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Reinventing the Subject: Michel de Certeau's Engagement with Michel Foucault

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Abstract

This paper attempts to reconstruct Michel de Certeau's critical engagement with Michel Foucault's theory of power by highlighting the way in which de Certeau tasks the subject to tactically oppose the dominant logic of power. This is inspired by the idea that for de Certeau, as opposed to Foucault's contention that it is almost pointless to talk about subjects as active agents who can subvert the totalizing effects of power given that there can be no possibility of a logic of resistance outside of power, there is always a remainder to this general logic of power, a silent but transgressive subject who maintains her reserve in the confines of her private life. Thus, following de Certeau, the paper argues that although subjects are always formed and transformed, shaped and reshaped through power, and that the possibility of a logic of resistance outside of power is seemingly next to impossible, there is always an outside to power, which means that strategic power can always be subverted and that even the most totalizing site of oppression can be a site of liberation. The paper is divided into two parts. The first part reconstructs Foucault's theory of power, with emphasis on the way in which power forms and produces the subject. The second part briefly reconstructs de Certeau's engagement with Foucault's theory of power. As we can see, this part highlights the way in which de Certeau tasks the subject to tactically oppose the dominant logic of power.

Keywords: *Power, Subject, Foucault, de Certeau, Strategy, Tactic*

As is well known, Michel Foucault's oeuvre has been characterized by the theme of the formation and production of the subject through power. In fact, in his 1982 essay titled "The Subject and Power", Foucault reminds us that the general theme of his research is not power but the subject.¹ As we can see, it is in this important work that Foucault clarified once and for all the main goal of his project during the last twenty years, which is, as Foucault writes, "to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects", and not simply "to analyse the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis."² In a similar essay titled "Technologies of the Self" that Foucault delivered as part of his lecture at the University of Vermont in 1982, Foucault reiterated the point that his main interest is not so much the analysis of power per se, but on how power forms and produces subjects. Foucault writes: "Perhaps I've insisted too much on the technology of domination and power. I am [now] more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination..."³ For sure, the notion of power is a central concept in Foucault, but it has to be understood as a means through which the subject is formed and produced. Again, Foucault's main concern is to articulate the way in which

¹ Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power", in *The Essential Foucault: Selections from the Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, eds. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 2003), 127. This essay was first published in English in 1982 as an appendix to a book edited by Hubert Dryfus and Paul Rabinow titled *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*.

² *Ibid.*, 126.

³ Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self", in *The Essential Foucault: Selections from the Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, eds. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 2003), 147. Emphasis added. It seems to me that towards the end of his academic career, Foucault had become largely preoccupied with the attempt to clarify the general trajectory of his project. For example, in the essay titled "The Political Technology of Individuals", another set of paper that Foucault delivered as part of his lecture at the University of Vermont in 1982, Foucault mentioned for the third time that the main goal of his project is to address the question concerning the formation and production of the subject through disciplinary power. Foucault writes, "And now my present work deals with the question: How did we directly constitute our identity through certain ethical techniques of the self that developed through Antiquity down to now?". See Michel Foucault, "The Political Technology of Individuals", in *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 404.

individuals through the mechanism of power have been made subjects, as well as to show how the individuals participate in the very act of dominating themselves—of transforming themselves into subjects—or, to use Foucault's own words, how the subject "...becomes the [very] principle of his own subjection".⁴

Now, as we will show later, Foucault argues that the notion of a subject as formed and produced through the manipulation of the body means that the subject is primarily an effect of power, rather than simply being subjected to power. Thus, for Foucault, the subject is not a victim of power (as the traditional conception of power, that is, juridical power, would have us believe) but a mode of power.⁵ As a mode of power, the subject becomes the very possibility for the reconfiguration of power's dominant logic. For this reason, there can be no possibility of a logic of resistance outside of power. Simply put, if subjects are to be conceived as effects of power, and by virtue of their being products of power they become the very modes of power, then, as Foucault argues, it is pointless to talk about subjects as active agents who can subvert the totalizing effects of power. For sure, this is a theoretical deficit in Foucault's theory of power which enables the social constructivist Michel de Certeau to situate his own project of reinventing the subject. Against Foucault, de Certeau refuses to view the subject as a passive agent of social transformation. For him, there is always an "other" to the general logic of power. In other words, de Certeau suggests that there is always a remainder to this general logic of power, a silent but transgressive subject who maintains her reserve in the confines of her private life. For de Certeau, this subject is not captured in Foucault's panoptic gaze. Thus, it can be argued that de Certeau's social constructivism expressed most visibly in his 1984 (but originally published in French in 1980) work titled *The Practice of Everyday*

⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1979), 203. Emphasis added.

⁵ See Claire Colebrook, "Certeau and Foucault: Tactics and Strategic Essentialism," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 544.

Life suggests that strategic power can always be subverted and that even the most totalizing site of oppression can be a site of liberation.⁶

It is in de Certeau's celebration of the possibilities of resistance to any disciplinary regime that this paper attempts to reconstruct his engagement with Foucault's theory of power by highlighting the way in which de Certeau tasks the subject to tactically oppose the dominant logic of power. However, we will argue that de Certeau's conception of tactical opposition does not necessarily suggest the need to think of some outside of power. In fact, for de Certeau, tactics deploys a new conception of a subject that does not simply function as an outside of power, but as a transgressive subject that moves within the already ordered constellations of power yet views it from a different vantage point.

Thus, if the Foucaultian conception of power says, "This is how we ought to behave", de Certeau's tactical opposition says "No, there is another way of behaving", a kind of behaviour or practice that escapes the panoptic gaze. We will argue further that de Certeau's engagement with Foucault's theory of power should not be viewed as a critique of its internal contradictions; rather, it must be viewed as an expansion of Foucault's theory of power to reveal what de Certeau calls "practices" that can be considered as points of resistance.

The paper is divided into two parts. The first part will briefly reconstruct Foucault's theory of power, with emphasis on the way in which power forms and produces the subject. The second part will articulate de Certeau's engagement with Foucault's theory of power. As already mentioned, it will highlight the way in which de Certeau tasks the subject to tactically oppose the dominant logic of power.

⁶ Kim Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 47.

Foucault on Power and the Subject

Recent scholars who engaged Foucault's theory of power normally began with the philosopher's famous work *Discipline and Punish*.⁷ The choice to begin with this very important work is understandable: it is in *Discipline and Punish* that Foucault distinguishes disciplinary power from previous forms of power that are based on violence and repression. As we know, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault uses the panopticon as a concrete example of a disciplinary instrument that is more efficient and more effective than the traditional conception of power as repression. This is because when one knows that she is being watched all the time, she behaves accordingly. With this panoptic gaze, according to Foucault, the subject becomes more docile and more useful. While there is nothing wrong if one begins with *Discipline and Punish* in studying Foucault's theory of power, we find it more strategic if we do it backward, that is, if we begin with the three important works that Foucault composed in the early 1980s (few years before his death in 1984), namely, "The Subject and Power", "Technologies of the Self", and "The Political Technology of Individuals".

Although these works are only a tiny fraction of Foucault's voluminous works, we are convinced that they are suggestive of what really is the main intention of the Foucaultian scholarship, of the main problem that Foucault wanted to see addressed. Our contention is that knowing the main goal of Foucault is a necessary condition for us to fully make sense of his many programmatic works from *Madness and Civilization* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* down to *Discipline and Punish* and the three volumes of *The History of Sexuality*. These early 1980s essays of Foucault may have cast the aura of his past works, but for sure they have mapped out a new and different trajectory that have somehow departed from the intention of the early Foucault. With this

⁷ For example, de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* was partly inspired by his reading of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. See John Marks, "Certeau and Foucault", *Paragraph* 22, no. 2 (July 1999): 127.

caveat, let us now briefly sketch Foucault's theory of power and the way in which it forms and produces the subject.

To begin with, Foucault distinguishes juridical or sovereign power from productive power. On the one hand, juridical power is negative power in the sense that it acts on or subordinates pre-given subjects.⁸ This type of power is thus something that is possessed and consciously exercised by an individual or groups of individuals for some pragmatic reasons, such as the furthering of one's own interest. But historically speaking, this type of power is possessed and exercised by the state, usually a repressive one. In "The Subject and Power", Foucault calls this a "relationship of violence", where power acts upon bodies—forcing them, bending them, destroying them until it closes off all possibilities for resistance.⁹ On the other hand, productive power is a type of power that has the capacity to form and produce subjects not through repression but through a positive mechanism. In other words, if juridical power is negative because it limits or it prohibits, productive power is positive because it produces, it creates, and it induces pleasure. Foucault calls this a "relationship of power", or, simply, power relation(s).¹⁰ Although the deployment of this type of power in modern societies according to Foucault has rendered juridical power obsolete, he did not deny that juridical power which is negative by nature remains a force today. However, Foucault argues that there is more to juridical power, that in modern societies, power is predominantly positive.¹¹ Thus, in Foucault, juridical power or conceptions of power based on legal models (law) or institutional model (state) cannot account for the subjectivation (*assujétissement*) of the subject. Foucault, therefore, suggests that we need to expand our understanding of power, that we need a new economy of power so that we better understand and explain the evolution of subjects from a mere "given" subject into a subject that is an

⁸ See Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 84.

⁹ Foucault, "Subject and Power", 137.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Colebrook, "Certeau and Foucault", 544. See also Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 84.

“effect” of power. For this reason, whenever we speak of “power” from a Foucaultian perspective, we refer to this positive conception of power.

Again, power for Foucault is not something that is possessed, but one that is exercised over subjects. Clearly then, power for Foucault is an activity that is performed on others. Thus, as Foucault writes, “...power exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action”.¹² This notion of activity or performance explains why Foucault understands power as a relation; in fact, Foucault always speaks of power relation in his writings. But it must be noted that what defines power relation for Foucault is not simply that it is exercised over subjects, but it is exercised on the actions of others in terms of a strategy. It is therefore an act that acts on others’ actions, which involves putting into play a certain mechanism, a strategy to implement power effectively and at the same time influence others. As Foucault remarks, power relation “...is a set of actions on possible actions”, and in the act of acting on others’ actions, power incites, induces, seduces, contrives, and even makes things easier or difficult.¹³ Now, what this positive conception of power reveals is that to act on others’ actions means to lead or govern others, which then means to structure the possible field of actions of others.¹⁴ And for Foucault, as one of the best ways to understand the nature of power, governmentality is the very movement through which the individuals are made “subjects”.¹⁵

It is important to note that for Foucault, for power to work effectively, it has to include the important element of freedom. In other words, for Foucault, power can only be exercised on free and autonomous subjects.¹⁶ It is worthwhile

¹² Foucault, “Subject and Power”, 137.

¹³ Ibid., 138.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, “What is Critique”, in *The Essential Foucault: Selections from the Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, eds. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 2003), 266.

¹⁶ Ibid., 138-139. See also Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 83. It is also important to note that juridical power is partly characterized by physical determination. Here, subjects are made to behave accordingly through the imposition of, say, law or force.

quoting here one of the longer passages in Foucault's "The Subject and Power", where he argues that freedom is a necessary element of power. Foucault writes:

... freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power (at the same time its precondition, since freedom must exist for power to be exerted, and also its permanent support since without the possibility of recalcitrance, power would be equivalent to a physical determination).¹⁷

The introduction of the concept of freedom here is important in fully grasping the specificity of power relation because it is only through the notion of freedom that a power relation and the eventual formation and production of the subject become possible. First, with freedom, the subject to whom power is exercised "is recognized and maintained to the very end as a subject who acts".¹⁸ Note that power for Foucault is an activity, an act that acts on others' action; and activity in this case is understood as an action of a free and autonomous subject. Second, and because of the first, it is only when the subject is free that, according to Foucault, the "... whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up".¹⁹ In other words, freedom opens the possibility of the subject both to reconfigure the dominant logic of power, and to transform herself into the very principle of her own subjection. Consequently, after the individual internalizes the values of the system (of domination), by virtue of her being free and autonomous, she assumes responsibility for her own subjection. As a result, it is now the subject that inscribes itself, prohibits itself, regulates itself, monitors itself, or, better yet, dominates itself. Indeed, the known, prohibited, regulated, monitored, and dominated subject is the product of its own making. This precisely explains Foucault's claim that the subject is nothing

¹⁷ Foucault, "Subject and Power", 139. For a thorough discussion on Foucault's notion of freedom, see Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 137-138.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

other than the performance of power. But again, this is possible only if the subject is a free and autonomous agent.

This type of positive power that is deployed in the act of leading or governing others is what Foucault calls “disciplinary power”. For one, power is disciplinary when individuals, after having been invested with power through the imposition of rules and procedures, made sure that they follow such rules and procedures because of the belief that this is the type of behaviour that is expected of them. With this self-imposed obedience, it would appear that the regulated subject is the same with the subject being produced, and therefore, as Judith Butler remarks, compulsory production is the subject’s own form of regulation.²⁰

Disciplinary power operates at a variety of scales, from that of factories to schools and hospitals. But the specific manner in which disciplinary power plays out is even better illustrated in the famous analogy of the Panopticon that Foucault so cleverly deployed in his seminal work *Discipline and Punish*.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault recounts the subjectivation of the prisoner through an investment of power on her body. Thus, Foucault’s conception of power as an action that acts on others’ action presupposes the existence of a “locus” as the seat of power, namely, the body. For sure, as an activity, power is performed on bodies; power is exercised on bodies.²¹ Now, in the exercise of power that targets the body (of the prisoner), a variety of techniques have been developed and deployed, such as detailed schedules and timetables, exercises and training, report-keeping, examinations and inspection,

²⁰ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 84.

²¹ As early as the writing of *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault already had the notion of biopower, that is, power directed primarily against the body. However, the concept of biopolitics, as a politics of the body, was not fully developed until the posthumous publication of Foucault’s lectures at the Collège de France from 1978-1979. For a thorough discussion on Foucault’s biopolitics, see Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

isolation of inmates, confession, and the regularization and normalization of bodily movements and gestures. Foucault employs Jeremy Bentham's famous model, the Panopticon, to illustrate clearly how, through these signifying practises, the full siege and invasion of the body of the prisoner becomes complete.

In Bentham's Panopticon, as we already know, a tower is strategically situated at the center of the prison which allows a single guard to watch over all prisoners while keeping himself unseen. This strategy has a profound effect on the prisoners so that even if there is no guard staying in the tower, they think that they are being watched all the time. As a result, the prisoners behave accordingly. Thus, with the disciplinary power of correctional institutions like the prisons, hospitals, psychiatric wards and, indeed of factories, it seems as though everyone is a prisoner in modern society as the system of internalization of rules inside these correctional institutions has been extended to the entire society, and individuals everywhere become their own guardians. Hence, for Foucault, "the new disciplinary system 'celebrated' the child, the deviant, the mad, and the criminal"²² because the subjugation of their souls feeds the social order and propels the functioning of the entire system of domination.

As we can see, the subjection signified by the prison does not suggest that the prisoner is regulated by an external power, as in the case of juridical power whereby an institution, such as the state, takes a pre-given subject and acts on it as a target of repression. On the contrary, as Butler remarks, "the prison acts on the prisoner's body, but does so by forcing the prisoner to approximate an ideal, a norm of behaviour, a model of obedience",²³ that, as we already intimated above, enables her to assume responsibility for her own subjection. Few years later, Foucault reiterates this point in volume 3 of *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault writes "...the imperative to care for oneself eventually took the form

²² Robert Wuthnow, et. al., *Cultural Analysis: The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault, and Jürgen Habermas* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 166.

²³ Butler, *Psychic Power of Life*, 85.

of an attitude...; it evolved into procedures, practices, and formulas that people reflected on, developed, and taught.”²⁴ This gives us the impression that subjection does not only suggest the subjugation of the body (of the prisoner), but a kind of regulation through which the body forms and produces itself. Put differently, the subjection signified by the disciplinary regime of the body denotes both the process of subjugation, and the formation and production of subjects. For Foucault, this is precisely how human beings are made subjects.

Now, despite the critical potential of Foucault’s theory of power, however, there is another key dimension of it, which appears to be antithetical to the very idea of critique: namely, Foucault’s belief on the impossibility of resistance outside the purview of disciplinary power. As already mentioned, Foucault argues that it is pointless to talk about subjects as active agents who can subvert the totalizing effects of power since subjects are conceived both as effects of power and as modes of power. Hence, if subjects are both effects and modes of power, resistance cannot emanate from some privileged groups or individuals, but pit against all. Thus, the answer to Foucault’s question “Who fights against whom?”²⁵ is that we fight against each other. Of course, Foucault talks about resistance in the three volumes of *The History of Sexuality* and in his 1982 essays; however, given the omnipresence of power and its capacity to constitute reality (and also for the reason just mentioned, that is, subjects are both effects and modes of power), Foucault seemed to have undermined the possibility of challenging the totalizing effects of power. Indeed, Foucault was forced to defuse his explosive theory. Let us briefly sketch Foucault’s take on resistance that is scattered in these texts before we proceed with de Certeau’s critical engagement with Foucault. The question we wish to press against Foucault is how we might meaningfully think of an opposition to power.

²⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 3: The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 44-45.

²⁵ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 27.

Perhaps, the best way to understand Foucault's concept of resistance is to quote a longer passage in *The History of Sexuality*, where Foucault famously said that "Where there is power, there is resistance". It reads:

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. Should it be said that one is always "inside" power, there is no "escaping" it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned, because one is subject to the law in any case? Or that, history being the ruse of reason, power is the ruse of history, always emerging the winner? This would be to misunderstand the strictly relational character of power relationships. Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead, there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations.²⁶

And in the introductory part of volume 2 of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault now explicitly laid down the main intention of the entire project of *The History of Sexuality*, which also reflects the aim of his *Discipline and Punish*, and was developed further in the 1982 essays (especially "The Subject and Power"), that is, is to "enable individuals to question their own conduct, to watch over

²⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 95-96.

and give shape to it, and to shape themselves as ethical subjects”.²⁷ Foucault writes:

As for what motivated me,²⁸ it is quite simple; I would hope that in the eyes of some people it might be sufficient in itself. It was curiosity—the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself. After all, what would be the value of passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower’s straying afield of himself.²⁹

For sure, we find in Foucault an attempt to at least cushion the totalizing effects of power. In fact, in his other famous essay titled “What is Critique?”, Foucault insists that the question of being governed cannot be dissociated from the question of not being governed. Foucault then asks the question “How not to be governed?”.³⁰ Here, Foucault seeks refuge in the power of critique. According to Foucault, “Critique would essentially ensure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call... the politics of truth.”³¹ Foucault thus suggests that the alternative to the totalizing effects of power is a critical attitude, an attitude that does not accept what the authority tells one to be true.³² Thus, by examining the effects of power (critique), the subject is able to stray afield of herself; she is able to get free of herself. Indeed, Foucault’s notion

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 13.

²⁸ Foucault refers to the entire project of *The History of Sexuality*.

²⁹ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 8.

³⁰ Michel Foucault, “What is Critique?”, in *The Essential Foucault*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 2003), 265.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 266. In fact, Foucault loosely define critique as the art of not being governed so much.

³² *Ibid.*

of (genealogical) critique may have been relevant in exposing the insidious effects of power, and, therefore, helped reduce, if not eradicate, domination to the minimum. However, with this critical rigor, as Colebrook remarks, there came the price of panopticism—a power so omnipresent that a standpoint outside of its purview is inconceivable.³³ And so, if power encompasses everything and has no outside to it, how then can we meaningfully think of resistance?

Because resistance for Foucault cannot escape, although it can alter, power, in the second volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault suggests that resistance can take the form of an aesthetics of existence.³⁴ According to Daniel Nica, this is the ethical turn in Foucault.³⁵ But for Nica, this Foucaultian conception of ethics “does not refer to a theory of moral rules, but to a relationship one has with himself/herself”.³⁶ Now, what this Foucaultian conception of ethics harbours is the notion of “self-creation”, which, according to Nica, suggests the idea of a subject who alters power, who invents new forms of discipline and stylizes her own existence.³⁷ Hence, the subject who questions her own conduct, watches over and gives shape to it, and shapes herself as an ethical subject is a subject who creates itself, and in turn becomes an ethical subject. This is precisely what Foucault meant by “aesthetics of existence” as a form of resistance.³⁸

³³ Colebrook, “Certeau and Foucault”, 550.

³⁴ Foucault explores the possibility of the aesthetics of existence as resistance by appropriating the Ancient Greeks’ conception of ethics. However, it must be noted that Foucault did not intend to make the Ancient Greeks’ conception of ethics as a model of self-creation for today’s subjects. Instead, Foucault believes that the way the Ancient Greeks conceive ethics could somehow provide some practical suggestions for self-creation for today’s subjects. For more on Foucault’s detailed discussion on the aesthetics of existence, see Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 2, 89-93.

³⁵ Daniel Nica, “The Aesthetic of Existence and the Political in Late Foucault”, in *Rethinking the Political in Contemporary Society: Globalization, Consumerism, Economic Efficiency*, ed. Viorel Vizureanu, 39-62 (Bucuresti: Pro Universitaria, 2015), 45.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ For more discussion on Foucault’s later concept of the aesthetics of existence, see Timothy O’Leary, “Foucault, Politics and the Autonomy of the Aesthetic”, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 4, no. 2 (1996): 273-291; Fabian Heubel, “From Techniques of Power

However, despite the great benefit that we can draw from Foucault's notion of aesthetics of existence as a form of resistance, there seems to be a serious flaw in his approach. One might read Foucault's ethical subject as being in fact a powerless subject. To show the paradoxical character of Foucault's notion of aesthetics of existence as a form of resistance, let us bring the issue of resistance in relation to law. As we already know, resistance for Foucault cannot be outside of power, or, in this case, the constitutive power of the law. Hence, as Butler argues, Foucault's notion of resistance is "located in a domain that is virtually powerless to alter the law that it opposes".³⁹ And since, as Butler argues, resistance here presumes the continuation of the law, therefore, resistance contributes to the perpetuation of power, of the system of domination. At the end of it all, Foucault's model of resistance is doomed to perpetual defeat. Thus, if we are to think of a meaningful opposition to power, resistance should not be viewed as a purely aesthetic event, but a political practice of opposition. Foucault's ethical subjects, therefore, must be politicized. Our take here is that there must be a standpoint beyond the purview of the panoptic gaze. Finally, it is at this precise point, regarding the powerlessness of Foucault's ethical subject, that de Certeau becomes relevant.

De Certeau's Engagement with Foucault

After presenting Foucault's notion of power in relation to the subject in the previous section, we have seen how he was very firm in asserting that the panoptic gaze is eminently inescapable. As Foucault argues, individuals cannot do anything that would lead to their emancipation from power's domination due to its pervasiveness in contemporary society. But as mentioned over and over

to Aesthetic Cultivation: Reflections on the Philosophical Turn of the Late Foucault", *Philosophy and Culture* 37, no. 3 (2010): 85-102; Marli Huijer, "The aesthetics of existence in the work of Michel Foucault", *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 25, no. 2 (1999): 61-85; and Cristian Iftode, "The Ethical Meaning of Foucault's Aesthetics of Existence", *Cultura* 12, no. 2 (2015): 145-162.

³⁹ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 97-98.

again, de Certeau contradicts this claim and argues that resistance is not impossible. He goes against this notion and explicated a different take on the subject as a social agent. He argues that the subject is not at all passive. In fact, as we will show later, there are practices that could lead to the individual's emancipation from the system she is in. This is precisely what this section will talk about.

As already intimated above, de Certeau viewed the subject as an active agent, that is, a transgressive subject who can subvert the repressive system. To better understand this concept, revisiting de Certeau's seminal work, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, would be necessary. As is well known, de Certeau particularly dedicated the book to the weak, the ordinary individual or the common man in the society. But most particularly, in this book, de Certeau shows how individuals can subvert the repressiveness of the system. In doing so, de Certeau introduces two groups of people in contemporary society, namely, the consumers or poachers and the producers, and links these to the concepts of strategy and tactics.

The producers, as the name suggests, are those individuals or groups that produce, while the consumers or poachers are the "ordinary" individuals who simply consume. When de Certeau links these concepts to the political system, the producers are viewed as those that occupy the seat of power. They could be the government officials, scientists, police forces, among other things. They hold a tremendous power and control over the society and its subjects. In fact, if we look at contemporary society, the dominant, or in de Certeau's language, the producer, is seen as coercive and powerful as it utilizes and exercises disciplinary techniques. In contrast, the consumers or poachers represent the ordinary individuals in the society, that is, those that do not have control and power over the organization and administration of society. Put simply, they are the consumers.

As already mentioned, the key to understanding de Certeau's concept of the subject as an active agent who can subvert the repressive system is to uncover the implication behind the dynamic interplay between the concepts of "strategy" and "tactics". The terms strategy and tactics have their origin in military theory. On the one hand, the term strategy refers to "the identification of key campaigns that are necessary to accomplish the main objective — in most cases, winning the war",⁴⁰ such as plans on the operations needed for victory to transpire. Tactics, on the other hand, are the techniques needed to win battles.⁴¹ To better understand de Certeau's usage of the concepts of strategy and tactics, it is worthwhile quoting some of the longer passages of *The Practice of Everyday Life*. He writes:

A distinction between strategies and tactics appears to provide a more adequate initial schema. I call a strategy the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed... By contrast with a strategy (whose successive shapes introduce a certain play into this formal schema and whose link with a particular historical configuration of rationality should also be clarified), a tactic is exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus, it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power.... It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of

⁴⁰Stan Goff, "The Tactics of Everyday Life," *Beautiful Trouble*. <http://beautifultrouble.org/theory/the-tactics-of-everyday-life/>. (accessed March 12, 2018).

⁴¹ Ibid. As we can, tactics for de Certeau is subordinate to strategy.

"opportunities" and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids.⁴²

As we can see, social and political institutions, for instance, the government or corporations, are able to formulate rules and establish dominance in the society and in turn influence the way individuals act and behave through a strategy. Indeed, a strategy can be viewed as the tool of the powerful. It is through a strategy that social and political institutions are able to "produce", such as the subject. And for de Certeau, the scientists, government officials, military personnel, and the like, all make up the producers that organize strategies of an administered society.

As indicated above, strategy is a way of asserting power over other people. When city planners, for example, design grids and frameworks for the organization of the city, they are strategically designing a rigid path for the city dwellers or ordinary individuals to follow. Also, a book of recipes and cooking techniques can be created under the principle of conforming to certain standards in a way that would compel individuals to behave accordingly. Or a police officer's assertion of authority over ordinary individuals maybe predicated on strategically organizing behavior, actions, values, and the like. Indeed, with these strategies, subjects are left with no choice, so it seems, but to conform to the repressive logic of the system. A strategy, therefore, serves as a powerful instrument of the "producers" for governance and administration.

Like the panoptic gaze of Foucault, therefore, strategy, for de Certeau, is the very instrument that allows producers to form and transform, shape, and reshape the subject. In other words, following Foucault, de Certeau believes that it is through this mechanism that individuals are made "subjects". However, contrary to Foucault's claim that individuals cannot escape the panoptic gaze, de Certeau believes that there is always a way out. Indeed, de Certeau believes that

⁴² Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 35–37.

ordinary individuals can subvert the totalizing effects of power, of strategy. This is where de Certeau's concept of "tactics" comes in.

As de Certeau sees it, tactics are the weapons of the poachers, of the ordinary individuals.⁴³ This is because for de Certeau, tactics allow poachers to utilize "places" and turn them into "spaces". What this means is that the poachers can interpret places and create their own paths in them. It must be noted that de Certeau understands the term "place" as a point in the grid, such as a coffee shop or a shopping mall in a city center, while "space" is what happens when poachers navigate these places.⁴⁴ As we can see, for de Certeau, "space" is a "practiced place", that is, the "spatialization" of the place. Now, from the poachers' end, the spatialization of the place means the poachers' act of interpreting, redefining, reinventing, or transforming, through their quotidian practices, the environment or social system defined and produced by strategic power with the use of a tactic. This explains why de Certeau views "tactic" as the weapon of the weak. To further illustrate this point, let us engage very briefly de Certeau's theorization of the (former) Twin Towers of Manhattan.

In the famous chapter titled "Walking in the City" of his *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau talks about the idea of standing on top of the (former) World Trade Center. There, one gets a general view of Manhattan, a perspective

⁴³ The same notion of tactic is also appropriated by the peasants, indigenous peoples, and other groups that stay outside the global system in resisting domination. For more discussion on the way in which people at the margins resisted domination, see Jeffrey Ocaj, "Ethics of Refusal: Globalization and the Penan People's Struggle for Recognition," *Budhi* vol. 19 (2015). See also Jeffrey Ocaj, "Shifting Pattern and Sophistication of the American Colonial Domination in the Philippines: From Colonialism to Technological Domination," *Silliman Journal* Vol. 55 No. 1 (2014): 117-152; Jeffrey Ocaj "Domination and Resistance in the Philippines: From the Pre-Hispanic to the Spanish and American Period," *LUMINA* Vol. 21 No. 1 (March 2010): 1-145; and Jeffrey Ocaj, "The Peasant Movement and the Great Refusal in the Philippines: Situating Critical Theory at the Margins," *KRITIKE: An Online Journal of Philosophy* Vol 12 (Special Issue): 43-67.

⁴⁴ Jason Kosnoski, "Rambling as Resistance: Frederic Law Olmsted, Michel de Certeau, and the Micropolitics of Walking in the City" 3 (February 4, 2011): 121.

of the entire city. He sees how the city is planned, the waves of verticals, as well as the movement of cars and people down below. As we can see, de Certeau likened this analogy to the panoptic gaze of Foucault: the “seeing” is in fact a scoping mechanism, a kind of policing. But what de Certeau would like to convey here is that the person standing above the building does not actually see and observe the minute details down the city streets. In fact, he is only having a “perspective” of the city dwellers down below; and for this reason, he does not truly capture the specificity of the people’s actions. In other words, for de Certeau, there is always a remainder to the general logic of power as expressed most visibly in Foucault’s panopticism. Applying this idea to the “producers” who employ a “strategy” in administering the people (consumers), that is, if we make a connection between the institutional structures in urban spaces and the everyday practices of the consumers of these spaces, we may conclude that after all the purported “powerful” have not really subdued the “weak”. The weak, that is, the ordinary individuals, are not after all molded by the regulations and symbolic structures of social life.⁴⁵ In fact, if we look closely, the city planners and architects may have designed the city’s structure and area, but ordinary individuals after all could create shortcuts or decide not to follow these grids in the same way that readers are not passive when they read texts. Like the readers who can reinterpret texts and appropriate them in the way they want to, the ordinary individuals as poachers can reinterpret, reinvent, or transform the grid of power to their advantage. Indeed, for de Certeau, these tactical behaviors, these everyday practices, like walking in the city, allow the ordinary individuals to escape the strategy of the powerful, of the producers. As Kosnoski rightly puts it:

...de Certeau goes on to describe one particular activity that encourages the exercise of individuals’ tactical sense, that of walking in the city. He claims that, even though cities represent

⁴⁵ Jeremy Ahearne, “Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 16, no. 1 (February 1, 2010): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630902971595>.

highly structured spaces that impose numerous spatial and temporal disciplines of bodies, walking (as opposed to activities of commerce or entertainment and other modes of transportation such as automotive or public) allows the individual to choose paths, paces, and objects of moment and to undermine structured spaces, while pursuing quotidian aims. Although the map of the city certainly imposes a structure, the “walker actualizes some of these possibilities... but he also moves them about and he invents others since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transforming or abandoning spatial elements.⁴⁶

To reiterate, against Foucault, de Certeau refuses to view the subject as a passive agent of social transformation. He claims that there are means that ordinary individuals can employ to subvert the logic of the repressive system. Thus, for de Certeau, strategic power can always be subverted and that even the most totalizing site of oppression can be a site of liberation. In his engagement with Foucault’s theory of power, as intimated above, de Certeau tasks the subject to tactically oppose the dominant logic of power.

Lastly, let us bring here Louis Althusser’s notion of interpellation so we can fully make sense of the way in which de Certeau’s subject can tactically oppose disciplinary power. As we may already know, Althusser’s notion of interpellation involves the “naming” or “addressing” of the subject. For example, a police officer who shouts (interpellates) “Hey, you there?”, is constituting the subject, producing an identity of the subject. In Foucault, it is presumed that the subject being interpellated is formed and produced through this symbolic demand, of this disciplinary power that names and watches. But for Althusser, as de Certeau would have us believe, the subject can tactically oppose such interpellation by undermining it, by not listening to it. The subject

⁴⁶ Kosnoski, “Rambling as Resistance,” 121.

may have heard the interpellation, but she can pretend not to hear it, and dashes away and murmurs, “*Siraulong pulis ‘to’*”.⁴⁷

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⁴⁷ This Tagalog statement can be loosely translated in English as “Stupid cop!”

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