

The everyday life of the people is where the contradictory interests of capitalist societies are continually negotiated and contested. [Michelle] De Certeau (1984) is one of the most sophisticated theorists of the culture and practices of everyday life, and running through his work is a series of metaphors of conflict--particularly ones of strategy and tactics, of guerrilla warfare, of poaching, of guileful ruses and tricks. Underlying all of them is the assumption that the powerful are cumbersome, unimaginative, and overorganized, whereas the weak are creative, nimble, and flexible. So the weak use guerilla tactics against the strategies of the powerful, making poaching raids upon their texts or structures, and play constant tricks upon the system.

The powerful construct 'places' where they can exercise their power--cities, shopping malls, schools, workplaces, and houses, to name only some of the material ones. The weak make their own 'spaces' within those places; they make the places temporarily theirs as they move through them, occupying them for as long as they need or have to. A place is where strategy operates; the guerillas who move into it turn it into their space; space is practiced place.

The strategy of the powerful attempts to control the places and the commodities that constitute the parameters of everyday life. The landlord provides the building within which we dwell, the department store our means of furnishing it, and the culture industry the texts we 'consume' as we relax within it are ours and ours alone. Lefebvre (1971:88) is thinking along the same lines as de Certeau when he uses the distinction between compulsion and adaptation to point out the opposition between the strategy of the powerful (compulsion) and the tactics of the weak (adaptation): "He who adapts to circumstances has overcome compulsion . . . adaptation absorbs compulsion, transforms and turns them into products."

Against what he calls "the misery of everyday life," with "its tedious tasks and humiliations," Lefebvre sets "the power of everyday life," the manifestations of which include:

its continuity ... the adaptation of the body, time, space, desire: environment and the home ... creation from recurrent gestures of a whorl of sensory experience; the coincidence of need with satisfaction, and, more rarely, pleasure: work and works of art; the ability to

create the terms of everyday life from its solids and its spaces (35).

De Certeau (1984:18), with his greater emphasis on the popular resistances, argues that the culture of everyday life is to be found in the "adaptation" or "ways of *using* imposed systems," which he likens to "trickery--(ruse, deception, in the way one uses or cheats with the terms of social contracts)."

Innumerable ways of playing and foiling the other's game ... characterize the subtle and stubborn resistant activity of groups which, since they lack their own space, have to get along in a network of already established forces and representations. People have to make do with what they have. In these combatants' stratagems, there is a certain art in placing one's blows, a pleasure in getting around the rules of a constraining space . . . . Even in the field of manipulation and enjoyment (18).

The key words characterizing the tactics of everyday life are words like *adaptation*, *manipulation*, *trickery*. As de Certeau asserts so confidently, "People have to make do with what they have," and everyday life is the art of making do.

Cohen and Taylor (1976) trace the origin of their more pessimistic account of the resistances and evasions of everyday life to their work with long-term prisoners. As good Marxists, they initially sought to explain criminal behavior as forms of radical resistance to bourgeois capitalism. However, the prisoners themselves were "more concerned" with "ways of making out in the world than radical techniques for confronting it" (12). Cohen and Taylor came to wonder if the important question was not how to change the world, but rather "in what ways should one resist or yield to its demands in order to make life bearable, in order to preserve some sense of identity" (13). . . .

The young are shopping mall guerrillas par excellence. Mike Pressdee (1986) coins the productive term "proletarian shopping" to describe the activities of the young unemployed he studied in an Australian mall (see *Reading Popular Culture*, Chapter 2) . With no money but much time to spend, the consumed the place and the images, bunt not the commodities. They turned the place of the mall into their space to enact their oppositional culture, to maintain and assert their social difference and their subordinated but hostile social identities.

They would cluster around store windows, preventing legitimate customers from seeing the displays or entering; their pleasure was in disrupting the strategy and in provoking the owner-enemy to emerge and confront them, or to call in the security services to move them along. . . .

Shoplifting is another area of constant trickery and tenacity. The accessible, tempting display of goods is clearly a strategy of power. . . . Commodities are 'lifted' for numerous reasons, from the pathological to the material-economic, but among them are the tactical--the pleasure in spotting and exploiting the strategic moment of weakness, and, sometimes, of tricking the owner further by returning the stolen goods and claiming a refund because they were unsuitable. . . . Katz writes of amateur shoplifters' "delights in deviance" and, when describing middle-class adolescents, shows how their shoplifting is fueled not by economic need but by a desire for the 'sneaky thrills' that the boredom and discipline of everyday life denies them. Shoplifting is not a guerilla raid just upon the store owners themselves, but upon the whole power-bloc in general; the store owners are merely metonyms [substitutes] for their allies in power--parents, teachers, security guards, the legal system, and all the agents of social discipline or repression. . . .

How different is shoplifting from the university professor asking the university television technician to clean the heads on her video recorder? . . . paradoxically, the larger and more complex the systems become, the easier they are to trick, and the more damage such tricks can cause. The trickster with unauthorized access to a computer system is in a position of enormous power. But such tricks differ only in technological sophistication from de Certeau's (1984:25) definitive example of "*la perruque*," the wig:

*La Perruque* is the worker's own work disguised as work for his employer. It differs from pilfering in that nothing of material value has been stolen. It differs from absenteeism in that the worker is officially on the job. *La Perruque* may be as simple a matter as a secretary's writing a love letter on "company time" or as complex as a cabinetmaker's "borrowing" a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room. In the

very place where the machine he must serve reigns supreme, he cunningly takes pleasure in finding a way to create gratuitous products whose sole purpose is to signify his own capabilities through his *work* and to confirm his solidarity with other workers or his family through *spending* his time in this way. With complicity of other workers (who thus defeat the competition the factory tries to instill in them), he succeeds in 'putting one over' on the established order on its home ground. Far from being a regression toward a mode of production organized around artisans or individuals, *la perruque* re-introduces the "popular" techniques of other times and other places into the industrial space (that is, into the present order). . . .

De Certeau argues that the very success of the bureaucratic commercial order within which we live has created, paradoxically, the means of its own subversion. . . . As Eco [too] points out, the larger the system, the easier it is to trick, and the less effectively it can control those who move within it.

The structures of early capitalism were visible, its agencies of power easily apprehensible. When the factory owner lived in the house on the hill and the workers in terraced cottages in the shadow and smoke of the factory or pithead, everyone knew the system was ordered where he or she worked or dwelt. The system was as visible as its inequalities; its power was naked. The shift to corporate capitalism was a shift toward invisibility; the system became more abstract, more distanced from the concrete experiences of everyday life and thus less apprehensible [i.e. visible]. Late capitalism's further shift to the multinational that transcends nations or states, the system has become so distant, so removed, so inapprehensible that its power to control and order the details of everyday life has paradoxically diminished. . . . The order of the system that builds and manages the shopping malls is consistently at risk of being turned into the disorder of those who use them, in a way that the small corner deli never was. 932-43)

Fiske, John. Understanding Popular Culture. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989. 32-43