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## **The Philosophy of Representation (According to Jacques Rancière) and the Tactics of Knowledge**

### ABSTRACT

Jacques Rancière, claims that representation in art appears threatening to public order. The political idea exists first (before it has been depicted within the field of politics) in the form of play and artistic marks and is initially concerned with carnality, luring the citizen/spectator with a vision of prosperity and happiness. Rancière claims that politics manifests itself not so much in the wielding of power, as in the creation of divisions between citizens by excluding them from the public discourse, or even removing them from the field of perception.

One important aesthetic category is the category of *pathos*, understood by Rancière as a type of knowledge, of the recognition of the tragicality stemming from the intermingling of knowledge and non-knowledge – an act of will is a positive abolition of *pathos*. Rancière places the “ethical turn” at the point where Antigone replaces Oedipus in Jacques Lacan’s theory. This becomes a new form of experiencing *ethos*, irreducible to any saving knowledge. Antigone, according to Lacan, is not a heroine fighting for human rights, but rather a “witness of a secret terror within the social order”. According to Rancière, there are only two categories of people – those who have a voice and those who do not. Politics exists thanks to this division.

Michel de Certeau described the function of tactics, which are remedy for terror of social order. A tactic “is a ruse and a trick of the weak one”. It makes use of holes in the system. A tactic is an individual response to anonymous strategies, often invisible ones. The theory of tactics explains the nature of the fight. The background of all wars is the fight in time, for time, for the conquest of space where it does not exist. The tactic of knowl-

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edge is first and foremost the ability to connect, to include what seems to stretch beyond the *field*, does not fit within the *field*. It is based on the self-regulation of structures and manoeuvrability of systems, but it does not allow repetitions (for example, repetitions of concepts, that is, the historical depiction of knowledge) to strengthen the systems (domination of systems).

#### KEY WORDS

representation, order, politics, perception, tactic, strategy, image, pathos

## POLICE – A NEW FORM OF EQUALISING POWER

Jacques Rancière, born in 1940 in Algiers, French philosopher and professor emeritus of the *Université Paris VIII*, claims that representation in art appears threatening to public order.

Considering the fact that, beginning with Kant, philosophy contented itself with aesthetics as a general reflection on beauty, while art became estranged to it, a chasm arose between the two, which does not allow them to be captured in a common reflection. Kant was the last among the moderns to attempt to understand the cognitive experience in a comprehensive way (especially in his three *Critiques*). Rancière is a post-Kantian; his idea is based on the thesis that “aesthetic autonomy” is no longer the same as the autonomy of the artistic “process” (which is especially praised by the moderns), but is rather the “autonomy of the form of the sensory experience”, dictated by so-called experts. We are supposed to know how to evaluate works of art before we begin to think, to experience.

We associate this autonomy with the sphere of individual freedom; this, however, is merely an illusion, possibly fuelled by the more basic illusion of the freedom of our imagination. This stems exclusively from the status of new ideas. The political idea exists first (before it has been depicted within the field of politics) in the form of play and artistic marks – Rancière suggests – and is initially concerned with carnality, luring the citizen/spectator with a vision of prosperity and happiness, achievable thanks to broadly construed (technical) efficiency, and therefore the availability of forms of experience. Rancière claims that politics manifests itself not so much in the wielding of power, as in the creation of divisions between citizens by excluding them from the public discourse, or even removing them from the field of perception. Art may also participate in the creation of such divisions. However, when the “parameters of visibility” in the work of art are

changed, groups previously excluded may again become visible and audible. Paradoxically, Rancière's politicality of art (as a revolution within the form) requires a rejection of the politicisation of art (subordinating it to some kind of aesthetics).

We are dealing here with inverted Platonism. Art is censored not because it lacks the virtue of truth (multiplying copies of copies), but rather because of its excessive ability to make accessible the knowledge about an individual and for the individual in the world. Today only art has the power to individualise subjects.

All forms of virtue (truth, goodness, beauty) are functions of consensus – that is, they establish a comparative measure of things and people – but only art escapes the new form of power.

Today, power does not forbid anything, but rather veils things – this is how Alicja Sawicka sums up Rancière's work. Above all it veils art, which possesses an enormous potential to emancipate. This happens because the identification of a work as art shatters the unanimity of the experiencing (through, for example, the utilitarian category) of the world<sup>1</sup>.

Thus power veils art, making it impossible for the recipients to discriminate that which is given to be seen (represented) from that which is hidden. It is easy to veil art, since art does not order anything, does not project anything. According to Rancière, emancipation is first and foremost the allowing of the unprogrammed gaze of the spectator.

Rancière defines the contemporary form of power mainly as blocking of the sensory experience, in the fashion of police slogans barring access to reality, such as “disperse”, “stop”, “no loitering”, etc. Nowadays *police* (in Rancière's meaning) dominates politics as a power which guards order – that is, the way of experiencing the world which seems natural to its subjects.

Rancière understands the concept of *police* as a technique of power, drawn from Plato's *Republic*. This technique is seen to guarantee a balance between the three states: of reason (the instrument of the philosophers), of courage (the instrument of the guardians), and of work (the field of the artisans<sup>2</sup>). There are two types of sensibility (sensuality) – on the one hand that of the elite, and on the other hand that of those who have no “place” of their

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<sup>1</sup> Cf A. Sawicka, *Estetyka zaangażowania a ontologiczny status dzieła sztuki*, [in:] *Materia sztuki*, Kraków 2010, p. 277.

<sup>2</sup> Cf T. May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière. Creating Equality*, Edinburgh 2008, p. 42.

own, since they are too “equal”<sup>3</sup>, those who constitute a collective (egalitarian) political subject, and who are too poor (not only in the materialistic sense) to exist as individuals. The test of democracy, which keeps this part of society in a passive state, is the abstractly understood distribution (partition – *partage*) and trust. Distribution requires access and freedom; trust is seen as maintaining the order of the equality of so-called opportunities. Equality is mythical. Rancière presents another contemporary interpretation of Kant’s thought as universalising modern society. A human being as a member of a community above all respects equality (equal distribution of not only goods, but also of sensibility<sup>4</sup>). From an abstract understanding of equality there emerges a specific separation of power from dominance. There are two types of freedom – one based on access to “power”, and the other ubiquitous freedom (freedom of the equal), dominant, but passive – nihilistic<sup>5</sup>.

*Police* is neither natural, nor neutral; it does not emerge “of itself”, as Plato seems to suggest in his “myth of the cave”. A politicised subject has no place of his own. However, this is not the tactical non-place, but represents uprooting. Paradoxically, the face of politics today is mainly that of happiness (it roots us in happiness by luring us with access to goods); it persuades us to participate in abstract happiness at the cost of being excluded from other fields of experience (especially by marginalising art).

This state of happiness is abstract, mythical, constantly postponed. We live in condensed times; our experience needs to be recorded (camcorders, cameras, blogs, social networking sites) in order to be transformed into some kind of knowledge (memory). However, the simultaneity of experience and knowledge (*catharsis*) is nowadays becoming more and more rare. Art too is undergoing condensation: there is no time for the power of the representation to reverberate; art is consumed at the same level as so-called popular culture, which serves only to entertain, with entertainment being simultaneously something less and something more than pleasure. Art needs tactics. Rancière’s understanding of that which is “aesthetic” is close to the Kantian idea of “*a priori* forms of sensuality”, which concern broadly interpreted issues of time and space. Art is that which allows us to deny the continuity of the spatiotemporal experience and to find new associations within the boundaries of knowledge, broadly understood.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 111.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, p. 126.

## STAGES OF AN IMAGE – BETWEEN CONCEPT AND VISION

Rancière refers to three stages of image: the naked image, concerned with giving testimony (for example photography, which Barthes in his *Camera lucida: Reflections on Photography* calls “uniform”, often acting through shock), and with a certain “harshness” of that which is represented; the ostensive image, in which harshness becomes its very essence – for example in art ostensivity evokes the notion of conceptualism or icon; and the metaphorical image, playing on resemblances, where the postulate of uncertainty becomes activated (we cannot study the image and its interpretation simultaneously). On the third level there appears a risk of interpretation which transgresses art, leading even to an indifference to the adequacy of object and judgment – for example, a judgment determining whether an object is a work of art<sup>6</sup>.

It is impossible to assert the greater worth of any of the phases; all of them are important, although, according to the purpose of study, we usually select one of them for exposition.

In his *Critique of Judgment* (at a time when there was still no aesthetics as such) Kant presents the framework of the sensory experience. Apperception (*Anschauung/Apperzeption*) is a cognitive structure combining sensibility with reality; within it perception relates directly to the object (confined within the framework of pure forms of apperception: time and space). The faculty of judgment decides the extent to which the content of cognition can be applied to the object.

Thus representation is associated with the form of experience: there are no pure subjective forms of experience, nor is there a purely conceptual or purely apperceptive cognition. Therefore, by superimposing Rancière’s reflection over Kant’s, we obtain four specific forms or stages of image: testimony, presence, fetish, and figure.

Testimony is the naked image, the foreignness of the object inaccessible to the concept, something which does not really allow trust in the subject – object dialectic, but rather induces us to trust in sensory perception. The ostensive image is always comprehensive, provided it is separated from concepts, which immediately destroy the experience of the coherence of representation. The metaphorical image is the most scrutinised form of representation; through figuration (distinguishing of the figure from the background) it ascribes a permanent hierarchy to different elements of knowledge, which enables them to be investigated separately, without disturbing the whole.

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<sup>6</sup> J. Rancière, *Le destin des images*, Paris 2003, p. 31–37.

	concept	apperception ( <i>Anschauung Apperzeption</i> )
object	PHENOMENON / vision NAKED IMAGE – testimony	REPRESENTATION / observation OSTENSIVE IMAGE
subject	NOTHING / voyeurism Fetish	FIGURATION / looking METAPHORICAL IMAGE

Kantian forms of sensuality and types of image according to Rancière, superimposed in a subject – object table

The same image can be seen in different ways. There are no “pure phases” of the image; representation is born in the process of viewing and reflection. The question is: are we prepared for the processuality of the reading of the representation? In particular, the phase of fetishization of the concept, when a void on the side of sensory experience emerges, when objects drift away, can bring the process of representation to a standstill, unless we treat it as a kind of contemplation and turn it back into experience.

It appears that philosophical thinking is most in danger of a kind of conceptual fetishism, associated with the domination of concepts devoid of image, representation, or context.

The aesthetic revolution, described by Rancière, which still belongs to the future, is being hampered by a configuration of thought which rejects representations in favour of a simple story – Plato’s testimony of ideas or the new art of loftiness, which is supposed to have an ethical impact through avoidance of the ambiguity and excessiveness of aesthetic communication. This thought, according to Rancière, on the one hand argues for the impossibility of the expression contained in the representation, while on the other hand, it judges images in the perspective of Platonian ethics, where the concept of art does not appear, but the only judgments are made on the relationship between the images and their source (are they true to what they represent?) and their objective (what effect will they have on their recipients?). These two logics intermingle. One concerns the separation of different orders of thinking about art, that is, different forms of relationships between sensibility and comprehensibility. The other does not know art as such, and acknowledges only different types of imitation.

## PATHOS – ACTUALITY OF THE MYTH OF ANTIGONE

One of Rancière's most important books is entitled *The Aesthetic Unconscious* (*L'inconscient esthétique*, 2001). This work concerns the unprogrammed gaze, and is written with constant reference to Freud. First and foremost, it presents a reflection on the characteristics of aesthetics not as a derivative of art, but as a play on the limitations of thinking about art. (Visual) art is a form of silent word, which must be extracted from the image. In turn, the image cannot be reduced to either representation or to the object. Rancière emphasises that aesthetics today is not just a new name, describing the domain of art, as if art itself was not conscious of what is happening within it, but rather is a specific configuration of that domain – it changes the rules of thinking about art<sup>7</sup>. One important aesthetic category is the category of *pathos*, understood by Rancière as a type of knowledge, of the recognition of the tragicality stemming from the intermingling of knowledge and non-knowledge – an act of will is a positive abolition of *pathos*<sup>8</sup>. In *L'inconscient esthétique* Rancière refers to the myth of Oedipus, a mythical story which, thanks to Freud, became once again a universal truth about the motivations of human behaviour, while in *Le spectateur émancipé* (2008) he refers chiefly to Plato's "myth of the cave". Just as the Oedipus myth illustrates the history of art, especially the transition from *logos* to *pathos*, the myth of the cave is a step backwards on that road.

The paradox of the spectator (the ignorant spectator) states that there is no performance without the spectator, despite the latter being expelled beyond the fictional representation (of course, Rancière's reflection pertains not just to the theatre). To be a spectator is to be able to separate the capacity for knowledge from the power to act<sup>9</sup>. This valuable ability is not merely – as Plato put it – a place where the ignorant admit to looking at suffering. It is also a place where suffering can have a positive function – as a lesson in patience. Theatre (a fictional representation) transforms the disease, understood as passivity, into an "optical machine", which collides the gaze, the illusion and the passivity. Theatre is implicated by word<sup>10</sup>, but it does not separate the word from the object.

A "sentence-image" – a basic unit of representation, according to Rancière – is a unity of two functions, a parataxis (from Greek *parataxis*, placing side

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<sup>7</sup> Cf idem, *L'inconscient esthétique*, Paris 2001, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Cf idem, *Le spectateur émancipé*, Paris 2008, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Cf ibidem, p. 9.

by side). On the one hand, it opposes madness, while on the other it opposes easy consensuses<sup>11</sup>. It opposes the “ordinary” sentence or image, not through dissimilarity or severance, but through juxtaposition. A reasonable explanation of the sentence-image requires not so much identification of the common points (of the image and sentence) nor the reduction to “pure” consciousness in which the combination will manifest itself (in its essence, as necessary or intentional), but rather it is based on the principle of finding the measure – a possibility of “calculating” the value of this combination, where the “calculation” is guided by the rules of the “other” rationality, described by Rancière in *Malaise dans l'esthétique*. This is the rationality of the *ethos*, following the “ethical turn” in aesthetics and politics. This represents a return to Kant, where aesthetics is no longer a regime of historical identification of art, since art becomes autonomous and uncompromising, although it is always experienced in a given historical moment (within particular forms of time and space). Rancière places the “ethical turn” at the point where Antigone replaces Oedipus in Jacques Lacan’s theory. This becomes a new form of experiencing *ethos*, irreducible to any saving knowledge. Antigone, according to Lacan, is not a heroine fighting for human rights, but rather a “witness of a secret terror within the social order”<sup>12</sup>.

Antigone must choose between the law of the gods (burying her brother according to religious principles) and human law (acting in accordance with the law passed by Creon). In turn, Creon will either act according to the given order (whoever buries the traitor, dies), or be accused of bending the law according to his own needs (Antigone is his relative). In Sophocles’ drama a tragic situation emerges, because both Antigone and Creon defend the laws to which each of them remains faithful until the end. Antigone will not allow herself to be put in a position of an obedient patient (one who patiently bears suffering). Creon orders the girl’s complaints to be silenced and for her to be sealed inside the tomb. Again, as in all key moments of the history of Thebes, Tiresias comes and calls upon Creon to cool his fury. He tells him that gods do not accept sacrifices.

According to Rancière, the political scene assumes a division into “us” and “them”; what is more, a community based on solidarity (we are all “us”) requires both a common metaphor and a recognition that it is a metaphor, not a concept<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Cf idem, *Estetyka jako polityka*, tłum. P. Mościcki, J. Kutyla, Warszawa 2007, p. 75.

<sup>12</sup> Idem, *Malaise dans l'esthétique*, Paris 2004, p. 150.

<sup>13</sup> Cf idem, *Le Mésentente, Politique et philosophie*, Paris 1995, p. 84–91.

Rancière contemplates the common object argument between interlocutors X and Y. A situation of extreme misunderstanding between X and Y stems, according to Rancière, from the fact that one of them does not see the common object, since he does not mark it, he has no sounds or signs for marking it. Additionally, the aporia of politics in itself is a preserved philosophical object, a scandal of exclusion. This scandal is reflected in the killing of Socrates, the murder which led to the founding of the Platonian *politeia*. *Politeia* is a community which forces its inner principles onto all manifestations of life – hence comes the Platonian distinction between the ideal republic and degraded democracy<sup>14</sup>.

The scandal emerges from the fact that even the theoretical laws of rationality are divergent. It is outrageous that politics is a type of activity which is based on the inner divergence of its own rationality. The one class of which Plato's Republic is really made up is the artisans, who must be guarded from the outside (guardians) and directed (philosophers)<sup>15</sup>. The artisans work, while the philosophers attribute value to their work.

According to Rancière, there are only two categories of people – those who have a voice and those who do not. Politics exists thanks to this division. Plato, however, put the emphasis in the wrong places: politics was to be attended by philosophers, who belonged to the sphere of ethics (they learned mostly the ideas, i.e. things-in-themselves). All knowledge can always be divided into parts, which is why the whole of politics consists of parts (parties). In Plato's thought we can see the division between the phonic and logical phenomena – those who speak stay in the cave, while those who know about the ideas go out and do not need to speak<sup>16</sup>. There is no communication between them.

## THE TACTIC OF KNOWLEDGE

Pierre Bourdieu emphasises that we always begin a game with incomplete knowledge, that is, in a state of ignorance, which makes the aspect of faith so important as an element of initial engagement in a game. A practical faith is an agreement to obey the rules in force within a field; it is then tested at each subsequent stage (rites of initiation, competitions, exams, teams, a hierarchy of groups within the *field*<sup>17</sup>). It is a tactic based on a decision concerning awareness of ignorance; it is a “loan for power”.

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<sup>14</sup> Cf *ibidem*, p. 95–103.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 39.

<sup>16</sup> Cf *Ibidem*, p. 44–49.

<sup>17</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Zmysł praktyczny*, tłum. M. Falski, Kraków 2008, p. 93.

Michel de Certeau, a French philosopher who undertook a serious examination of everyday life, described the function of tactics mainly as a way to make use of shortcomings that the “particular business cycles show in the supervision of authority”. A tactic “is a ruse and a trick of the weak one”<sup>18</sup>. It makes use of holes in the system. Despite the system’s consisting mostly of holes, it is very difficult to use them to deconstruct the system. Certeau writes that the place of the tactic is always a pre-prepared place of the other, since there is no way of creating a comprehensive plan of action and of subjugating one’s opponent within an objectively existing space. Paradoxically, it is this very lack of place that guarantees the mobility of the tactic and its ability to use the opportunities of the moment.

A tactic is an individual response to anonymous strategies, often invisible ones. And despite the fact that (as Bogdan Banasiak noted in his analysis of Michel Foucault’s concept of power) power is a visible object of our hatred, we tend to “substantialise it”<sup>19</sup>; it does not cumulate within objects, but rather in strategies for dealing with objects. For example in panopticism, as a form of a society of surveillance and supervision, a disciplinarian society<sup>20</sup>, the object is not the all-seeing gaze, but the strategy consisting in liberating the gaze. The one who looks ceases to be needed. *Panopticon* (from Greek *pan* = all; *optikos* = to see), known as the name of a jail designed by the English utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, was meant to be cheaper to maintain than ordinary jails, as it would not need many staff. Theoretically, in an ideal situation, the guard tower could even be empty, because, as the guards cannot be seen, they do not have to keep watch all the time. According to Bentham, the prisoners of the Panopticon would be guardians of each other, thus reducing the burden on its staff.

For Certeau, the Panopticon is a function of the ego of the modern human<sup>21</sup>. What is hidden today is not the physical forms of the guards, but knowledge, broadly interpreted, which is both available and inaccessible at the same time. The loss of the “utilitarian value” of knowledge was described by Jean François Lyotard in his *Report on Knowledge* from the late 1970s. Consumed knowledge can no longer be seen as shaping the mind or the person<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> M. de Certeau, *Wynaleźć codzienność. Sztuki działania*, tłum. K. Thiel-Jańczuk, Kraków 2008, p. 37.

<sup>19</sup> B. Banasiak, *Michel Foucault – mikrofizyka władzy*, „Literatura na Świecie” 1988, nr 6, p. 331.

<sup>20</sup> Cf ibidem, p. 333–334.

<sup>21</sup> B. Highmore, *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture*, London 2006, p. 551.

<sup>22</sup> Cf J.-F. Lyotard, *Kondycja ponowoczesna. Raport o stanie wiedzy*, tłum. M. Kowalska, J. Migasiński, Warszawa 1997, p. 29–30.

An average citizen – a prisoner of modernity – does not possess the capacity for meaningful structuring, he cannot use knowledge differently than within the enforced system which is imprinted in us in the process of education (Bourdieu).

The new tactic of “placing the knowledge” is an escape from the work of history. History is a transformation of everything into a story, that is, into a type of knowledge which has already been ascribed a certain value.

“History”, then, is already determined by the activities of conserving and archiving: In history everything begins with the gesture of *setting aside*, of putting together, of transforming certain classified objects into “documents” (*The Writing of History*, New York 1988, p. 72). What the production of historiography does is constantly move documents from one place to the other, not just altering the context for these documents, but altering their “composition”. Crucially this movement, and its attendant decompositions and recompositions, does not access the past: what it does is access materials that are constituted by their interpretation of the past. In this sense there are no “raw” or –“primary” sources that could speak immediately for the past: as Nietzsche had already ascertained, the historian is in the business of interpreting interpretations (as is the anthropologist). For de Certeau, the epistemological fact that historians are trading in “refined matter” doesn’t invalidate the attempt to write history, in many ways it becomes the condition of possibility for writing anything of value – whether it is about the past or the present<sup>23</sup>.

Through examination of everyday life Certeau discovers individualism – this category, supplemented with the concept of the tactic, no longer has negative connotations. It is no longer about the individual human being as the highest good. The strong tradition of liberalism, which grew upon this notion, is rejected due to its being associated with tactics. Individualism, formerly connected with anarchy and egoism, now tends to be associated with resistance (towards the strategy in force), often with a subtle resistance, one that egoism seems to deny.

In his *Heterologies*, Certeau investigates, among other things, the relationship between psychoanalysis and history. He states that the attitude towards time is identical to the attitude towards knowledge; the latter splits the subject between the search for basic pleasure (*Eros*) and the law concerning the other (*Thanatos*)<sup>24</sup>. The explanation of history changed the way Freud wrote; he built the psychological machine like a theatrical model.

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<sup>23</sup> B. Highmore, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>24</sup> M. de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, “Theory and History of Literature”, Vol. 17, Minneapolis 1986, p. 6.

Freudian analysis adopts as its system of explanation the structuration of psychic phenomena through the positing of three psychic machine echoes a theatrical model. It is constituted in the manner of a Greek tragedy and in that of Shakespearian drama, from which we know that Freud drew structures of thought, categories of analysis and authoritative quotations. Non-human “role-players” (here, Freudian “principles”, and there, Greek gods) form a configuration of the play, they set forth in synchronic fashion the stages through which the name-bestowing hero (The “I” for Freud, King Lear or Hamlet for Shakespeare) will pass in order to find himself at the end in the inverse of his original position. At the beginning, an order of agencies yields in topographical form, the “moments” which will unfold in diachronic form with successive displacement of the “hero”. Every play or story is the progressive transformation of a spatial order into a temporal series. The psychic apparatus and its function are built on this “literary” model of theater<sup>25</sup>.

A breakthrough in psychoanalysis did not come from referring to clinical cases, but from referring to a myth, described in a masterpiece (Sophocles’ *Oedipus*). Lacan also behaved like an actor during his seminars, attempting to pass on knowledge while he himself did not belong to any field (of science, art, or even psychoanalysis). According to Certeau, his seminars were tragicomic.

Lacan belongs to no one. He is not situated, not entrapped in his own discourse, where certain faithful think they hold him, not chained to an institution and to a genealogy, not even to his own. He speaks and is alone: both are aspects of the same battle. He is Other, as he signs in this final declaration of 1980: “If it should happen that I leave, you may say that it is only order to be at least Other. One can be happy being Other like everybody else after a life spent, in spite of the Law, trying to be Other”. It happened<sup>26</sup>.

In this way he separated the symbolic from the imaginary, thus rescuing the symbolic. It is a tactic to clear access to the symbolic, a new way of topological thinking, consisting in “metonymic displacement”<sup>27</sup>.

## TACTICS VS. SYSTEMS

Thanks to the three features of the structure, described by Jean Piaget (wholeness, transformation, self-regulation), we can also precisely specify what a system is. Roland Barthes describes three main features of a system (a semantically

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<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 22.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 48.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 53.

perfect one, such as fashion): “closedness, emptiness and manoeuvrability”<sup>28</sup>. According to Barthes the system is damaged if it opens to the world through connotation. The system is closed, which means that no resistance can damage it – it may even help to better specify it. People who are indifferent to fashion do not damage its system, and the enemies of fashion can only do the system a service by surrounding it in an aura of scandal and shock, of transgression of aesthetic boundaries.

Tactics are a lack of place (bottom-up) and movement (top-down). There are meta-systemics, meta-structural concepts. Through their strong specification, systems seem to make tactics impossible; instead they create special places for tactics (turning points). If we look at the system as a structure (that is, as a certain wholeness, but an open one), we have space for tactical movement.

Robert Altman’s 1994 film *Prêt-à-Porter* is an ingenious but unsung masterpiece, which has gained renown thanks to its cast, which included a large number of actors and celebrities, mostly from the fashion world. Barthes wrote about the excesses of fashion, upon which its system is constructed. This is because, if fashion responded to our needs for clothing or even to our aesthetic needs, it would quickly exhaust itself. Consequently fashion is a system ready for incessant expansion. It is not so much about larger and larger billboards or the splendour of fashion shows, as about the shifting of the boundaries of fashion onto all phenomena of social life.

The film *Prêt-à-Porter* seems almost like a documentary, as it presents one of the regular (semi-annual) events, when the whole world of fashion meets in Paris to determine what is in fashion this season, what is – literally – “ready to be worn”.

In the last scene of the movie a renowned female designer sends naked models out onto the catwalk. This gesture is preceded by the information that it is the result of twenty years of deliberation. The truth is different, and the audience knows it – the Lo company is in financial trouble. Kitty Potter (the main commentator of the show) has great difficulty interpreting the designer’s gesture. She says that this is fashion “for everybody and for no one”, and suddenly realising the emptiness of her own discourse, she gives up her job. She is replaced by a young assistant, who immediately starts patching up the mosaic of images with appropriate words, establishing the gesture of Lo within the history of fashion, giving it continuity. This gesture is not limited merely to the presentation of nakedness. The last model on the catwalk is in an advanced

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<sup>28</sup> R. Barthes, *System mody*, tłum. M. Falski, Kraków 2005, p. 285.

multiple pregnancy and is dressed in a white wedding veil, which, according to tradition, is reserved for virgins.

Thus fashion can reverse everything; it sells youth as the most desirable state, associated with beauty, good looks, health and opportunities. What is not presented is the other side of youth – naivety, lack of experience, susceptibility to influence. Fashion, writes Barthes, accepts the *boy-look*, or, as we would probably call it today, *unisex*. The feminine and the masculine keep referring to each other, keep exchanging places, but it is all about neither of them, it is about the *boy-look* associated not as much with sex, as with time – it is a complementary sign of an ideal age. This is what the “deep process of Fashion” is about – “what counts is the age, not the sex”<sup>29</sup>.

All systems are police systems; they equalise human abilities, turning people into slaves, unable to oppose the system.

The theory of tactics explains the nature of the fight. The background of all wars is the fight in time, for time, for the conquest of space where it does not exist. The tactic of knowledge is first and foremost the ability to connect, to include what seems to stretch beyond the *field*, does not fit within the *field*. It is based on the self-regulation of structures and manoeuvrability of systems, but it does not allow repetitions (for example, repetitions of concepts, that is, the historical depiction of knowledge) to strengthen the systems (domination of systems).

The concept of tactics is derived from the Greek words *tássein*, *táttein* – to arrange, to order, to align in a row. From another perspective, tactics are a direct armed struggle, meant to destroy the enemy, regardless of the size (scale) of the armies. The most common tactical manoeuvre is the rotation (relief) of units, both on the offensive and in defence.

Parataxis, understood as the joining of several coordinate sentences into a compound one, is used by Barthes as a mechanism which supplements Jakobson’s division of language into two main axes: metaphor and metonymy.

Metonymy, in Jakobson’s understanding, is opposed to metaphor, with the latter directed at condensation of meaning. Metonymy is more of a shift of meaning, rather than a mechanism which transforms meaning. The whole joy of interpretation consists in the process of shifting, of eluding absolute meanings. The circulation of meaning takes place through associations, or even beyond associations.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 256.

The levels of the art of war	Three basic mechanisms of language	Features of structure according to Piaget	Features of systems according to Barthes
Operational art	Metaphor condensation	wholeness	closedness
Strategy	Metonymy shift	transformation	emptiness
Tactics	Parataxis connection	self-regulation	manoeuvrability

Comparison of the features of structure, system, mechanisms of language and levels of the art of war

Therefore, parataxis strengthens metonymy (as a strategy of shifting), and eventually it loosens the metaphor (as a uniform image of the whole). The positivity of Lyotard's *Report on Knowledge* arises from appreciation of the new form of knowledge. Despite the fall of grand narratives, there will always be a demand for practical (tactical) knowledge, which is based on making creative connections between pieces of information that were not associated before.

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