the world while the other is content to explore the detail of things within the framework devised by the first; rather, the boundary now runs between practices articulated in discourse and those which are not (or not yet) verbalized.

What will be the status of such forms of nonverbal technical know-how, such techniques without writing (since the discourse on method is both writing and knowledge)? The realm of skill is made up of multiple but undisciplined operativities, a proliferation which does not obey the laws of discourse but is already obedient to those of production, the ultimate value of a physiocratic and subsequently of a capitalist economy. Such activities thus challenge the primacy of scientific writing over the organization of production; they alternately exasperate and stimulate the technicians of language; they propose a conquest, and not a conquest of inconsequential practices, but rather one of “ingenious,” “complex,” and “operative” types of knowledge. From Bacon to Christian Wolff or Jean Beckmann, therefore, an immense effort is made to colonize this vast reservoir of “arts” and “crafts” which, not yet able to be articulated as sciences, can nonetheless be introduced into language by means of a “description” and thereby increasingly “perfected.” With these two terms—that of “description” which derives from narrativity, and that of “perfection” which aspires to technological progress—the situation of the “arts” is fixed: near, yet outside the boundaries of science.⁴⁵

The *Encyclopédie* is the summa as well as the manifesto of this process of collation: a *Reasoned Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts and Crafts*. It juxtaposes “sciences” and “arts” in the promise of a future assimilation: the former are operatory languages whose grammar and syntax constitute formal systems, the latter techniques still waiting for an enlightened knowledge, yet falling short of it. In his article on *Art*, Diderot seeks to

⁴²See the catalogue of the exposition, *Le livre dans la vie quotidienne*, Bibliothèque nationale, 1975.

⁴³Louis-François Jouffret founded the *Société des Observateurs de l'homme* in 1799.

⁴⁴*Gorgias*, 465a.

⁴⁵J. Guillerme and J. Sebestik (“Les commencements de la technologie,” in *Thalès*, Vol. XII, 1966, pp. 1-72) give a series of examples of this intermediary status: arts are objects of *Description* (pp. 2, 4, 32, 37, 41, 46-47, etc.).

clarify the relation between these two disparate entities. We have an “art,” he tells us, “if the object is to be contemplated”: a distinction between performance and speculation which is more Baconian than Cartesian. The same distinction is reduplicated within “art” itself, depending on whether the art in question is merely represented or actually put into practice: “Each art has its speculation and its practice: the former, the inoperative knowledge of its rules; the latter, the habitual and unreflected use of those same rules.” Art is thus a form of knowledge which operates outside enlightened discourse and is absent from it. Indeed, such technical know-how can even outrun enlightened science by its very complexity. Thus, speaking of geometry in the arts, Diderot notes: “It is obvious that academic geometry is in its elements far more rudimentary and undeveloped than the geometry of the workshops.” Calculus is, for example, quite inadequate for problems of leverage, friction, textile deformations, clockwork, and the like. The desirable solution would be the “appropriate task” for an ancient “experimental and manipulative mathematics,” even though the “language” of the latter has remained undeveloped, owing to “the dearth of its own proper words or terms” and the “abundance of synonyms.”⁴⁶

By “manipulative” [*manouvriers*] Diderot, following Girard, refers to those arts which are limited to the “adaptation” of raw materials: cutting, trimming, joining, etc., without conferring on them some “new being” (by smelting, composition, etc.) as the properly “manufacturing” arts do.⁴⁷ They “form” a new product as little as they dispose of a language of their own; they are simply forms of *bricolage*. But as knowledge is reorganized into new hierarchies according to the criterion of productivity, such arts win a twofold value: of reference, owing to their operativity, and of opening new lines of development, owing to their “experimental and manipulative” subtlety. In their very incommensurability with the more properly “scientific” languages, they come to constitute an *absolute* of practical activity (in other words, a form of efficacy which, detached from discourse, nonetheless embodies its productivist ideal), as well as a *reserve* of uncatalogued knowledge in workshops and in the countryside, a *Logos* hidden away in handicraft and already hinting at the future of science. There is thus introduced into the relationship of science to the arts the problem of time lag: the *epistemologically superior* sciences are separated by a *temporal handicap* from these arts or forms of technical know-how which they are supposed, in time, to elucidate.

“Observers” therefore throng towards such practices which are both distant from the sciences and ahead of them. Fontenelle urged this as early as 1699: “The workshops of our artisans show a spirit and an inventiveness of all kinds which has hitherto failed to attract notice. People need to examine and to reflect on instruments and practices which are so useful and so ingeniously devised . . .”⁴⁸ These will become the collectors, describers, and analysts. Still, even though they here recognize a type of knowledge which preceded that of the scientists, they must nonetheless disengage the former from its “improper” language, transform into a specific discourse of its own these so-called “marvels” of everyday handicraft. Science will turn all these Cinderellas into princesses;

⁴⁶*Encyclopédie* (Geneva: Pellet, 1773), Volume 3, article *Art*, pp. 450-455.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, article *Catalogue*, by David after a manuscript of Girard. See on this subject Guillerme & Sebestik, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁸Fontenelle, Preface to *Histoire de l'Academie royale pour 1699*, where *Sur la description des Arts* is published; quoted in Guillerme & Sebestik, p. 33, note 1.

and with this aim, the type of ethnological operation to be performed on such practices is henceforth secured: the latter's *social isolation* demands a kind of "education" which will, by *linguistic inversion*, make them presentable in scientific writing.

It is noteworthy that from the 18th to the 20th century, historians and ethnologists have, from their standpoint, always considered techniques as essentially respectable. They are content to note what operations the latter perform, without interpretation—description is enough. They meanwhile consider mere "legend" those stories by which a given group tries to place or symbolize its own activities, yet another strange example of the disparity between the treatment of practices and of discourse. Where the first registers the "truth" of doing or of practical activity, the second unmasks the "lies" of speech. Indeed, the brief descriptions of the former contrast strikingly with the prolix interpretations which have made myths or legends a privileged object for the professionals of language, for clerks long trained, with their hermeneutic procedures passed down from jurists to professors and/or ethnologists, to comment and gloss referential documents and "translate" them into scientific texts.

At length, this development is complete, and the field of wordless practices has been historically circumscribed. A hundred and fifty years later, Durkheim will scarcely have to modify the "ethnological" description—but merely reinforce it—when he takes up the problem of the "arts," that is, according to him, "those things which are pure practice without theory." Here is the absolute of "operativity" in all its purity. Durkheim continues: "An art is a system of practical activities adjusted to particular ends, and these activities are either the product of traditional experience transmitted by education or the result of the personal experience of the individual." Lodged in particularity and bereft of the generalizing power of language, art is no less a "system" and no less organized by "ends"—and these two basic postulates now entitle science and ethics to speak *in the place* of art and to hold that "proper" or intrinsic discourse which it lacked. Also characteristic is the interest of this pioneering theorist of education and of sociology for artistic production and acquisition: "The only way to acquire an art is to place one's self in contact with the objects on which it works and to perform this activity one's self." Thus Durkheim no longer opposes the "immediacy" of its operations to some lag or neglect of theory with respect to "manipulative" knowledge, as Diderot did; but the former retains a hierarchy based on education. "An art," Durkheim continues, "can no doubt be self-conscious or enlightened, to use this key word of the *Aufklärung*, but such reflection is not its essential ingredient, since it can exist without it. Yet there exists no art which is fully reflexive."⁴⁹

Is there a science, then, which is "fully reflexive"? In any case, in a terminology still akin to that of the *Encyclopédie*, which spoke of "contemplation," theory is assigned the task of "reflecting" on this new "totality." More generally, for Durkheim, society is a text which only he can decipher; by the same token, there is a knowledge inscribed in these practices, but not yet illuminated. Science will be the mirror in which it can be read, and will offer a language to "reflect" this immediate, precise, yet wordless and unconscious operativity, already intelligent and yet at the same time unformed.

As Durkheim observed about sacrifice (which is "closer to us than its apparent

⁴⁹E. Durkheim, *Education et sociologie* (Paris, 1922), pp. 87ff. See Bourdieu, *Esquisse*, p. 211, who sees in this text a "perfect description" of "learned ignorance."

crudeness would lead us to believe”⁵⁰), art is a kind of knowledge which is essential to science yet illegible without it. This is to be sure a dangerous position for science itself, since it is left only with the power to articulate what it lacks in its own right. Thus a kind of complementarity is envisaged between science and art, or even a kind of mutual articulation, as Wolff, following Swedenborg and anticipating Lavoisier, Desaudray, Auguste Comte, and others, will propose in 1740: “a *third man* who would unite science and art in himself, and who would make up for the weaknesses of the theoreticians, just as he would free lovers of the arts from the erroneous idea that the latter might perfect themselves without any theory altogether”⁵¹ This mediator between “the man of theorems” and “the man of experience”⁵² would be the *engineer*.

The “third man” has haunted enlightened (philosophical or scientific) discourse and still does, but he did not end up taking the form anticipated. The place ultimately assigned him (and today slowly reduplicated by that of the technocrat) was the result of the progressive detachment, throughout the 19th century, of art from its own techniques on the one hand, and the geometrization and mathematization of those techniques on the other. Little by little whatever could be detached from individual performance was “perfected” in the form of *machines*, which then constitute an administrable complex of forms, raw material, and forces. These “technical organs” are now withdrawn from manual competency (which they surpass when they become machinery) and placed within a new space of their own, under the supervision of the engineer: they now belong to “technology.” Thus the older technical know-how is little by little emptied of what formerly articulated it in the practical activity of individuals; and, as its sheer techniques are withdrawn and turned into machines in their own right, it tends itself—bereft of the language of its procedures (which are now returned to them and even imposed on them by machines)—to be reduced to the condition of some merely *subjective* knowledge, taking on the quasi-secret appearance of “intuition” or “instinctive” skills, whose status remains undetermined. Thus the optimization of technique in the 19th century, drawing on the arts and crafts for the models, pretexts, or constraints of its mechanical inventions, leaves nothing behind for the practices of daily life but a terrain swept clear of means or products of their own: something like a domain of folklore, a double silences zone bereft of verbal discourse as well, henceforth, of even those “manipulative” languages it used to wield.

Yet such practices retain a kind of knowledge, one now missing its technical apparatus (of which machines have been made) and whose activities have no legitimacy in the sight of a reigning productivist rationality, as is the case with the everyday skills of cooking, cleaning, sewing, and the like. Meanwhile, this remnant left over by technological colonization acquires the value of purely “private” activity, becomes charged with the symbolic investments of daily life, begins to function beneath the aegis of collective or individual particularity, is in short made over into something like the active and legendary memory of everything still stirring in the margins or interstices of the dominant scientific or cultural norms. These remaining, privatized practical activities or modes of doing—indices of singularity, poetic or tragic murmur of daily life itself—are now

⁵⁰Durkheim, *Formes élémentaires*, op. cit., p. 495.

⁵¹Christian Wolff, Preface to the German translation of Belidor, *Architecture hydraulique*, 1740; quoted in Guillerme & Sebestik, p. 23.

⁵²H. de Villeneuve, “Sur quelques prejuges des industriels” (1832), quoted in Guillerme & Sebestik, p. 24.

massively introduced into novel or tale, where they find a new space of representation—that of fiction, peopled with those quotidian virtuositities and skills which science cannot handle and which become the signatures of those micro-narratives of everyone's anonymous daily life. *Literature* as such is now transformed into the repertory of practices which lack scientific copyright; and they will later also find a privileged place in the stories patients tell in psychiatric institutions or on the psychoanalyst's couch.

This is to say that now "stories" of all kinds endow daily practices with the register of *narrativity*, even though they only offer the latter in fragmentary or metaphoric forms. This is in fact a continuation and a variation (in spite of the discontinuities in epistemes) in the long tradition of narrative documents which from folk tales—those storehouses of schematic activities—all the way to the "Descriptions of Arts" of the classical period, present technical activities in the form of *narratives*. In this tradition must still be numbered the contemporary novel, as well as those micro-novels which are ethnological descriptions of handicraft or culinary techniques, and so on. This tradition and this continuity suggests that narrativity has a fundamental theoretical relevance to the study of the practices of everyday life.

The "return" of such practices in narration must be linked to a vaster yet historically more indeterminate phenomenon that might be called the *aestheticization of knowledge* implied in technical know-how. Indeed, stripped of its procedures, this kind of knowledge most often passes for "taste," "tact," even "ingenuity"—characteristics of artistic or biological intuition—a kind of knowledge which is unself-conscious, or at least whose self-consciousness cannot provide the mastery of inner reflexivity. Between practice and theory, it occupies a "third" place, nondiscursive, primitive, originary, a kind of "source" of all the things to be differentiated and elucidated by more "advanced" systems.

This *knowledge cannot be known*. Its relationship to practice gives it the status of myths or fables, namely, of being statements of an unconscious knowledge: in both cases, a knowledge upon which individual subjects do not reflect, betraying its presence without being able to appropriate it, such that they are finally merely the tenants, and not the proprietors, of their own know-how. Their statements do not make us ask if knowledge is present in them (we assume it is), but this knowledge can only be *known* by someone other than the speakers themselves. As with the skill of poets or painters, that of the practices of daily life can only be known by way of an interpreter who illuminates it in his own discursive mirror, without possessing it any more than they do. This knowledge therefore in the last instance belongs to nobody: it circulates from the unconsciousness of its practitioners to the reflexivity of its non-practitioners without finally depending on any individual subject. It is an anonymous and referential knowledge, a mere condition of possibility for technical or learned practices.

Freudian psychoanalysis offers a particularly striking version of this model of a marginalized knowledge, bereft both of reading procedures (it has no proper language of its own) and of any legitimate proprietor (there is no subject that corresponds to it). Psychoanalysis functions on a presupposition which has only been validated by its own effects, namely, that there is a kind of *knowledge*, which is however *unconscious*; reciprocally, it is the unconscious alone that knows.⁵³ Patients' narratives [*Krankenge-*

⁵³A constant theme in Freud, although the status of this "knowledge" remains theoretically undecided.

schichten] tell this particular story at interminable length; and indeed psychoanalysts since Freud have learned it again from their own experience: “people already know everything”—something which the analyst, however, in the position of the “subject who’s supposed to know,” is supposed to permit them to articulate. It is as though the workshops of Diderot have become the very metaphor of a repressed and recontained space in which that “experimental and manipulative” knowledge of which he spoke anticipates the discourse a psychoanalytic theory or “academy” might hold upon it. Analysts often say about their clients (and about everybody else): “Somewhere, deep down, they know the truth.” “Somewhere”: but where? It is their practices that know it—gestures, conduct, ways of talking and walking, etc. Knowledge is certainly there, but whose knowledge? So rigorous and precise is this knowledge, indeed, that all of the criteria of scientificity seem to have been transported bag and baggage into the realm of the unconscious, leaving only its fragments and effects on the other side, ruses and tactics of the sort that used to characterize the “arts” themselves. In this inversion, *reason* is now what is unself-conscious and cannot speak—the *unknown* and the *in-fans*—while “enlightened” consciousness is little more than the “improper” language of that particular knowledge.

But this reversal has more significant consequences for the primacy of consciousness than it does for the traditional model of the relationship between knowledge and discourse. In the handicraft “workshops” as well as the Freudian unconscious, a fundamental and primitive knowledge is stored away, a knowledge which runs ahead of enlightened discourse, but which lacks any culture of its own. The analyst proposes—for the “knowing” of the unconscious just as much as for that of handicraft—the chance for “proper words” and for distinctions between synonyms. Whatever stirs dimly in this well of knowledge can at least partially be “reflected” by theory into the broad daylight of “scientific” language. So, across three centuries, and in spite of the vicissitudes of consciousness or the successive transformation of scientific epistemes, what remains the same is a binary relationship between two terms: on the one hand, a referential and “uneducated” knowledge, on the other, an explanatory discourse which brings forth into the light the inverted representation of its dim source. This discourse is “theory.” It retains its ancient and classical meaning of “seeing/showing” or “contemplating” (*theorein*) and is thus very precisely “en-lightened” or “en-lightening.”

VI. KANT AND THE “ART” OF THINKING

It is characteristic that Kant should raise the question of the relationship between an art of doing (*Kunst*) and science (*Wissenschaft*), or between technique (*Technik*) and theory (*Theorie*) in the course of research which slowly moved from the study of taste to a critique of judgment itself.⁵⁴ On this trajectory which leads from taste to judgment, he encounters art—as the parameter of a form of practical knowledge which transcends knowledge and aesthetic form alike. Kant discerns in this type of practical know-how what he felicitously calls “logical tact” (*logische Takt*). Thus inscribed within the orbit of

⁵⁴On the evolution from the project of a *Critique of Taste* (1787) to the composition of the *Critique of the Faculty of Judgement* (1790), see Victor Delbos, *La Philosophie pratique de Kant* (Paris, 1969), pp. 416-422. Kant’s text may be found in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, section 43 (“Von der Kunst überhaupt”), *Werke*, ed. Weischedel (Insel, 1957), Vol. 5, pp. 401-402.

an aesthetic, the art of doing is placed beneath the sign of judgment, an “a-logical” condition of thought.⁵⁵ The traditional antinomy between “operativity” and “reflection” is here surmounted by a viewpoint which, recognizing an *art* at the very root of thought, makes judgment the “middle term” (*Mittelglied*) between theory and praxis. The art of thinking thus constitutes a synthetic unity between the two.

Kant’s examples deal specifically with daily practices: “The faculty of judgment transcends understanding . . . Faculty of judging the dress of a chambermaid. Faculty of judging the dignity appropriate to a given building, the type of ornament which does not contradict the end in view.”⁵⁶ Judgment does not bear solely on social “decorum” (the elastic equilibrium of a network of tacit contracts) but more generally on the *relationship* among numerous elements: it exists thus only in the act of concretely creating a new ensemble by a decorous correlation of the older relationship with a supplementary element, just as one adds a red or an ochre to a picture, transforming it without destroying it. This transformation of a given state of equilibrium into another one is the principle characteristic of an “art.”

Kant sharpens this definition by quoting a general discursive authority which is however always local and concrete: in my part of the world, he writes (*in meinem Gegend*: in my region or country), the “common man” (*der gemeine Mann*) says (*sagt*) that magicians (*Taschenspieler*) exercise knowledge (anybody can do it who knows the trick), while acrobats (*Seiltänzer*) exercise an art.⁵⁷ Walking a tightrope involves maintaining an *equilibrium* of every instant by recreating it with perpetually renewed interventions; preserving a relationship which is never acquired once and for all, and which ceaseless invention must renew while seeming to “perpetuate” it. Thus an art of knowledge finds an admirable definition, all the more so since the practitioner himself necessarily belongs to this equilibrium which he modifies without compromising it. In this capacity for making a new ensemble out of a preexisting harmony and maintaining the latter’s formal relationship throughout a variation of elements, he participates in what is essentially an artistic production: such would be the incessant innovation of taste within practical experience.

But this art also designates everything in scientific work itself which does not merely depend on the (indispensable) application of rules and models and in the last instance remains what Freud will also call “a matter of tact” (*eine Sache des Takts*).⁵⁸ Freud had in mind diagnostic practice, the matter of judgment which, in a practical intervention, calls into question a relationship or an equilibrium between a multitude of elements. For Freud as well as for Kant, this involves an autonomous faculty, one which can be refined but not taught: “Lack of judgment,” Kant tells us, “is very properly what is called stupidity, and this vice knows no remedy.”⁵⁹ It is a vice which affects science just as much as anything else.

⁵⁵See A. Philonenko, *Théorie et praxis dans la pensée morale et politique de Kant et de Fichte en 1793* (Paris, 1968), pp. 19-24; Jürgen Heinrichs, *Das Problem der Zeit in der praktischen Philosophie Kants* (Kantstudien, Vol. 95, esp. pp. 34-43); and Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 120-165, 331-350.

⁵⁶Quoted in A. Philonenko, op. cit., p. 22, n. 17.

⁵⁷Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, section 43.

⁵⁸Freud, *Gesammelte Werke*, XIII, p. 330; XIV, p. 66; etc.; and see M. de Certeau, *L’Ecriture de l’histoire* (Paris, 1978), p. 310.

⁵⁹*Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, quoted in A. Philonenko, op. cit., p. 21.

Between understanding (which knows) and reason (which desires), the faculty of judgment is thus a formal “arrangement,” a subjective “equilibrium” between imagination and comprehension. It has the form of a kind of *pleasure*, one which is relative to a mode of exercise rather than to exteriority, setting in play the *concrete* experience of a *universal* principal of harmony between imagination and understanding. It is a *sense* (*Sinn*), but one that is “common”: common sense (*Gemeinsinn*) or judgment. Without dwelling on the details of a thesis that denies the ideological division between various forms of knowledge, and thus their social hierarchy, we can at least observe that this kind of tact links a (*moral*) freedom, an (*aesthetic*) creation, and a (*practical*) action—the very three elements already present in “ripping-off,” the example we have given above of a contemporary daily “tactic.”

Perhaps the antecedent of this form of judgment invested in an ethical and poetic act is to be sought in the older religious experience, when it was also a kind of “tact,” the apprehension or creation of “harmony” in particular practices, the ethical and poetic gesture of *religare* (tying up), of creating a harmony in an indefinite series of concrete acts. Newman also sees this as a kind of “tact.” But as the result of historical displacements which have singularly restricted the kinds of equilibrium available to the religious version of “tightrope walking,” aesthetic practices were gradually substituted for these religious ones, and this aesthetic practice had itself increasingly been isolated from operativity and scientificity to the point where, from Schleiermacher to Gadamer, it has become that marginal experience to which a whole “hermeneutic” tradition appeals to found its critique of objective science. As a function of genius assisted by a particular conjuncture (all the way from the art of J.S. Bach to the French Revolution), Kant is positioned at a crossroads where the ethical and aesthetic form of the concrete religious act alone remains (while its dogmatic content disappears), and where artistic creation retains the sense of a moral and technical act. This transitive combination, which already in Kant wavers between a “critique of taste” and a “metaphysic of manners,” furnishes an inaugural modern reference for the analysis of the aesthetic, ethical, and practical nature of everyday know-how.

Kant returns to the determination of “tact” in a piece of enlightened journalism, published in the very thick of the French Revolution in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (September, 1793) on the subject of a “proverbial saying”: “It May Be Right in Theory But It Won’t Work in Practice.”⁶⁰ This important theoretical text thus takes as its object (and its title) a proverb, and expresses itself in the language of the press (so that scholars have called this a “popular work” of Kant). The text is part of a debate in which, after Kant’s own replies to Christian Garve’s objections (1792), articles of Friedrich Gentz (December, 1793) and August Wilhelm Rehber (February, 1794) take up the commentary on this particular proverb, which is a *Spruch*, that is, at one and the same time a proverb (wisdom), a maxim (judgment), and an oracle (or enunciation which authorizes knowledge). Is it as an effect of the Revolution itself that this proverb receives the philosophical pertinence of a verse (or *Spruch*) of scripture, mobilizing around itself, as

⁶⁰“Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis.” The text (in Kant, *Werke*, ed. Weischedel, 1964, Vol. VI, pp. 127ff) was reedited and presented by Dieter Henrich with the entire debate 1793-1794 on the relationship between theory and praxis, in Kant, Gentz, Rehberg, *Über Theorie und Praxis* (Suhrkamp, 1967); references are to this remarkable dossier. See also the valuable English translation of Kant’s text published separately: Kant *On the Old Saw: That may be right in Theory but it won’t work in Practice*, introduction by G. Miller, trans. E.B. Ashton (Philadelphia, 1974).

in the ancient editions of Talmud, Koran, or Bible, the exegetical knowledge of theoreticians?⁶¹ The philosophical debate around this proverb also evokes the New Testament story of the *Infans* speaking in the midst of scribes, or the popular theme of the “wise three-year-old.”⁶² Henceforth, forever, it is no longer a question of childhood or even of old age (as when Kant’s *Gemeinspruch* is translated as “old saw”), but rather of anybody and everybody, of the “common” or “ordinary” (*gemein*) man, whose *saying* as so often calls into *question* the intellectuals themselves and causes them to proliferate commentaries.

This common “saying” does not affirm a principle. It ratifies a fact, which Kant interprets as the sign, either of the insufficient interest of the practitioner in theory proper, or else of insufficient development of theory in the theoretician himself. “Whenever theory tends to fail in practice, the fault is not that of theory itself, but it is rather that there is not yet enough theory of the type that should have been learned from experience”⁶³ Whatever his examples, Kant organizes his demonstration in the form of a three-act play where the common man appears under the guise of three distinct characters (the businessman, the politician, and the man of the world) whose opposition to three philosophers (Garve, Hobbes, and Mendelssohn) enables the analysis of problems of ethics, constitutional law, and the international order. What is essential here is less the variety of examples than the principle of a *formal harmony* of mental faculties within judgment. The latter can neither be localized in scientific discourse, nor in any particular technique, nor in a particular aesthetic expression: it is an art of thinking, and one on which ordinary practices depend just as much as theory. As in the acrobat’s activity, it has ethical, aesthetic, and practical significance. It is therefore not surprising that theoretical discourses on practice such as those of Foucault or Bourdieu should ultimately be governed by an art. But at that point the most un-Kantian question arises, as to the nature of such discourse, both the art of saying or doing theory and the theory of art itself, namely, a discourse which is both memory and practice, the *narrative of tact*.

VII. STORYTELLING AND ITS TIMES

As we stroll around these practices and contemplate them from above or from below, we keep missing something, which can neither be said nor “taught,” but only “practiced.”

The soundings attempted above suggest the following conclusion, that if an “art” can only be practiced, it, outside its own exercise, there exists no specific enunciation of it, then language must also represent a certain practice. If the art of speaking is itself at once an art of doing and an art of thinking, then it ought to constitute both theory and practice simultaneously: this art is storytelling. We must now make two remarks on this subject, the first an observation, the second a hypothesis for future research:

(1) A *fact* is first of all indicative. Practices, practical activities, are not merely the objects of study of theory. They organize the very construction of theory itself. Far from

⁶¹On Kant and the Revolution, see L.W. Beck, “Kant and the Right of Revolution,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXXII, 3 (July-September 1971), pp. 411-422; and esp. L.W. Beck, ed., *Kant on History* (New York, 1963).

⁶²Luke, II, 41-50, on the child Jesus, “seated in the midst of the doctors, listening to them and questioning them.” This theme is renewed in popular literature with the *Wise Three-year-old*, a text analyzed by Charles Nisard in *Histoire des livres populaires* (Paris, 1854), Vol. II, pp. 16-19, quoted by G. Bollême, *La Bible bleue* (Paris, 1975), pp. 222-227.

⁶³*Über Theorie und Praxis*, p. 41.

being external to theory, or on its doorstep, the “procedures” of Foucault, the “strategies” of Bourdieu, and tactics in general, *provide the operations within which theory is itself produced*. (Here we also rejoin the stance of Wittgenstein with respect to “ordinary language.”)

(2) In order to clarify the relationship of theory to those procedures that produce it as well as to those which are its objects of study, a *possibility* comes to mind: a *storytelling* discourse. The narrativization of practices would then be a practical activity within the text itself, with its own procedures and tactics. Indeed, since Marx and Freud (to limit ourselves to modern times), authoritative examples are scarcely lacking; and in any case, Foucault tells us that he does nothing but tell stories. As for Bourdieu, the tale plays the part of the pro-logue and the reference point for his own system. In scholarly works, narrative often infiltrates a non-narrative discourse, by way of the title, or through alternating sections (such as the analysis of “cases,” “life stories,” group testimony, etc.), or as a kind of running counterpoint to the text (quotation of fragments, interviews, remarks of historical individuals, etc.), in which it plays the role of a ghostly double. Is it not then time to recognize the *scientific* legitimacy of narrative, which is then seen less as some ineradicable remnant (a remnant still to be eradicated), but rather as a functional necessity within discourse? and to entertain the hypothesis that narrative theory is indissociable from any theory of practices, as its precondition as well as its production?

This would, for instance, involve recognizing the theoretical value of the novel, which has been the principal zoo in which everyday practices have been kept since the beginnings of modern science. It would mean restoring the “scientific” importance of that immemorial gesture which has always consisted in telling the *story* of this or that practice. If that were the case, then the popular tale would turn out to offer a model for scientific discourse and not simply a collection of raw materials and texts to be processed: it would lose its status as a document that does not know what it is saying, summoned before a discourse which knows what it doesn’t. Now, on the contrary, such storytelling becomes a form of “know-how” perfectly adapted to its object, no longer the “other” knowledge, but a variant of scientific discourse and a source of theoretical authority. This would account for the alternations and complicities, the procedural homologies and social interconnections, between arts of speaking and arts of doing: the same practices would be produced sometimes in the verbal realm, sometimes in the gestural; playing back and forth on this alternation, with equally subtle tactics in either register, passing the ball back and forth—from workday to evening chats, from cooking to legends and gossip, from the ruses of lived history to those of recounted history.

Does such narrativity amount to a return to the “Descriptions” of the classical period? There is one fundamental difference: the story or tale no longer has the obligation to approximate as closely as possible an external “reality” (a technical operation, for instance), or to accredit itself by an exhibit of the “real.” On the contrary, the narrative generates a fictive space and distances itself from reality, or at least pretends to divorce itself from historical conjuncture: “once upon a time” But this is precisely a *tactic* in our earlier sense, a way of scoring or taking a trick: the narrative does not merely *describe* such a “hit,” it *effects* one in its own right: theatrical, a tight-rope act, a matter of “timing,” in its circumstances (place and time), interlocutor, a skill at manipulating, arranging, “placing” a given utterance and displacing a preexisting set of relations, all are artfully combined.

A narrative does have content, but that content is also part of the art of “scoring”: it makes a detour through the past (“the other,” “in former times”), or by the way of a quotation (a “saying” or a proverb), in order to seize an occasion and make an unexpected modification in the precarious balance of things. Here too, discourse is characterized more by the way it makes its moves, than by what it tries to show. Nor should one be taken in by what it says it does; storytelling produces effects rather than objects—narration rather than description. It is an art of speaking. The public knows this very well, distinguishing art from mere gimmicks (what it *suffices* to know for you to be able to do it) and from revelation/vulgarization (what everybody always *has* to know . . .): something in narrative escapes these categories of the sufficient and necessary and is better understood in terms of the *style* of the tactics in question.

This kind of art is easy to see at work in Foucault—suspense, quotations, ellipses, metonymies, an art of conjuncture (the current situation, the public) and of unique occasions (either epistemological or political); in short, an art of “scoring” by means of historical fictions. Foucault’s (obviously immense) erudition is not the principle reason for his efficacy, but rather this art of speaking which is also an art of thinking and of doing things. He draws on the most subtle rhetorical procedures, and on a calculated alternation between representational tableaux (exemplary “narratives”) and analytic ones (theoretical distinctions) to produce an effect of conviction in his chosen public, systematically displacing the fields in which he successively intervenes and restructuring the system. Yet this narrative practice remains essentially an art of otherness, modifying the laws of conventional historiographic “description” without substituting new ones for them. It does not have a discourse of its own, does not speak itself, but amounts essentially to a practice of the non-locus (*fort? da?* there and not there all at once), pretending to efface itself behind an erudition and a set of taxonomies it busily manipulates, like a ballet dancer pretending to be a librarian. Nietzschean laughter meanwhile spreads through the historian’s text.

We therefore need a more explicit scientific model in order to determine the relationship of narrative to tactics: a model where the theory of practice takes the specific form of narrating tactics. We will find such a model in the important work of Marcel Détiénne and Jean-Pierre Vernant on the concept of “metis” in ancient Greece: *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*.

Historian and anthropologist, fully as much as Foucault or Bourdieu, Détiénne has in his work deliberately opted for narrative. He does not examine the tales of ancient Greece in the name of a value alien to their own. He rejects the break or boundary which would turn them into “objects” of knowledge, or into objects on which knowledge must be increased, caverns in which a storehouse of “mysteries” challenges scientific investigation and waits for it to disclose their real significance. Nor does he presume the existence of secrets hidden away behind these stories, whose progressive revelation then justifies a special position for their interpreter. Tales, stories, poems, treatises, are for him already essentially practices: they say exactly what they do; they are the gesture they themselves signify. There is thus no reason to couple them with glosses that tell us what they mean unconsciously, or to determine that other reality of which they are the metaphorical expression. They are nothing but a network of operations whose thousands of characters embody the forms and the hits or strikes to be made within them.

Within this space of textual practices, as in a chess game whose figures, rules, and

historic traditions have been expanded to a properly literary scale, D  tienne knows the thousands of moves people have already made (just as the memory of previous moves is essential in chess), but he also makes new ones of his own, using this preexisting repertory to tell stories of his own in turn. He re-cites the great tactical gestures, and in order to tell what they say can only use their own language. You want to know what they *mean* [ce qu'ils veulent dire]? All right, I'll tell them all over again. Questioned about the meaning of a particular sonata, Beethoven is supposed to have sat down and re-played it. The same is true for the traditions of oral storytelling as Jack Goody has analyzed them: recombination, repetition, whose art consists in "adjusting" the new combination to specific circumstances and a specific public.⁶⁴

Narrative thus does not *express* practices, does not merely represent this or that move, it performs them; and this is what you begin to understand as you enter into this realm. This is why D  tienne ends up telling Greek tales in order to speak Greek practices: his earlier books reperform Greek narratives on the contemporary stage in an effort to outline their essential moves.⁶⁵ He thereby protects them from museographic reification by exercising an art which historiography has forgotten after long having held it in high esteem, an art whose importance (at least, for other cultures) anthropology has begun to rediscover, from L  vi-Strauss' *Mythologiques* to Bauman and Sherzer's *Ethnography of Speaking*.⁶⁶ namely, the art of storytelling. D  tienne's work thus exploits that intermediate terrain between what historiography used to practice and what anthropology reexamines as an alien object; and here, at last, the love of storytelling wins scientific relevance. The tale-teller evolves his twists and turns exercising an art of thinking. Like the knight in chess, he describes the immense checkerboard of literature by way of the gambit of his narrative repertory; like a pianist, he "interprets" his fables through their very performance. This performance, indeed, emphasizes two distinct figures in which the Greek art of thinking found privileged expression: dance and combat—in short, the very figures exercised by the writing of the narratives itself.

D  tienne and Vernant's book is in this sense nothing but a collection of tales.⁶⁷ It is devoted to a form of intelligence which is somehow always "submerged in practice," and in particular practice characterized by a combination of intuition, shrewdness, anticipation, mental agility, a sense of the best chance, all kinds of supplementary skills, and a certain maturity of experience.⁶⁸ Extraordinarily constant throughout Greek history, even though missing from the ideal image (and theory) that Greek thought made for itself, *metis* is related to everyday tactics by its skills, knacks, and strategems, and by the range of conducts that it governed, all the way from know-how to ruse.

Three features need to be retained from this description, not merely because they serve sharply to differentiate *metis* from other kinds of actions, but also because they can

⁶⁴Jack Goody, "M  moire et apprentissage dans les soci  t  s avec ou sans   criture: la transmission du Bagre," in *L'Homme*, XVII, 1 (January-March 1977), pp. 29-52; and see also Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge, 1977).

⁶⁵Marcel D  tienne, *Les Jardins d'Adonis* (Paris, 1972); *Dionysos mis    mort* (Paris, 1977); *La Cuisine du sacrifice* (in collaboration with Vernant: Paris, 1979).

⁶⁶See R. Bauman and J. Sherzer, eds., *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking* (Cambridge, 1974); and D. Sudnow, ed., *Studies in Social Interaction* (New York, 1972).

⁶⁷D  tienne and Vernant, *Les ruses de l'intelligence. La M  tis des Grecs* (Paris, 1974). English translation, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1978).

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

equally serve to characterize the tales in which *metis* is celebrated. These are the threefold relation of *metis* with the occasion itself, with disguise, and with a paradoxical invisibility. On the one hand, *metis* counts on the “right moment”—the *kairos*—in order to play upon it: this is essentially its practice of time. On the other hand, it seeks to perpetuate its own masks and metaphors, thus subverting the proper locus. Finally, it vanishes into its own act, as though lost in what it performs, without any mirror to represent it: it has no image of itself. Yet these three features of *metis* are equally characteristic of storytelling itself and may suggest a kind of “supplement” to D  tienne and Vernant: the form of practical intelligence analyzed by them and the way in which they analyze it must have some theoretical relationship, if the art of narrativity is to be considered as something like a *metis* in its own right.

In the balance of power in which it seeks to intervene, *metis* is the “absolute weapon,” the one that gave Zeus mastery over the other gods. It is a principle of economy: obtaining the maximum effect with the minimum force. And, as we know, it defines a whole aesthetic: since the multiplication of effects by a progressive restriction of means is also, but for different reasons, the very rule which governs practical arts as well as the poetic arts of speech, painting, or song.

This principle of economy helps to frame *metis* without really getting at its main-spring. The trick or reversal which leads this operation from its point of departure (weakness, lack of force) to its conclusion (multiplication of effects) depends on the mediation of a certain knowledge—a knowledge characterized by the gradual process of its acquisition and the never-ending accumulation of its particular understandings. The texts see this as a matter of “age”; the “experience” of the old is contrasted with the “rashness” of youth. This knowledge is made up of many distinct instants and many heterogeneous objects. It knows no general or abstract statement, no proper “locus.” It is essentially a *memory*,⁶⁹ whose contents are inseparable from the temporal occasions which provided them, whose singularities it interweaves. This memory draws on a multitude of events, circulating through them without ever possessing any of them (each one is *past*, its place lost, its time shattered), and weighs and anticipates “the multiple paths of the future” by combining antecedent or merely possible particularities.⁷⁰ Thereby a certain temporal duration can be introduced into the current balance of forces in order to modify it: *metis* counts on that accumulated time which is favorable to it as a way of prevailing over the unfavorable configurations of space. Yet its memory remains hidden (without a place specific to it) until the moment—the “favorable” or “right” moment—in which it can reveal itself. And the manner of its revelation remains temporal, though it is the very opposite of any effort to bury itself in duration. The lightning bolt of this memory gleams forth in the *opportunity*.

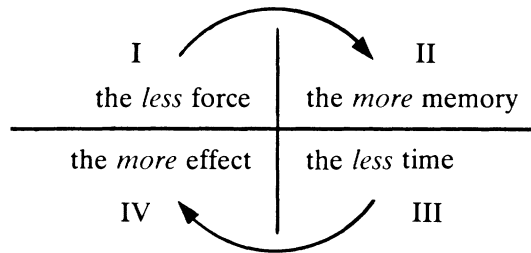
Encyclopedic, owing to *metis*’ capacity to accumulate past experiences and to take stock of logical possibilities, its knowledge is lodged in the smallest possible space within the opportunity, or *kairos*. The latter condenses the *maximum* knowledge into the *minimum* time. Reduced to its minimal format—a single act capable of transforming a whole situation—this concrete encyclopedia has something of the philosopher’s stone

⁶⁹“Memory” in the older sense of the term, as designating a presence to plurality of times which is not limited to the past alone.

⁷⁰Expressions in quotes are borrowed from D  tienne and Vernant, op. cit., pp. 23-25.

about it! Indeed, it explicitly evokes the logical motif of an identity between point and circumference, except that here extension is temporal, and the instant is its concentration. Provided we thus translate space into time, the coincidence between the indefinite circumference of experiences and the punctual moment of their recapitulation would offer an accurate theoretical model for the *kairos*.

We may now, limiting ourselves to these initial elements, propose a schematic representation of the type of “move” represented by the *metis*, as it moves from its initial point (I)—minimum of force—around to its terminal one (IV)—maximum of effect. The process would look something like this:



In I, force diminishes, while in II, knowledge and memory begin to augment; in III, time diminishes, while in IV effects augment. These increases and decreases are combined in inverse proportions, such that we have the following connections:

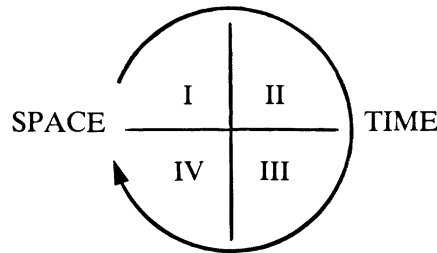
- from I to II, the *less* force there is, the *more* knowledge and memory is needed;
- from II to III, the *more* knowledge and memory there is, the *less* time is needed;
- from III to IV, the *less* time there is, the *more* considerable will be the effects.

The *kairos* is so crucial a *nodal point* in all the practices of daily life, as well as in those of the accompanying “popular” narratives, that we must examine these first indications in greater detail. Yet “opportunity” always subverts its own definitions, since it can never be abstracted from a conjuncture or a specific operation: it is not some fact detachable from the “move” which exploits it; as it finds itself inscribed in a chain of events, it works to distort their relations. It will thus be registered as a twist produced in a given situation by the conjugation of qualitatively heterogeneous dimensions (of which the standard oppositions of contraries and contradictions are only two specific forms). This wily process can be discerned with the set of indicators provided by the proportional relations listed above; those relations are comparable to those mirror effects (inversion, curvature, reduction, magnification) or tricks in perspective that allow *different* spaces to be juxtaposed within a single painting: except that in the sequence dealing with “opportunity,” such heterogeneous dimensions are rather given by time and space, equilibrium and act, etc., and involve the proportional inversion of relationships.

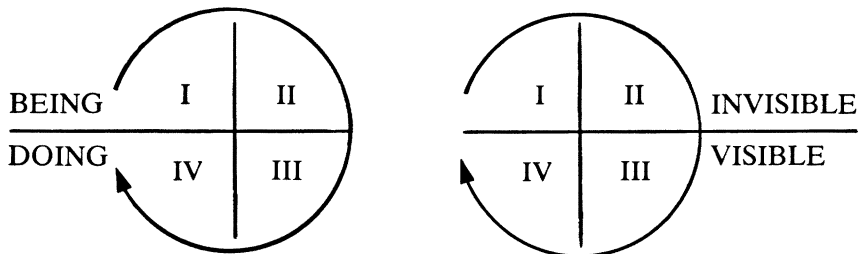
Among such qualitative differences which entertain inverted relations with one another, the most significant would seem to fall into two types, which are characterized by two distinct kinds of sequential reading:

(1) A difference between *space and time* imposes the following paradigmatic sequence: in the initial configuration of space (I), the world of memory (II) intervenes at the “right moment” (III), producing spatial modifications (IV). This sequence has, at the beginning and in the end, a spatial organization; in-between is time, an alien element

coming from elsewhere and producing the shift from the one spatial state to the next. There is, in short, an irruption of time between two states of equilibrium:



(2) A difference between *being* (an established state) and *doing* (a production and transformation) combines with the preceding one. This distinction plays upon an opposition between the visible and the invisible, without altogether coinciding with it. According to this new axis, the following paradigmatic sequence is established: given an initial visible configuration of forces (I), as well as an invisible accumulation in the area of memory (II), a punctual act on the part of this memory (III) produces visible consequences in the initial established order (IV). The first segment of the series involves existing situations, in which invisible knowledge eludes the surveillance of visible power; this static segment is then followed by an operational one. Distinguishing the twin-cycles of being/doing and visible/invisible we have the following representation:



These combinations may then be schematically recapitulated as follows:

	(I) Place	(II) Memory	(III) Kairos	(IV) Effects
TIME		+	+	
DOING			+	+
APPEARING	+		+	+

Memory mediates the spatial transformation. It produces, at the “opportune moment” (*kairos*), a break which also inaugurates something new. It is the strangeness, the alien dynamic, of memory which gives it the power to transgress the law of the local space in question: from out of unfathomable and ever-shifting secrets, there comes a sudden

“strike” to modify a given local order. The closure of the series thus depends on a visible transformation of a given spatial organization: yet the precondition of the latter is time itself, with its invisible resources, time with its alien laws which, in a surprise blow, snatches something from the proprietary distribution of space itself.

This schema, which is found in many narratives, would be something like their “minimal unity.” It can take on comic form, when memory—at the right moment—suddenly reverses a situation, after the fashion of: “But . . . you are my father! Good heavens, my daughter!” This pirouette is due to the return of temporality upon a quasi-spatial distribution of characters which failed to take it into account. There is also a mystery-story variant, in which the resurgence of the past disrupts hierarchical order: “So he’s the murderer!” Miracles also fall into this pattern: from out of another time, a time profoundly “other,” there suddenly rises a “god” endowed with the characteristics of memory, a silent encyclopedia of individual acts, a figure which, in religious narratives, faithfully represents that “popular” memory of those who have no space or land, and so have time—“Be patient!” Numerous are the variants of such recourse to an alien world, which can be expected to deliver the blow that will change an established order. Yet all such variants, enlarged into symbolic and narrative projections, may well be but the shadows cast by the practices of daily life as they search for the chance to transform their loci by means of memory.

Still a final point, the most decisive one, must be clarified: how is time articulated upon organized space? How does it use the “opportunity” to effect its break-through? In short, how can we think the implanatation of memory into a space which is already an organized whole? This is the moment of tactics, the moment of art. For the implantation is neither “localized” nor determined by memory itself: opportunities are “grasped,” not created. They are presented by a conjuncture, that is, by external circumstances in which only the trained eye can perceive the elements of a new configuration that might be wrought by the intervention of one supplementary detail. One final touch, and the trick will be turned: only a trifle is lacking for harmony to be reestablished in the realm of practice, a scrap, a remnant which these circumstances suddenly make precious indeed, odds and ends we can expect the invisible treasury of memory to supply. Yet whatever the fragment selected from this storehouse, it will have to be inserted into a configuration imposed from without, before it makes the latter over into its own unstable makeshift harmony. In the form memory takes in practical activity, it lacks any ready-made organization which could be applied as such; it marshals its forces according to events—artfully turning surprises into opportunities: it finds a home only in chance encounters, and in the space of the other.

Like those birds that always lay their eggs in the nests of other species, memory does its work in a locus which is not its own. It receives its form and its implantation from external circumstances, even if the missing detail, this minute element which gives a new sense to the whole plot, is its own invention. Its mobilization is inseparable from *alteration*; indeed, memory draws its very capacity to intervene from its alterability—mobile, adaptable, without a fixed locus. It has this permanent feature: it forms itself (and its “capital”) by *emerging from the other* (from circumstance), which it now *loses* (this being no more than a memory): whence a twofold change, both in itself (since its modification is the condition of its own exercise) and of its object, retained only when it is lost. Thus memory wastes away when it loses this capacity for alter-ation and can only be

constructed from events independent of it, in the expectation that something may happen which will be different from and alien to this present. Far from being either the shrine or the ashcan of the past, it thrives upon a belief in possibilities and vigilantly lies in wait for them.

Equivalent in the realm of time to what the “arts” of warfare are to space, the “art” of memory develops a capacity to inhabit the space of the other without possessing it, and to exploit this alteration of space without losing itself in the process. Such force is not the same as power (although its narratives may be used in the latter’s service): rather it has often been termed “authority”—whatever, drawn from collective or individual memory, “authorizes” or enables a reversal, a transformation of order or place, a transition to the qualitatively different, a “metaphor” for practice or for discourse. Hence the discerning use of “authorities” in all popular traditions. Memory comes from another place, it is “beside itself,” it can dis-place. The tactics of its art depend on these properties, and on its disquieting familiarity. In conclusion, I would like to emphasize some of its procedures, especially those which organize “opportunities” in everyday life: the play of alteration, the metonymic practice of singularities, and, as a kind of general effect, an unsettling and wily mobility.

(1) Practical memory is controlled by a multiple play of alter-ation, not merely because it is constituted and marked by external encounters, and consists in a collection of the successive blazons and tattoos of the other, but also because even those invisible inscriptions are called back to light only by new circumstances. The dynamics of this “recall” are consistent with those of the original inscription. Perhaps, indeed, memory is nothing but this “recall” or “call” of the other, whose imprint overprints a body already unconsciously altered by it. Then, at certain contacts, this deeper, secret, and originary writing would “come back out.” Memory is in any case played by circumstances, as a piano yields its sounds to the touch of hands: it is a sense of the other. Not unsurprisingly then, it is developed by relationship—whether of “traditional” societies or of love—and atrophies in the progressive autonomization of space and of the proper locus. It does more than register, it replies, until that moment when, its fragile mobility lost, and henceforth unfit for fresh alter-ation, it can only repeat its first replies over and over.

This system of responsible alter-ation organizes, moment by moment, the delicate touch whereby an intervention into a set of circumstances is achieved. The opportunity, seized on the wing, is thus essentially the transformation of a combat into a response, a “reversal” of that surprise which was anticipated without ever having been foreseen: the inscription due to an event, rapid and fleeting, is reversed and transformed into speech or gesture. Tit for tat: the liveliness and aptness of the retort are indissociable from a dependence on the successive instants of time, and from a vigilance which must be all the greater since there is no proper place in which we can protect ourselves from them.

(2) Response is singular, particular. In whatever system it happens, it is but one supplementary detail—a gesture, a single word—yet so appropriate that the whole situation is thereby completely reversed. Yet what else could memory be expected to furnish? It is made up of nothing but such details, of broken pieces, particular fragments: such are memories. Each one, when it emerges against a surrounding darkness, is part of a whole which has vanished. Its luminosity is that of metonymy. What is left of a painting is only this deep blue, a delicious wound; of a body, only this brightness in the eyes, or this grainy whiteness beneath a curl. Such particularities have the force of demonstratives:

this man bent over in the distance . . . *that* smell whose source we could no longer locate . . . Chiselled details, intense singularities, which already function in memory as they do when circumstances give them an opportunity to intervene: the same timing in both occasions, the same artful relation between a concrete detail and a conjuncture, the latter figuring alternately as the trace of a past event, or as the production of some new harmony.

(3) The strangest aspect of memory is doubtless its mobility, such that details are never identical to themselves: never mere objects (in which form they could not be retained), nor fragments (since they at once furnish the missing background), nor totalities (since they are not self-sufficient), nor even stable entities (since every fresh remembrance alters them). The “space” of this placeless mobility has something of the disembodied subtlety of a cybernetic world. Probably (but the reference provides a mere description, not an explanation) memory is the original model of the arts of practice, or of that *metis* which seizes its *kairos* to restore, to places invested with organized power, the peculiar pertinence of time itself.

Everything seems the same in the structure into which is introduced the detail that in reality changes its whole dynamic and modifies its equilibrium. Those contemporary scientific analyses which reinsert memory into its “social framework,”⁷¹ those clerical techniques of the Middle Ages of which Frances Yates speaks in *The Art of Memory*,⁷² and which prepared the modern spatialization of time by artfully turning memory into an architectural composition—neither was able to come to terms with memory’s detours, although both demonstrate the ways in which the *kairos*—instant of indiscretion, poison—has been mastered by the spatialization of scientific discourse, and the strategic reasons for this form of control. Scientific writing—the constitution of a proper locus—over and over again returns temporality to the normality of an observable and readable system. No surprises: the careful maintenance of space will eliminate time’s scandals.

Nonetheless, they return over and over again, noiselessly and surreptitiously, and not least within this very scientific activity itself: not merely in the form of the practices of everyday life which go on existing even without their own discourse, but also in the sly and gossipy practices of everyday storytelling. To see this you would have to do more than analyze the forms or repetitive structures of such stories (although that is also a necessary task): a practical know-how is at work in these stories, where all the features of the “art of memory” itself can be detected. We need to make an inventory of the moves and tricks which transform the legendary stories of a collectivity or the private conversations of daily life into so many “opportunities”; as is so often the case, they have for the most part been studied by the rhetoricians. Still, we may hazard a hypothesis as a starting point for future study: that in that art which narrates the arts and practices, the tactics, of daily life, in reality it is the latter which are at work, and the art of daily life can be witnessed in the tales told about it. The practice of D tienne and Vernant—to tell the story of that labyrinthine intelligence which is their object in the form of stories—is an exemplary one, a discursive practice of history which is at one and the same time its art and its discourse.

This is an old story. Aristotle himself, scarcely a tight-rope walker, enjoyed losing himself in this most subtle and labyrinthine of all forms of discourse. He had

⁷¹See Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la m moire* (The Hague, 1975).

⁷²See Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory*.

