MICHEL DE CERTEAU

Practices of Space

> Metaphor is the *transport* to one thing of
> a name which designates another.
> (Aristotle, *Poetics*)

The Blind City

To *see* Manhattan from the 107th floor of the World Trade Center. Below the wind-stirred haze, the urban island, a sea upon the sea rises on the crested swell of Wall Street, falls into the trough of Greenwich Village, flows into the renewed crests of midtown and the calm of Central Park, before breaking into distant whitecaps up beyond Harlem. For a moment, the eye arrests the turbulence of this sea-swell of verticals; the vast mass freezes under our gaze. It is transformed into a texturology in which the extremes of defiance and poverty, the contrasts between races and styles, between yesterday's buildings already relegated to the past (New York, this anti-Rome, has never learned to age) and the new outcroppings that erect barriers to block space – all are conjoined. Paroxystic sites with monumental reliefs. The spectator can even read the fading urban universe. Inscribed upon it are the architectural figures of the *coincidatio oppositorum* sketched long ago in mystical miniatures and textures. On this concrete, steel and glass stage, bounded by the cold water of two oceans (the Atlantic and the American) the tallest letters in the world create this gigantesque rhetoric of excess in expenditure and production.[1]

To what erotics of knowledge can the ecstasy of reading such a cosmos be connected? Delighting in it as violently as I do, I speculate as to the origin of the pleasure of seeing such a world wrought by hubris "as a whole", the pleasure of looking down upon, of totalizing this vastest of human texts.

To be lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center is to be carried away by the city's hold. One's body is no longer criss-crossed by the streets that bind

[1] Consult "New York City" by Alain Médam, in *Les Temps modernes*, August–September 1976, pp. 15–33; and, by the same author, *New York Terminal* (Paris: Galilée, 1977).

and re-bind it following some law of their own; it is not possessed – either as user or used – by the sounds of all its many contrasts or by the frantic New York traffic. The person who ascends to that height leaves behind the mass that takes and incorporates into itself any sense of being either an author or spectator. Above these waters Icarus can ignore the tricks of Daedalus in his shifting and endless labyrinths. His altitude transforms him into a voyeur. It places him at a distance. It changes an enchanting world into a text. It allows him to read it; to become a solar Eye, a god's regard. The exaltation of a scopic or a gnostic drive. Just to be this seeing point creates the fiction of knowledge. Must one then redescend into the sombre space through which crowds of people move about, crowds that, visible from above, cannot see there below? The fall of Icarus. On the 107th floor, a poster poses like some sphinx, a riddle to the stroller who has been in an instant changed into a seer: "It's hard to be down when you're up" (see figure 1).
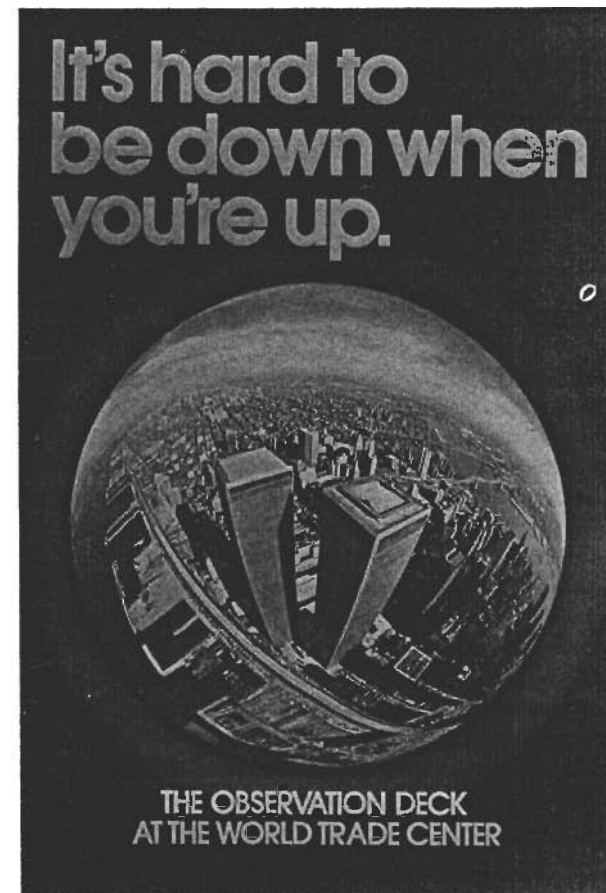

Figure 1

The desire to see the city preceded the means of fulfilling the desire. Medieval and Renaissance painting showed the city seen in perspective by an eye that did not yet exist.[2] They both invented flying over the city and the type of representation that made it possible. The panorama transformed the spectator into a celestial eye. It created gods. Since technical processes created an "omnivisual power", things are different.[3] The fiction invented by the painters of the past slowly became fact. The same scopic drive haunts the architectural (and no longer pictorial) productions that give materiality to Utopia today. The 1350-foot tower, Manhattan's prow, continues the construction of a fiction that creates its readers, that transforms the city's complexity into readability and that freezes its opaque mobility into a crystal-clear text. Can the vast texturology beneath our gaze be anything but a representation? An optical artefact. The analogue to the facsimile which, through a kind of distancing, produces the space planner, the city planner or the map-maker. The city-panorama is a "theoretical" (i.e. visual) simulacrum: in short, a picture, of which the preconditions for feasibility are forgetfulness and a misunderstanding of processes. The seeing god created by this fiction, who, like Schreber's, "knows only corpses",[4] must remove himself from the obscure interlacings of everyday behaviour and make himself a stranger to it.

On the contrary, it is below – "down" – on the threshold where visibility ends that the city's common practitioners dwell. The raw material of this experiment are the walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the cursives and strokes of an urban "text" they write without reading. These practitioners employ spaces that are not self-aware; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of one body for another, beloved, body (figure 2). The paths that interconnect in this network, strange poems of which each body is an element down by and among many others, elude being read. Everything happens as though some blindness were the hallmark of the processes by which the inhabited city is organized.[5] The networks of these forward-moving, intercrossed writings form a multiple history, are without creator or spectator, made up of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: with regard to representations, it remains daily, indefinitely, something other (figure 3).

Eluding the imaginary totalizations of the eye, there is a strangeness in the commonplace that creates no surface, or whose surface is only an advanced limit, an edge cut out of the visible. In this totality, I should like to indicate the processes that are foreign to the "geometric" or "geographic" space of visual,

[2] Cf. H. Lavedan, *Les Représentations des villes dans l'art du Moyen-Age* (Paris: Van Oest, 1942); R. Wittkower, *Architecturals: Principles in the Age of Humanism* (London: Tiranti, 1962); L. Marin, *Utopiques: jeux d'espaces* (Paris: Minuit, 1973).

[3] M. Foucault, "L'oeil du pouvoir", in J. Bentham, *Le Panoptique [Panopticon]* (1791) (Belfond, 1977) p. 16.

[4] D. P. Schreber, *Mémoires d'un nécropathe*, trans. (Paris: Seuil, 1975) pp. 41, 60, etc.

[5] In his *Regulae*, Descartes made the blind man the guarantor of the knowledge of things and places against the illusions and deceptions of sight.

Figure 2

Figure 3

panoptic or theoretical constructions (figure 4). Such spatial practices refer to a specific form of *operations* (ways of doing); they reflect "another spatiality"[6] (an "anthropological", *poïétik* and mystical spatial experiment); they send us to an opaque, blind domain of the inhabited city, or to a *transhuman city*, one that insinuates itself into the clear text of the planned, readable city.

From Concept to Practices

The World Trade Center is the most monumental figure of a Western urbanism. The atopia-Utopia of optical science has long tried to surmount and articulate the contradictions created by the urban conglomeration. It is a question of working towards an increase in the human collection or accumulation. A perspective view or a prospective view, the dual projection of an opaque past and an unclear future on to an accommodating surface, it has (since the sixteenth century?) begun the transformation of the *urban reality* into the concept of *city*, and it has begun – long before the concept itself can become history – to make it part of an *urbanistic* ratio. The alliance of city and concept never makes them one; rather, it employs their progressive symbiosis: city planning is both to *give thought to the plurality* of the real and to *make effective* that notion of the plural – it is to know and to be able to articulate.
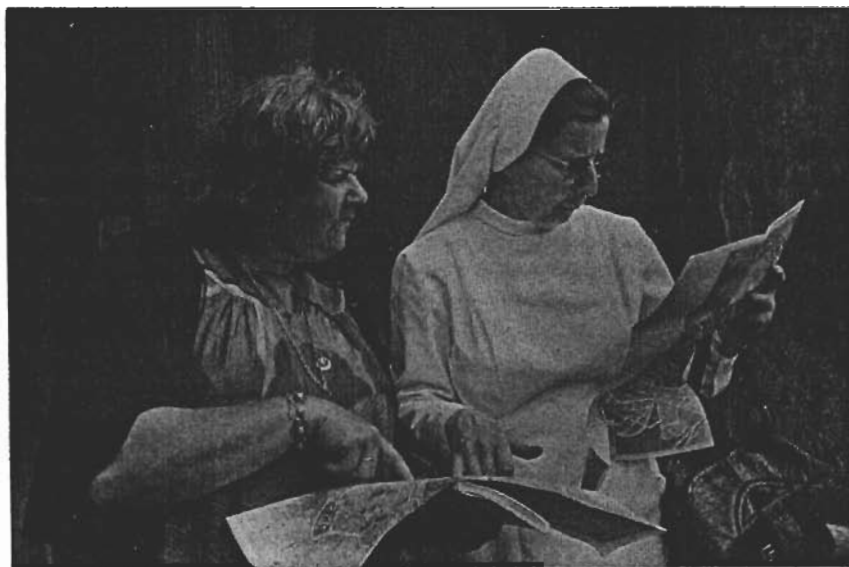

Figure 4

[6] M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) pp. 332–3.

The "city" established by Utopian and urbanistic discourse[7] is defined by the possibility of a threefold operation: the creation of a *clean space* (rational organization should eliminate all physical, mental and political pollution); the substitution of a non-time or a synchronic system for the indiscernible, stubborn resistance of tradition (univocal strategies, made possible by the exhaustion of all data, should replace the tactics that cleverly play upon "opportunities", catch-occurrences, and the opacities of history); and finally the creation of a *universal and impersonal subject* (this is the city itself: as with its political model, the Hobbesian state, it is gradually possible to endow it with all the functions and predicates previously disseminated and allocated to many real subjects, groups, associations and individuals). Thus, the city enables us to conceive and construct a space on the basis of a finite number of stable and isolatable elements, each articulated to the other.

In this site organized by "speculative" and classifying operations,[8] management combines with elimination: on the one hand we have the differentiation and redistribution of the parts and function of the city through inversions, movements, accumulations, etc., and on the other hand we have the rejection of whatever is not treatable, and that thus constitutes the "garbage" of a functionalist administration (abnormality, deviance, sickness, death, etc.). Progress, of course, allows for the reintroduction of an increasing proportion of these wastes into the management network and the transformation of those very flaws (in health, security, etc.) into means for strengthening the system of order. In fact, however, it constantly produces effects that run counter to what it aims for: the profit system creates a *loss* which, with all the multifarious forms of poverty outside and waste inside, is constantly inverting production into "expenditure". Furthermore, rationalizing the city involves *mythifying* it through strategic modes of discourse. Lastly, by favouring progress (time), functionalist organization allows the condition of its feasibility – space itself – to be overlooked, and space then becomes the unanticipated factor in a scientific and political technology.[9] That is how the city concept functions, a site of transformations and appropriations, the object of interventions, but also a subject continually being enriched with new attributes: simultaneously the plant and the hero of modernity.

Whatever the past avatars of this concept, it must be noted that today, while in *discourse*, the city acts as a totalizing and almost mythic gauge of socio-economic and political strategies, *urban life* allows what has been

[7] Cf P. Choay, "Figures d'un discours inconnu", in *Critique*, April 1978, pp. 293–317.
[8] We cannot connect urbanistic techniques, which classify things spatially, with the tradition of the "art of memory" (cf. F. A. Yates, *L'Art de la mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975). The capacity to build a spatial organization of knowledge develops its procedures on the basis of that "art"; it determines Utopias; it was almost realized in Bentham's *Panopticon*. It is a stable form, despite the diversity of its content (past, future and present) and its plans (to conceive or to create) *vis-à-vis* successive modes of thought.
[9] Foucault, "L'oeil du pouvoir", p. 13.

excluded from it by the urbanistic plan to increase even further. The language of power is "urbanized", but the city is subjected to contradictory movements that offset each other and interact outside the purview of the panoptic power. The city becomes the dominant theme of political epic but it is no longer a theatre for programmed, controlled operations. Beneath the discourses ideologizing it, there is a proliferation of tricks and fusions of power that are devoid of legible identity, that lack any perceptible access and that are without rational clarity – impossible to manage.

The city-concept is deteriorating. Does that mean that the sickness of the mind that created it and its professionals is also the sickness of the urban population? Perhaps the cities are deteriorating together with the procedures that set them up. However, we must be wary of our analyses. Ministers of knowledge have always assumed that the changes that shake their ideologies and their positions are universe-threatening. They transform the evil of their theories into theories of evil. Transforming their aberrations into "catastrophes" or trying to lock the people into the "panic" of their discourse, must they still be right?

Rather than staying within a discourse that maintains its privileged position by inverting its content (catastrophe, not progress), there is another way: analysing the microbial processes – both singular and plural – an urbanistic system should manage or eliminate and survive its decline; following the pullulation of those practices that, far from being controlled or eliminated by the panoptic administration, are abetted in their proliferating illegitimacy, developed and inserted into the networks of surveillance and combined according to strategies that, albeit unreadable, are stable to the extent that they constitute everyday rules and surreptitious creativities that serve only to conceal the frantic existing models and discourses of the observing organization. That path could be regarded as a continuation of – but also as the inverse of – Michel Foucault's analysis of power structures. Instead of focusing his analysis on localizable, dominant, repressive, legal centres, he turned it to bear on technical machinery and procedures, those "minor instrumentalities" that, through a mere organization of "details", can transform diverseness of humanity into a "disciplined" society, and manage, differentiate, classify and fit into a hierarchy every deviancy that can affect training, health, justice, the army or labour.[10] "The often tiny ploys of discipline", the "minor but flawless" machinery that has colonized and made uniform the institutions of the state, derive their effectiveness from a relationship between *procedures* and the *space* they redistribute to create an "operator". They set up an "analytic arrangement of space". From the standpoint of playing at (with) discipline, however, what spatial practices correspond to these disciplined space-creating apparatuses? In light of the current contradiction between the collective management mode and the individual mode of reappropriation, such a question is no less pressing – if we posit a society to be defined not only by its networks of technical

[10] M. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

surveillance, and if we further recognize that in fact spatial usage creates the determining conditions of social life. I should like to review some of the procedures – many-sided, resilient, cunning and stubborn – that evade discipline, without thereby being outside its sphere, and that can lead to a theory of daily practices, to a theory of experienced *space* and of the disturbing familiarity of the *city*.

Pedestrian Utterings

History begins at ground level, with footsteps. They are the number, but a number that does not form a series. They cannot be counted because each unit is qualitative in nature: a style of tactile apprehension and kinesic appropriation. They are replete with innumerable anomalies. The motions of walking are spatial creations. They link sites one to the other. Pedestrian motor functions thus create one of those "true systems whose existence actually makes the city", but which "have no physical receivability".[11] They cannot be localized: they spatialize. They are no more inscribed in a content than are the characters the Chinese sketch out on their hand with one finger.

Of course, the walking process can be marked out on urban maps in such a way as to translate its traces (*here* heavy, *there* very light) and its trajectories (*this* way, not *that*). However, these curves, ample or meagre, refer, like words, only to the lack of what has gone by. Traces of a journey lose what existed: *the act of going by* itself. The action of going, of wandering, or of "window shopping" – in other words, the activity of passers-by – is transposed into points that create a totalizing and reversible line on the map. It therefore allows for the apprehension of a mere relic set in the non-time of a projective surface. It is visible, but its effect is to make the operation that made it possible invisible. These fixations make up the procedures of forgetting. The hint is substituted for practice. It displays property (voracious) of the geographic system's ability to metamorphose actions into legibility, but it thereby causes one way of existing to be overlooked.

A comparison with the act of speaking enables us to go further[12] and not be restricted only to criticism of graphic representations as if we were aiming from the limits of legibility at some inaccessible Beyond. The act of walking is to the urban system what the act of speaking, the *Speech Act*, is to language or to spoken utterance.[13] On the most elementary level it has in effect a threefold

[11] C. Alexander, "La Cité semitreillis, mais non arbre", in *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* (1967).

[12] Cf. R. Barthes' remarks in *Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, no. 153, December 1970–January 1971, pp. 11–13 ("We speak our city . . . simply by living in it, by travelling through it, by looking at it"), and C. Soucy's comments in *L'Image du centre dans quatre romans contemporains* (Paris: CSU, 1971) pp. 6–15.

[13] Cf. the many studies on the subject since J. Searle's "What is a Speech Act?", in Max Black (ed.), *Philosophy in America* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965) pp. 221–39.

"uttering" function: it is a process of *appropriation* of the topographic system by the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and assumes language); it is a spatial *realization* of the site (just as the act of speaking is a sonic realization of language): lastly, it implies relationships among distinct positions, i.e. pragmatic "*contracts*" in the form of movements (just as verbal utterance is "allocution", "places *the others*" before the speaker, and sets up contracts between fellow speakers[14]). A first definition of walking thus seems to be a space of uttering.

We can extend this problem to the relationships between the act of writing and writing, if we like, and even transpose it to relationships of "touch" (the brush and its gestures) to the finished picture (forms, colours, etc.). First isolated in the field of verbal communication, uttering is only one of its applications, and its linguistic modality is only the first indication of a far more general distinction between the forms employed in a system and the ways in which the system may be employed, i.e. between two "different worlds", because the "same things" are there viewed according to opposed formalities.

Considered from this angle, the pedestrian's uttering displays three characteristics that immediately distinguish it from the spatial system: the present, the discontinuous and the "phatic". First, it is true that a spatial order sets up a body of possibilities (e.g. by a place) and interdictions (e.g. by a wall); the walker then *actualizes* some of them. He thereby makes them be as well as appear. However, he also displaces them and invents others (see box 1), since the crossings, wanderings and improvisations of walking favour, alter or abandon spatial elements. Thus Charlie Chaplin multiplied the possibilities of his japes: out of one thing he made other things, and he went beyond the limits that the purposes and functions of the object impose upon its user. In the same way, the walker transforms every spatial signifier into something else. And while, on the one hand, he makes only a few of the possibilities set out by the established order effective (he goes only here – not there), on the other hand, he increases the number of possibilities (e.g. by making up shortcuts or detours) and the number of interdictions (e.g. by avoiding routes regarded as licit or obligatory). In short, he selects: "The user of the city takes up fragments of utterance in order in secret to actualize them."[15] Thus he creates *discontinuity*, either by choosing among the signifiers of the spatial language or by altering them through the use he makes of them. He dooms certain sites to inertia or to decay, and from others he forms "rare" ("fortuitous") or illegal spatial "shapes". However, this is already inherent in a rhetoric of walking.

Within the framework of uttering, the walker, in relation to his position, creates a near and a far, a *here* and a *there*. In verbal communication, the adverbs *here* and *there* are actually the indicators of the locutory fact[16] – a coincidence

[14] É. Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1974) pp. 79–88.

[15] R. Barthes, quoted in C. Soucy, *L'Image du centre*, p. 10.

[16] "*Here* and *now* demarcate the spatial and temporal instance, which is coextensive and contemporary with the present source of a discourse containing *I*" (É. Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1966) p. 253.

Box 1

Passers-By

Like words, places are articulated by a thousand usages. They are thus transformed into "variations" – not verbal or musical, but spatial – of a question that is the mute *motif* of the interweavings of places and gestures: *where to live?* These dances of bodies haunted by the desire to live somewhere tell interminable stories of the Utopia we construct in the sites through which we pass. They form a rhetoric of space. They are "steps" (dance figures), glances (composing mobile geographies), intervals (practices of distinction) (figure 5), criss-crossings of solitary itineraries, insular embraces (figure 6). These gesturations are our everyday legends. They open up unpredictable spaces in an order of sites. They also play within the labyrinth of city signs (street names, advertising slogans, historic landmarks, commercial, political or academic identities), in the same way in which the voice wanders, delinquent, stubborn, through the networks of the linguistic system, tracing pathways foreign to the meaning of the sentences. Proliferant, these practices seem to repeat the mute experiment of the child, who invents a foreignness wherever he is in order to create for himself his own space – ecstasies in the window of the closed taxi (figure 7); dancing suspended on the sidewalk that is the shoreline of some story (figure 8); liminal astonishments (figure 9). Ceaselessly we have always to pass by in order to be able to inhabit.

Michel de Certeau

that reinforces the parallelism between linguistic uttering and the pedestrian uttering – and we must add that another function of this process of location (*here/there*) necessarily entailed by walking and indicative of an actual appropriation of space by an "I" is to set up *another* relative to that "I", and thereby establish a conjunctive and disjunctive articulation of places. Above all, I highlight the "*phatic*" aspect – if by that we understand, as Malinowski and Jakobson have noted, the function of terms that establish, maintain or interrupt contact: terms like "hello", "well, well", etc.[17] Walking, which now pursues and now invites pursuit, creates a mobile organicity of the environment, a succession of phatic *topoi*. And although the phatic function – the effort to set up communication – can characterize the language of talking birds as it does "the first verbal function acquired by children", it is not surprising that, anterior to or parallel with informative declamation, it also skips along, crawls

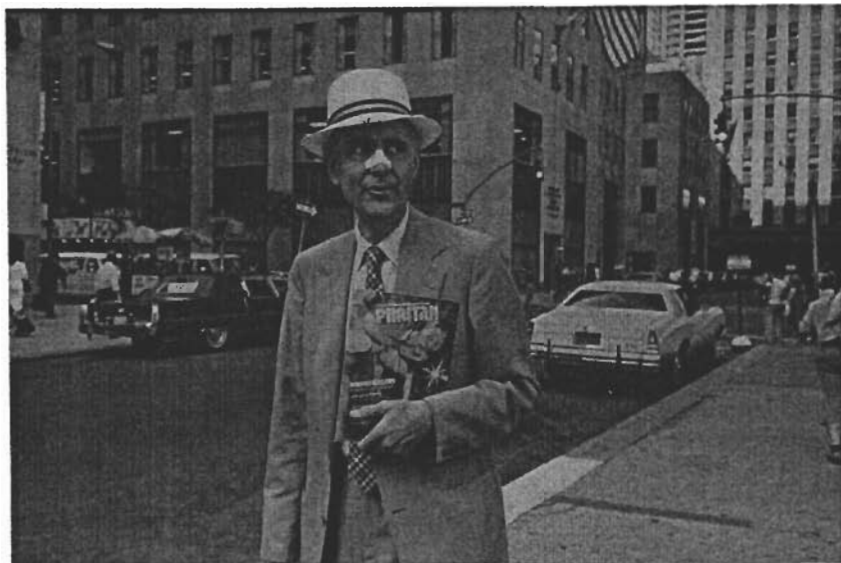[17] R. Jakobson, *Essais de linguistique générale* (Paris: Seuil, 1970) p. 217.

Figure 5

on all fours, dances and strolls, heavily or lightly, like a series of "hellos" in an echoing labyrinth.

We can analyse the modalities of the pedestrian's uttering hereby freed from the mapped route, i.e. the types of relationship it entertains with routes (or "utterances"), by assigning to them a value of truth ("alethic" modalities of the necessary, the impossible, the possible or the contingent), a value of knowledge ("epistemic" modalities of the certain, the excluded, the plausible or the arguable), or finally, a value regarding obligation ("deontic" modalities of the obligatory, the forbidden, the permissible or the optional).[18] Walking affirms, suspects, guesses, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it "speaks". All modalities play a part in it, changing from step to step and redistributed in proportions, successions, intensities that vary with the moment, the route, the stroller. The indefinable diversity of these operations of utterance. They cannot be reduced to any graphic tracing.

Perambulatory Rhetorics

The paths taken by strollers consist of a series of turnings and returnings that can be likened to "turns of phrase" or "stylistic devices". A perambulatory rhetoric does exist. The art of "turning" a phrase has its counterpart in the art

[18] On modalities, see H. Parret, *La Pragmatique des modalités* (Urbino, 1975), or A. R. White, *Modal Thinking* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975).
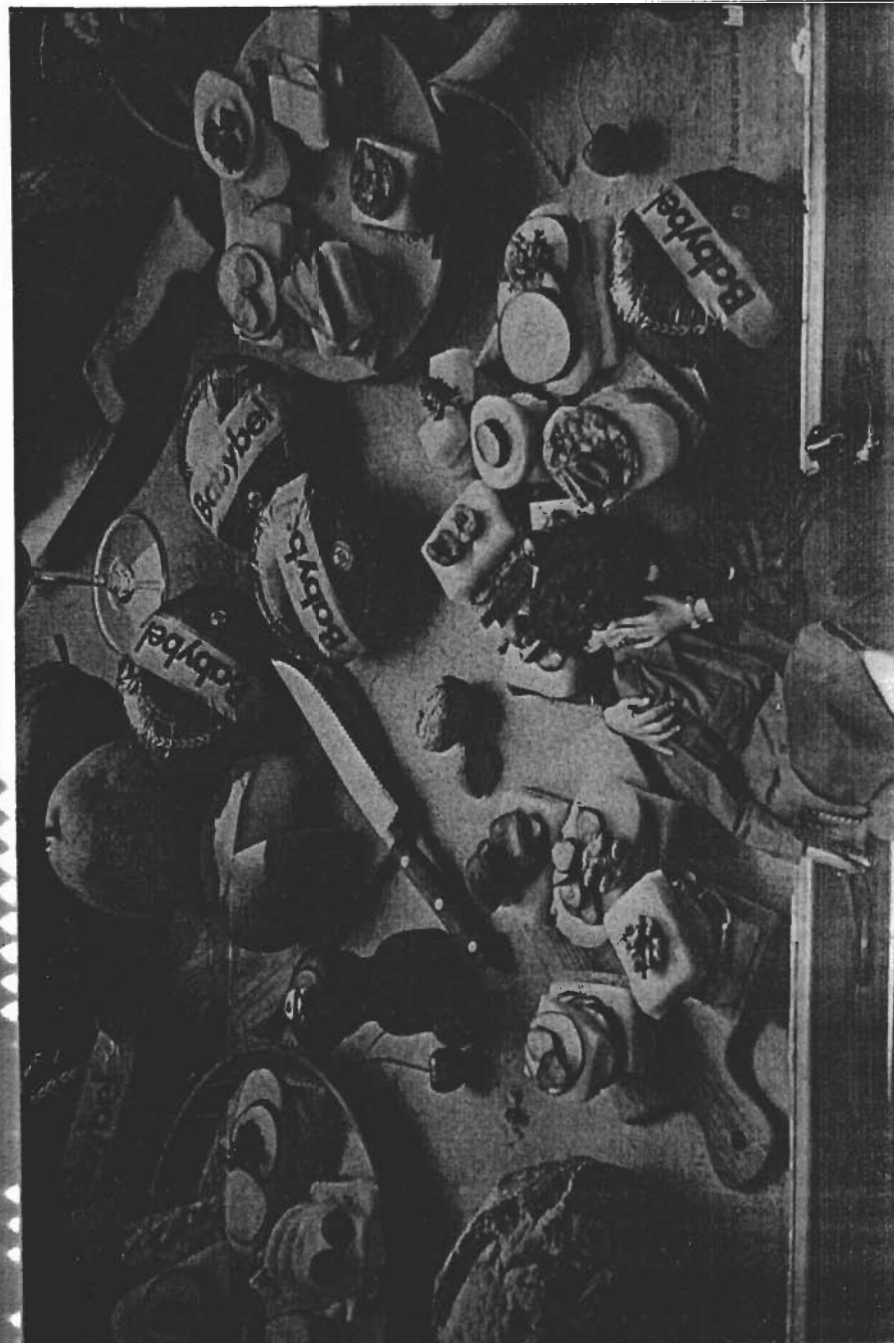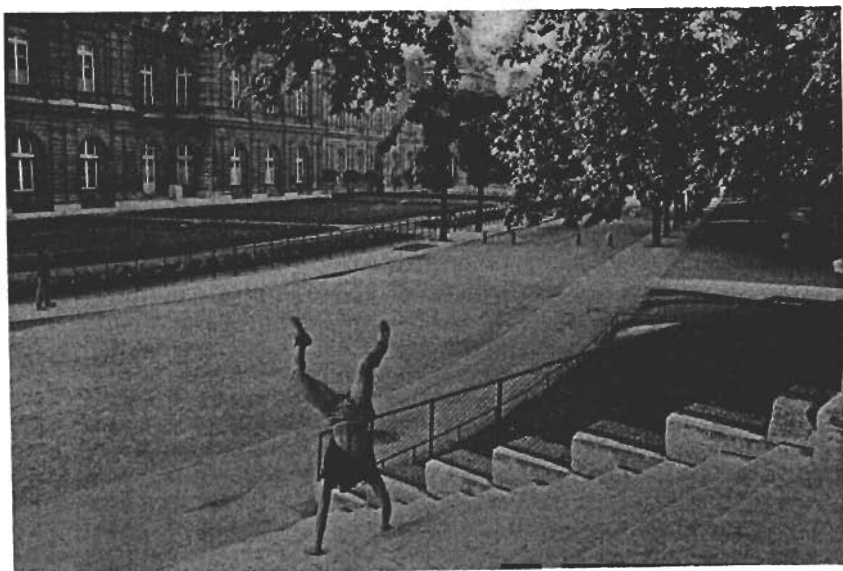
Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9

of "turning" course. As with everyday language,[19] this art entails and combines both *styles* and *usages*. Style specifies a "linguistic structure that can manifest on the symbolic level ... one man's basic way of existing in the world":[20] it connotes a singular. Usage defines the social phenomenon by which a system of communication is actually manifested: it refers to a norm. Both are aimed at a "way of doing" (speaking, walking, etc.), but one as a singular treatment of the symbolic and the other as an element of a code. They intersect to form a style of usage, a way of being and a way of doing.[21]

In introducing the notion of an "inhabitant rhetoric" – a fertile path indicated by A. Médam[22] and systematized by S. Ostrovesky[23] and J.-F. Augoyard[24] – it was posited that the "tropes" catalogued in rhetoric furnished

[19] See the analyses of P. Lemaire, *Les Signes sauvages: Philosophie du langage ordinaire* (Paris: duplicated thesis, 1972) pp. 11–13.
[20] A. J. Greimas, "Linguistique statistique et linguistique structurale", in *Le Français moderne*, October 1962, p. 245.
[21] In a related field – rhetoric and the poetic in the sign language of mutes – see E. S. Klima and U. Bellugi, "Poetry and Song in a Language without Sound" (San Diego, California, 1975), and E. S. Klima, "The Linguistic Symbol With and Without Sound", in J. Kavanagh and J. E. Cummings (eds), *The Role of Speech in Language* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1975).
[22] A. Médam, *Conscience de la ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 1977).
[23] UER de sociologie, Aix-en-Provence, France.
[24] J.-F. Augoyard, *Le Pas. Approche de la vie quotidienne dans un habitat collectif à travers la pratique des cheminements* (Grenoble: duplicated thesis, 1976) pp. 163–255: "La rhétorique habitante".

models and hypotheses for the analysis of the methods for appropriating sites. It seems to me that two postulates condition the validity of that application: spatial practices also correspond to *manipulations* of the fundamental elements of a constructed order; like rhetorical tropes, they are *divergent* from a kind of "literal" meaning defined by the urban system. Verbal figures and "perambulant" figures may be homologous (the latter already stylized in dance steps), for both are "treatments" or operations that affect isolable units,[25] and "ambiguous arrangements" that divert and move meaning towards the equivocal,[26] as when a moving image blurs and multiplies the photographed object. Both these modes make for analogy. I would add that the geometric space of city-planners and architects appears to have the validity of the "literal meaning" *constructed* by grammarians and linguists in order to establish a normal and normative level to which the deviations of the "figured" can be referred. In fact, this "literal" (without figures) is not to be found in ordinary usage, whether verbal or pedestrian: it is only the fiction produced by a usage that is also special – the metalinguistic usage of science that makes itself unique through that very distinction.[27]

The perambulatory gesture plays with spatial organizations, however panoptic: it is not foreign to them (it does not eschew them), nor does it conform to them (it does not take its identity from them). It creates of them shadow and ambiguity. It insinuates into them its multifarious references and citations (social models, cultural usage, personal coefficients). It is in itself the effect of the successive encounters and occasions that are constantly altering it into the advertisement for the other, the agent of whatever may surprise, cross or seduce its route. These different aspects establish a rhetoric; they even define it.

In analysing by means of the narratives of spatial practices this "modest art of everyday expression",[28] J.-F. Augoyard singled out two basic stylistic figures: synecdoche and asyndeton. I believe that this predominance, based on two complementary poles, establishes a formalism for such practices. Synecdoche is "employing the word in a sense that is part of another sense of the same word";[29] in essence, it is naming a part for the whole in which it is included: hence, "head" for "man" in the expression "I know not the fate of so dear a head"; and thus, in the narrative of a route the stone colonnade or the knoll stands for a park. Asyndeton is the elimination of linking words, conjunctions,

---

[25] In his analysis of culinary practices, P. Bourdieu considers not the ingredients but their treatments to be decisive ("Le sens pratique", in *Actes de la recherche*, February 1976, p. 77).

[26] J. Sumpf, *Introduction à la stylistique du français* (Paris: Larousse, 1971) p. 87.

[27] On the "theory of the literal" see J. Derrida, *Marges* (Paris: Minuit, 1972) pp. 247–324: "La mythologie blanche".

[28] Augoyard, *Le pas*, p. 256.

[29] T. Todorov, "Synecdoques", in *Communications*, no. 16, 1970, p. 30. Cf. also P. Fontanier, *Les figures du discours* (Paris: Flammarion, 1968) pp. 87–97, and J. Dubois et al., *Rhétorique générale* (1970) pp. 102–12.

adverbs, within a sentence or between sentences; it jumps over linkages and it omits whole parts (from this point of view, any promenade jumps or skips like a child playing hopscotch).

These two perambulatory figures are mutually reflective. One enlarges one element of space in order to make it play the role of a "more" (of a totality) and substitute itself for that (the motorbike or the furniture for sale in a shop window stands for an entire street or neighbourhood); the other, through elision, creates a "less" and makes gaps in the spatial continuum, retaining only selections or relics from it. Wholes are replaced by fragments (less in place of more); the other dissolves them by eliminating the conjunctive and consecutive (nothing in place of something). One concentrates: it amplifies detail and miniaturizes the whole. The other cuts: it dismantles continuity and weakens its verisimilitude. Thus handled and shaped by practices, space forms itself into enlarged anomalies and separate islets.[30] Through such swellings, diminutions and fragmentations – the tasks of rhetoric – a spatial sentencing is created, a sentence-making of an anthological (composed of juxtaposed quotations) and an elliptical (made up of gaps, slips and allusions) kind. The perambulatory figures substitute journeys with the structure of a myth for the technological system of a coherent, totalizing space, a "linked" and simultaneous space, at least if by "myth" we understand a discourse regarding the site/non-site (or origin) of concrete existence, a narrative cooked up out of elements drawn from shared sites, an allusive, fragmented tale whose gaps fall into line with the social practices it symbolizes.

Figures are the gestures of this stylistic metamorphosis of space; or rather, as Rilke put it, "gesture trees" in motion. They even affect the rigid and preplanned territories of the special educational institutions in which mentally ill children dance and act out their "spatial histories" at play.[31] These gesture trees are in motion everywhere. Whole forests of them stroll in the streets. They alter the scene, but image cannot fix them in one place. If despite everything we must have an illustration, it would be in transit images, in the yellow-green and electric-blue calligraphy that silently screams as it striates the city's undergound – "embroideries" of letters and numbers, the perfect gestures of spray-painted acts of violence, handwritten Sivas, dancing graphics whose fleeting apparitions are accompanied by the roaring of subway trains: New York's graffiti (figure 10). Indeed, while it is true that the forests of gesture can have meaning, their progress cannot be fixed by a picture, nor can the meaning of their movements be confined within a text. Their rhetorical transhumance carries away and off the analytical and coherent, literal, meanings of urbanism; it is "semantic wandering"[32] produced by the masses that make the city in some of its

---

[30] On this space organized by practices into "islets", see P. Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (Geneva: Droz, 1972) pp. 215 ff., and his "Le sens pratique", pp. 51–2.

[31] Cf. Anne Baldassari and Michel Joubert, *Pratiques relationnelles des enfants à l'espace et institution* (CRECELE, CORDES, 1976), and by the same authors, "Ce qui se trame", in *Paralleles*, no. 1, June 1976.

[32] Derrida, *Marges*, p. 287, concerning metaphor.

Figure 11

signify has outlived them. Saints-Pères, Corentin Celton, Place Rouge – they offer themselves to the polysemes with which passers-by endow them; they become things apart from the places they were intended to define and turn into imaginary meeting-places in the journeys they map out, having become metaphors, for reasons foreign to their original validity, however known/unknown to the passers-by. A strange toponymy, detached from the sites, floating above the city like a misty geography of "suspended meaning" and from the heights directing physical displacements below: Place de l'Étoile, Concorde, Poissonnière. As Malaparte said, "The Place de la Concorde does not exist, it is a notion."[37]

It is more than a notion. We must multiply comparisons in order to talk of the magic powers of proper names, slipped to the stroller like jewels on to moving fingers, guiding them as they adorn them. They link gestures and steps, they open up meanings and directions; such words even act to empty and erode their primary function. They are liberated, occupiable spaces. Through semantic rarefaction, their rich vagueness earns them the *poetic* function of expressing an illogical geography: "With a lovely nave I shall fill this great empty space."[38] The relics of meaning, and sometimes their shells, the inverted leftovers of great ambitions, maybe for walking.[39] Nothings – or near-nothings – symbolize and direct our steps; names that have, precisely, ceased to be "proper".

[37] See also, for example, the epigraph of *Place de l'Étoile* by Patrick Modiano (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).
[38] Joachim du Bellay, *Regrets*, p. 189.
[39] For example, *Sarcelles* – the name of a vast urban experiment – has taken on a

Three distinct (but combined) functionings of the relationships between spatial practices and signifying practices are sketched in (and perhaps based on) these symbolizing nuclei: the *believable*, the *memorable* and the *primitive*. They indicate that which "authorizes" (or makes possible and believable) spatial appropriations, that which is repeated (or remembered) of a silent and convoluted memory, and that which is structured and still marked by an in-fantile (*in-fans*) origin. These three symbolic mechanisms arrange the *topoi* of the discourse on/of the city (legend, recollection and dream) in a way that is also beyond urbanistic systematicity. They can even be found in the functions of proper names: they make the place they clothe with a word habitable and believable (by calling their classifying power they put on authorization); they recall or evoke the phantoms (dead and supposedly gone) that still stir, lurking in gestures and walking bodies; and, as they name – i.e. as they impose a command issuing from the other (a history) – and as they alter functionalist identity by breaking off from it, they create in the site itself this erosion or non-site carved out by the law of the other.

Believabilia and Memorabilia: Habitability

By an all-too-obvious paradox, the discourse that creates belief is the discourse that takes away that which it enjoins, or which never gives what it promises. Far indeed from expressing a vacuum, from describing emptiness, it creates one. It makes room for a vacuum. Thus it makes openings; it "permits" play within a system of defined sites. It "authorizes" a playing-space (*Spielraum*) to be produced on a checkerboard that analyses and classifies identities. It makes habitable. As such I call it a "local authority". It is a flaw in the system that saturates sites with meaning and reduces them to the point of making them unbearable, "stifling". A symptomatic tendency of functionalist totalitarianism (even when it programmes games and festivals) is that it thus seeks to eliminate local authorities, for these comprise the system's univocity. It challenges what it quite rightly calls *superstitions*: superfluous semantic coverings that insinuate themselves "more" or "too much"[40] and that in a past or in a poetics alienate a part of the territory the partisans of technological motives and financiers have reserved for themselves.

In the end these proper names are already "local authorities" or "superstitions". Therefore, they are replaced by numbers. It is the same for the stones and legends that haunt the urban space like so many additional or superfluous inhabitants. They are the targets of a witch-hunt, if only because of the logic of the technostructure. Their extermination, however (like that of the

symbolic value among the inhabitants of the city by becoming, for all of France, a benchmark of total failure. That extreme example ended up by lending its citizens an unexpected "prestige".
[40] *Superstare*: to be above, like *more* or *too much*.

trees, the woods and the dells where these legends live),[41] is turning the city into a "suffering symbol".[42] The habitable city is being wiped out. Thus, as a woman from Rouen says, here "there is no special place; except for my place, that's all. . . . There's nothing." Nothing "special", nothing unusual, nothing created by a memory or a tale, nothing made significant by someone else. The only thing that remains believable is the cave of one's own dwelling, for the present still permeable by legend, still touched with shadows. Aside from that, according to another city-dweller, there are only "places where you can no longer believe in anything".[43]

It is through the opportunity they afford of storing up pregnant silences and inarticulate stories – or rather through their ability to create cellars and attics everywhere – that local legends (*legenda*: that which must be read, but also that which can be read) create exits, ways of leaving and re-entering, and thus habitable spaces. The setting out and the journey complete and enlarge on departures, comings and goings that were once provided by a body of legend now lacking in sites. Physical movement has the itinerant function of yesterday's or today's "superstitions". And in the end what does travelling produce if not, through a sort of "going back", "an exploration of the deserts of my memory", a return to a close-by exoticism via far-off detours, the "invention" of relics and legends ("fleeting glimpses of the French countryside", "fragments of music and poetry"),[44] in short, a "total uprooting" (Heidegger)? This long peregrination leads directly to the body of legend that the close-by site now lacks; it is a fiction, one that also has, like the dream or the perambulatory rhetoric, the dual characteristic of being the result of movements and of condensations.[45] As a corollary, we can gauge the importance of such signifying practices as we do spatial practices.

From this viewpoint, their content is no less revealing, even more so their organizing principle. The narratives of sites are makeshift. They are made of fragments of world. Although literary form and actantial *schema* correspond to stable models whose structures and combinations have often been analysed over the past thirty years, their matter (all their "manifest" detail) is furnished by the leftovers of nominations, taxonomies, comic or heroic predicates, etc.: i.e. by fragments of scattered semantic sites. These heterogeneous – even opposite – elements fill out the homogeneous and given form of the narrative. Thus we have the actual relationship of the practices of space with the constructed order. On its surface, that is pierced and pitted by ellipses, asides and leakages of meaning, it is an order-sieve.

The verbal relics of which narrative is made up (fragments of forgotten

[41] Cf. F. Lugassy, *Contribution à une psychosociologie de l'espace urbain: L'habitat et la forêt* (Paris: Publ. de Recherche urbaine, 1970).
[42] Dard et al., *La ville*.
[43] Quoted in ibid., pp. 174, 206.
[44] C. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques* (Paris: Plon, 1955) pp. 434–6.
[45] One could say as much of snapshots brought back from a trip, substituted for (and changed into) legends of the site from which one left.

stories and opaque gestures) are juxtaposed in a collage in which their relationships are not thought out and therefore form a symbolic whole.[46] They are articulated by lacunae. Thus, within the structured space of the text, they produce anti-texts, effects of dissimulation and fugue, opportunities for passage through to other landscapes, like cellars and copses: "Oh, massifs; oh, plurals!"[47] Through the processes of dissemination they open up, narratives contrast with *rumour*, which is always injunctive, the initiator and result of a levelling of space, the creator of mass motions that shore up an order by adding make-believe to make-do or -be. Narratives diversify; rumours totalize. Although there is always an oscillation from one to the other, it would appear that today there is more stratification: narratives are becoming more private and fading into out-of-the-way neighbourhoods, families or individuals, while rumour is rampant and, in the guise of the *City*, the key word of some private law takes the place of every proper name and obliterates or combats superstitions that are still guilty of resisting it.

The dispersal of narratives already means the dispersal of the *memorable*. In fact, memory is the anti-museum: it cannot be localized. Its remains can still be found in legend. Both objects and words are hollow. Some past lies sleeping there, as it does in the everyday gestures of walking, eating, sleeping – where ancient revolutions lie dormant. Memory is only a travelling Prince Charming who happens to awaken the Sleeping Beauty – stories without words. "*Here*, there was a bakery"; "*That* is where old Mrs Dupuis *lived*". We are struck by the fact that sites that have been lived in are filled with the presence of absences. What appears designates what is no more: "*Look*: here there *was* . . .", but can no longer be seen. Demonstratives utter the invisible identities of the visible: the very definition of the site is, in fact, to be this series of movements and effects between the shattered strata of which it is formed and to play upon those shifting levels.

"Memories are what keep us here. . . . It's personal – not interesting to anyone – but still, in the end that creates the spirit of the neighbourhood."[48] Every site is haunted by countless ghosts that lurk there in silence, to be "evoked" or not. One *inhabits* only haunted sites – the opposite of what is set forth in the *Panopticon*. However, like the royal Gothic statues of Notre-Dame that were walled up for 200 years in the basement of a building on the rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin,[49] such ghosts – broken, like the sculptures – neither speak nor see. A kind of knowing has fallen silent. Only whispers of what is *known* but is *silent* are exchanged "between us". Sites are fragmentary and convoluted histories, pasts stolen by others from readability, folded up ages that can be

[46] Terms whose relationships are not thought out but rather stated as necessary may be called *symbolic*. On this definition of symbolism as a cognitive mechanism characterized by a "deficit" of thought, see Dan Sperber, *Le Symbolisme en générale* (Paris: Hermann, 1974).
[47] F. Ponge, *La Promenade dans nos serres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967).
[48] An inhabitant of Croix-Rousse, Lyon (interviewed by P. Mayol).
[49] Cf. *Le Monde*, 4 May 1977.

unfolded but that are there more as narratives in suspense, like a rebus: symbolizations encysted in the body's pain or pleasure. "I feel good here"[50] – an effect of space, set apart from language, where it suddenly bursts into light.

The Infancies of Sites

What is memorable is what we can dream about a site. In any palimpsestic site, subjectivity is already articulated on the absence that structures it like existence, and the fact of "being there", *Dasein*. We have seen, however, that that being acts only in spatial practices, i.e. in *ways of passing to something else*. We must ultimately recognize here the repetition in various metamorphoses of some decisive and basic experience: the child's differentiation of himself from his mother's body. Here the possibility of space and of a localization (an "I am not alone") of the subject has its origin. Without going into Freud's famous analysis of this prenatal and natal experience while watching the games of his one-and-a-half-year-old grandson, who was tossing a spool and contentedly crying "O-o-o-o!" (meaning *fort*, i.e. *there, gone* or *can't*) and pulling it back to him by its thread with a joyful *Da* (i.e. *here, returned*),[51] suffice it to note this (perilous and satisfying) abrupt emergence from indifferentiation with the mother's body for which the spool is the substitute: this departure of the mother (that she both disappears and is made to disappear by him) represents localization and exteriority against a background of absence. The jubilant physical feat enables him to "make" the material object "leave" and to make *himself* disappear (for he is identical to that object) – to be *there* (because) *without* the other, but in a *necessary relationship* with what has disappeared – that creates an "original spatial structure".

Undoubtedly, we can follow differentiation further back to the nomination that already cuts off from its mother the foetus identified as male (but what about the daughter, who is henceforth placed in another spatial relationship?). What is important in this initiatory game – as in the "gleeful behaviour" of the child who, before a mirror, recognizes *one* (the totalizable *he*), whereas it is only the *other* (there, an image with which he identifies himself)[52] – is this process of "spatial cognition" that inscribes the passage to the other as the law of the being and the law of the site. To employ space, therefore, is to repeat the joyous and silent experience of childhood: it is, in the site, *to be other* and *to pass to the other* (figure 12).

Thus begins the progress Freud compares to strolling in the motherland.[53] This relationship of self to self controls the internal alterations of the site (inter-stratal play) or the promenade-like unfolding of the stories silted up on a

50 See note 48 above.
51 See the two analyses in The Interpretation of Dreams and Beyond the Pleasure Principle, as well as Sami-Ali, L'Espace imaginaire (Paris: Gallimard, 1974) pp. 42–64.
52 J. Lacan, Écrits (Paris: Seuil, 1966) pp. 93–100.
53 S. Freud, Inhibition, symptôme et angoisse (PUF, 1968).

Figure 12

site (movements and journeys). Childhood, which determines the practices of space, then augments its effects, proliferates and inundates private and public spaces and defaces their readable surfaces, and creates in the planned city a "metaphorical" city or a city in movement, like the one of Kandinsky's dreams: "A great city built in accordance with all the rules of architecture and suddenly shaken by an unpredictable and incalculable force."[54]

54 N. Kandinsky, Du Spirituel dans l'art (Paris: Denoël, 1969) p. 57.

To my father and my mother

On Signs

EDITED BY
MARSHALL BLONSKY

The Johns Hopkins University Press
Baltimore, Maryland

Contents