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A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

French cultural theorist, Michel de Certeau was born in 1925 and died in 1986. Although his work really only found wide notice among English language readers after his death, as Natalie Zemon Davis (2008) tells us, de Certeau was seen as a kind of celebrity thinker in France, where he was openly mourned by the public. De Certeau was ordained as a Jesuit priest in 1956 (Ahearne 1995, 2) and throughout his scholarly career he maintained what one critic called an “unwavering religiosity” (Buchanan 2000, 2). Much of de Certeau’s scholarly output was concerned with early modern religions, particularly with his study of 17th-century Christian mystics (see Ahearne 1995; Giard 1997, ix; Davis 2008). Profoundly affected by the student and worker protests culminating in the general strike of May 1968 in France (Giard 1997), de Certeau collected his commentary and reflections on these events in a pamphlet entitled, *La prise de parole*¹ that was published later in the same year (Highmore 2006, 75). Some see these writings as representative of an important turning point in de Certeau’s oeuvre, marking a shift away from the strictures of the institutional discourses in which his religious studies were performed. Other analysts insist that there is a strong and coherent thread of thematic and methodological interests that runs through de Certeau’s entire body of work (for example, Buchanan 2000; Highmore 2002). De Certeau also conducted ethnographic studies among native communities in the Latin American countries of Brazil, Chile, and Argentina (Ahearne 1995, 70; Highmore 2006, 8). After 1968 and until his death, he worked consistently as a cultural policy analyst and public intellectual, working with colleagues on various projects for the Ministry of Culture in France (Highmore 2006, 154). De Certeau also pursued intellectual interests in psychoanalysis and was also a founding member of Jacques Lacan’s *École Freudienne* established in 1964 (Ahearne 1995, 2; Highmore 2006, 51). He held several academic positions in France and from 1978–84 he was a professor of French and comparative literature at the University of California at San Diego. He was

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appointed director of studies at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* in Paris the year before his death.²

Apparently, de Certeau identified primarily as an historian (Ahearne 1995, 194; Davis 2008), and he has made significant contributions to the history of early modern religious experience (see *The Possession at Loudon*) as well as to the writing of history and historiography (see *The Writing of History*). He brought to all of his writing the influences of his Jesuit training, his interests in psychoanalysis, and his concern to honour the perspectives of marginalized and invisible voices whether this was “of seventeenth-century ‘Christians without a church,’” of the Amerindians crushed by colonizers since the Renaissance, and of the “man without qualities,” (sic) our contemporary human beings who are submerged—even in the secrecy of their dreams—by mass consumerism” (Giard 1997, ix). However, most commentators on de Certeau’s oeuvre also point out his remarkably wide-ranging intellectual contributions to fields such as cultural and media studies, consumer and leisure studies, cultural anthropology, and literary studies, as well as to social and political thought and psychoanalysis. And, as many analysts have pointed out, Michel de Certeau’s work seems truly interdisciplinary in his quest to understand and articulate the practices of everyday life while privileging perspectives that have been silenced and invisible in other accounts. This serious, ethical insistence on the interrelated connections among disciplined ways of knowing may resonate the most with researchers and writers who work on the problematics of everyday life and marginalized voices and perspectives. For this reason (and due to the necessary editorial limits imposed for this chapter), it is primarily de Certeau’s ideas about the practices of everyday life that will be covered here, although references will be made to his diverse works as appropriate.³

PRACTICES OF EVERYDAY LIFE

In earlier work I sketched a framework for the analysis of everyday life information-seeking behaviour that drew from Michel de Certeau’s rubric of everyday life practices (Rothbauer 2005). In this chapter, I elaborate this framework making further reference to de Certeau’s ideas about the everyday as an “ensemble of practices” (Highmore 2002, 151).

It is important to emphasize that de Certeau’s “practices of everyday life” do not constitute anything like a fully formed theoretical formulation. He begins by informing the reader that the aim of the collected essays published in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) is “by means of inquiries and hypotheses, to indicate pathways for further research” (xi; see also 18). His project was to foreground the practices of everyday life, or the ways that ordinary people “made do” within networks of institutions like education, the military, the media, big business, and the church that comprised the disciplinary (or dominating) forces of society. The question at the center of his inquiries was, as Highmore writes, not how to overthrow networks of power, but rather how society resists being determined by “the grid of discipline” (2002, 159). De Certeau’s analytical lens, therefore, focuses on “ways of operating” or on what he described as “the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and make-shift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of ‘discipline’” (xiv–xv). He is interested to uncover the “poetics” of everyday cultural production: how people invent or create everyday life while using the products supplied by the

expansionist systems of sociocultural production (Highmore 2002, 148). De Certeau writes,

The purpose of this work is to make explicit the systems of operational combination (*les combina-toires d'opérations*) which also compose a "culture," and to bring to light the models of action characteristic of users whose status the dominated element in society (a status that does not mean that they are either passive or docile) is concealed by the euphemistic term "consumers." Every-day life invents itself by *poaching* in countless ways on the property of others. (1984, xi–xii)

De Certeau employs a distinct vocabulary to describe the ensemble of everyday practices from the ubiquitously cited "strategies" and "tactics," to "ways of operating," "poaching," and "making do" along with recurrent binary pairs such as "reading and writing," "consumption and production," and "space and place." An understanding of these terms provides an important key to de Certeau's overall formulation of everyday life practices. It is also important to recognize that for de Certeau the locus of analysis in his study of the marginalized and dominated was situated at the level of activities, procedures and practices, those that are quotidian, taken-for-granted, and massively predominant across all of society. He tells us right away that the individual is not the unit of analysis, but rather the social relations between individuals and ways of operating in everyday life (1984, xi).

His central metaphor for conceiving of the practices of everyday life is borrowed from military operations, encompassed by his use of the terms "strategies" and "tactics" now so widely cited across the disciplines. Given the freight of these two terms, it seems necessary to revisit the meaning that de Certeau explicitly gives to them:

I call a *strategy* the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed. (1984, 35–36)

I call a "tactic" on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on a "proper" (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances. The "proper" is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized "on the wing" . . . Many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.) are tactical in character. And so are, more generally, many "ways of operating" (1984, xix).

Strategies establish a place and are proprietorial, suggesting what appropriate activity is, and what accepted conventions are within or for that place (Highmore 2002, 158). Strategies are defined, in part, by a regulatory imperative to govern how a place is constructed and used. Strategies are deployed by the institutions that comprise the grid of discipline to continue to produce the network of disciplinary apparatuses and to produce a regulatory effect through distribution of its "products" to the "consumers." Stable places are produced through strategic operations. According to de Certeau (1984, 36) the effects

of strategies are threefold: to produce a “triumph of place over time” by creating a place that resists the erosion of time; to make a “panoptic presence” possible by producing a “mastery of places through sight” (so, a place is recognized and made visible as an institution, as site of power); and to provide “oneself with one’s own place” (or to produce regulations and laws that give credibility, visibility and power to an institution).

Such strategies are relentlessly expansionist in de Certeau’s vision of everyday life, but what interests him is the creative capacity of individuals (of consumers, of readers) to move within this system. Rather than this “rationalized, expansionist, centralized, spectacular and clamorous production” (1984, 31) de Certeau focuses on the “quasi-invisibility” of consumer production—invisible because it shows itself not in actual products, but through “ways of using” or “making do” within this “calculus of force-relationships” (1984, xix).

The operations of everyday life are characterized for de Certeau by what he termed “tactics” which, in turn, are defined by the concepts of “escaping without leaving” and “poaching.” Tactics operate inside the grid of discipline, inside the system—there is no other possibility—individuals dominated by networks of power must necessarily operate alongside the logics of the strategies of such systems. De Certeau attempted to give weight to this idea of tactical operations within the system by invoking the concept of *la perruque* (translated from the French as “the wig”) as an everyday procedure of making do. *La perruque* is when a worker uses company time to conduct personal business, in this way resisting the logic of the assembly line (1984, 25, 29–30). While this concept has been critiqued as having no power to disrupt unequal dynamics of social power (see Morris 1990), Ben Highmore provides a strong corrective to the interpretation of de Certeau’s notion of resistance as “opposition,” claiming that for de Certeau, resistance is “closer to the use of the term in electronics and psychoanalysis: it is what hinders and dissipates the energy flow of domination, it is what resists representation . . . [it] is as much an activity born of inertia as it is a result of inventive forms of appropriation” (2002, 152). Seen this way, *la perruque* provides massive evidence of the failure of the grid of discipline to wholly determine the contours of everyday life.

By looking at de Certeau’s analyses of everyday life we can learn more about how he envisioned the interplay of strategies and tactics. He provides an elaboration of the operations of everyday life in several chapters of *The Practice of Everyday Life* but it is his writing on the relationship between reading and writing and his ideas on place and space that we will be concerned with here.⁴

De Certeau brings the activities of reading and writing together as similar everyday cultural operations: he sees both as practices of creative and active production of readers and writers (de Certeau 1997b, 145; and as cited in Highmore 2002, 155). However, in what de Certeau calls a “scriptural economy” (1984), writing is privileged because it is more visible than reading and such visibility continually reifies its place in our society. Reading is an “inevitable” starting point in de Certeau’s work as he saw it as “the “exorbitant” focus of contemporary culture and its consumption” (1984, xxi). He creates a parallel between the binaries of writing-reading and production-consumption. In one of his most famous passages, he debunks the supposed passivity of readers by rejecting the ideology that posits readers, consumers, and users of cultural products as victims who witlessly absorb the values and beliefs provided by the systems of production. He explicitly critiques the ideology of “informing through books” when he describes its logic as rendering consumption as “something done by sheep progressively immobilized and ‘handled’ . . . The only freedom supposed to be left to the masses is that of grazing on the

ration of simulacra the system distributes to each individual” (1984, 165–66). In place of this ideology, de Certeau posits an idea of the reader (i.e., the consumer of texts) as a poacher and as a silent producer who, through the process of reading a text, creates “a different world (the reader’s) [that] slips into the author’s place” (1984, xxi). Reading then, for de Certeau, is tactical resistance par excellence, since the reader necessarily has to make do with what the author and the publisher (i.e., the producer) provide. The text in this formulation represents the place of strategies, what de Certeau terms the “readable space,” while the “actuality” of reading is a tactical way of operating within the systems of production of cultural texts (1984, 169). Furthermore, for de Certeau the only way to understand this silent production was to look at ways of using; he asked of “[t]he thousands of people who buy a health magazine, the customers of newspaper stories and legends—what do they make of what they ‘absorb,’ receive, and pay for? What do they do with it?” (1984, 31). The everyday practice of reading, in de Certeau’s framework, “eludes the law of information,” disrupting the ideology that sees a passive reader receiving wholesale messages from cultural texts. However, reading also illustrates how tactics do not necessarily oppose the strategies of the dominant, but do, rather, work alongside them: to read a text you need to work within it as a frame of reference.

De Certeau provides some elaboration of his notions of place and space. As his definitions of these terms indicate, “place” is seen to be a recognizable, stable, distinct site of power in the context of changing social-cultural-political relations. The “law of the ‘proper’ rules in the place” and defines it and makes it impossible for some other complex of relations to be in the same place at the same time. As is illustrated by the case of reading, places must also contain tactical ways of operating. Space is characterized by movement and “mobile elements” and is “produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs.” So, again, rather than seeing the production of space in conflict or opposition to place, de Certeau declares that “space is practiced place” (1984, 117), just as reading is a spatial operation that relies on the text as a “place.” As Highmore writes, de Certeau provides a picture of the production of everyday life that holds in abeyance the “binary logic that infects the analysis of the social” (2002, 151) and further, that a focus on the resistance of everyday, tactical ways of operating “offers a different and pluralized account of powers” (152).

LIS RESEARCH AND MICHEL DE CERTEAU: SUPPORT FOR RESISTANCE

Michel de Certeau has been cited very little in the published literature of Library and Information Science (LIS), and when he is cited it is exclusively to the 1984 English language edition (translated by Stephen Rendall) of his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Most citations to de Certeau rely on one general application of his work: to posit active or resistant agency of research participants or subjects (e.g., Adams; Chopin; Davenport, Higgins and Somerville; McKechnie et al.; Mehra, Merkel and Bishop; Wyatt et al.). While it is difficult to locate many examples of in-depth treatment of de Certeau’s ideas in the published LIS literature, notable use of his ideas is evident in the work of a handful of LIS scholars.

In the late 1990s, Wayne Wiegand and Christine Pawley were the first LIS researchers to cite de Certeau in their respective work. In the published version of his 1997 address to the Library of Congress, Wiegand (1999) used de Certeau to support his analysis of the gaps in information science research when it came to conceptualizing the

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“personal information economy” of ordinary people. Specifically, Wiegand uses de Certeau to support the idea that people do not passively receive information from a variety of media, information tools or people and that the ways in which they “appropriate that information in efforts to make sense of the world around them in their everyday lives” remained invisible in the information science discourse (24).

Christine Pawley (1998) uses de Certeau’s work as a framework to discuss various instances of ideological resistance to hegemonic strategies at work within LIS. She cites de Certeau’s ideas about tactical resistance to remind us that the dominated classes in society exercise agency to “create space for themselves to exercise choice and control” and that such practices, if taken far enough, according to de Certeau “compose the network of an anti-discipline” (de Certeau, cited in Pawley 1998, 128). Pawley picks up this thread again later in the article when she discusses the tactical practices performed both by librarians who resisted official policies of censorship during the First World War and the McCarthy era, and LIS faculty who disrupted LIS curricula by offering courses on marginalized and invisible user groups (139–40).

Pawley (2003) introduces two different aspects of de Certeau’s work in a later paper on the contradiction among conceptualizations of information literacy as, on one hand, a set of practices with emancipatory and democratic potential, and on the other hand, as systematic control that undermines such liberatory effects. First, Pawley indirectly cites de Certeau’s notion of the “scriptural economy” as she links the concept of information with Enlightenment ideas of being informed and improved through reading (428). Second, Pawley uses de Certeau’s work on reading as poaching to define a line of scholarly inquiry into readers and texts that complicates the relationship between information and users (437). Pawley (2009) revisits the resistance framework provided by de Certeau’s formulation of the strategies and tactics of everyday life when she interrogates the strength of its explanatory power beyond an understanding of the daily appropriations and personal resistances of individual readers (78–80).

Pawley develops her own approach for the history of reading scholarship (focused on making reading institutions the unit of analysis) by strategically critiquing de Certeau’s resistance model of reading. Another researcher, David Patterson (2009), maps his inquiry regarding the use of new literary theories as a way to investigate information literacy instruction among undergraduate and college students to de Certeau’s notion of the creative agency of reading acts. He suggests that community college librarians recast students as active “creators of knowledge” in all stages of the research act (353). However, in an overview of models of reading in the context of public libraries and pleasure reading, Catherine Sheldrick Ross (2009) provides the most expansive articulation of the resistance model of reading informed by de Certeau (647–49). Ross illustrates how de Certeau, especially his writing in his chapter on reading as poaching in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, helps reading researchers to posit a “meaning-producing poacher reader” (648) that undermines “the notion of the compliant reader as a receptacle for meanings produced by others” (649).

In my own work I have used de Certeau’s concepts of spatial tactics to theorize the role of the public library in my understanding of the reading and information seeking practices of library users and readers (Rothbauer 2007). Specifically, I explore de Certeau’s insistence on the power of readers to grab hold of what the system provides to find or produce a space in the grid of discipline that imposes social control or in response to what Pawley (1998) calls “hegemonic strategies” in her analysis of LIS curricula. Using de Certeau’s formulation of the practices of everyday life as a

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framework for a study of libraries and reading permits the library to be positioned as a site and source of information for the creation of ideological space that potentially supports the social and personal identities of people who claim alternative sexual identities as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer (LGBQ). Rather than simply making claims for resistant readers, using de Certeau's ideas on the practices of everyday life, I attempt to theorize both an ideological space and an actual social place for the library that allows for a negotiation of the tension between professional LIS practice and user perceptions and behaviour. The ethical imperatives in LIS to create ordered access to information for a variety of users who are institutionally categorized by various identity markers, including those that describe sexual identities and orientations (in other words, the library's own grid of discipline), paradoxically, provides the ground and the ideological resources that are appropriated by users in their tactical use of the place of the library. As they make their way through various imposed systems—information, library, and publishing—they find personally relevant reading materials that resonate with their sense of themselves as readers and as people belonging to a large community of sexual minority citizens. The common litany offered in empirical studies of the information practices of LGBQ library patrons that the library does not yield much useful, relevant, or current information or materials to their searches, does not spell out a complete failure. Such activities and reflections on the same provide a point of commonality among all such users that could be seen in terms of an information practice that corresponds to a ritual coming-out narrative (“I went to look for books at the library but they didn't have what I wanted, or all they had was this” (i.e., old, out-dated, irrelevant titles).

De Certeau's conceptualization of tactics and strategies of everyday life allows us to see that it is not just a matter of escaping dominant systems that treat all consumers and users as dupes, nor on the other hand, is it simply a matter of positing an active agent who nevertheless, exerts no real power to change the system. Everyday tactics are iterative, wily, and difficult to reify into stable and lasting representations, but this does not render them meaningless or trivial—in many ways it is this plurality and heterogeneity that grants power to everyday ways of operating.

THE PROMISE OF PRACTICES OF EVERYDAY LIFE FOR LIS

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss other areas of Michel de Certeau's oeuvre that are rich with possibility for LIS, it would be remiss to fail to mention them at all. His critique of traditional modes of historiography (1988) along with his work that insists on the plurality of voices and meanings for an understanding of social practices and relations among the dominated and the powerful (1986) will be of interest to certain LIS researchers. For those who reject the thesis of social control that pins individuals onto the grid of discipline with their every movement determined by powerful sociopolitical forces, Michel de Certeau offers an approach to the study of culture that privileges multiple modes of operating among a plurality of voices that contributes to an understanding of social and cultural phenomena. Readers are also directed to Ben Highmore's book published in 2006, entitled, *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture* for an analysis of de Certeau's “methodological imagination” as read against and with prominent social theorists and writers such as Spivak, Bakhtin, and Foucault. In particular, de Certeau's conception of an ethical ethnography should be of interest to LIS researchers working in this tradition.

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As discussed in the previous section, the practices of everyday life as formulated by de Certeau have found fertile ground in a handful of LIS studies. His work has predominantly been used to support research on readers and reading but has been cited much less in research concerned with how people use information resources and navigate information systems. It would seem that this field of research is wide open in terms of an application of de Certeau's work. After a brief discussion of the field of everyday life information studies, I briefly provide three specific examples of research problems that could be informed by de Certeau's practices of everyday life, moving an application of his work beyond resistance models of use and consumption to interrogate more deeply the overlapping relations between strategic and tactical operations.

Inquiries regarding the information behaviour of people in everyday life constitute a growing field of study in LIS (Fisher and Julien 2009, 325–26). Although researchers have been examining information seeking, use, and sharing by ordinary people in the context of everyday needs for information at least since the 1960s (Savolainen 2008, 6, 37–38), it is in recent years that serious attention has been given to the study of information practices as central to people's daily lives.⁵ One of the key questions in this area concerns the relationship between sociocultural factors and quotidian information practices associated with identifying personal needs for information and relevant or convenient sources of information. A consistent finding is that daily routine and convenience often determine the assessment of reliability and quality as well as the degree of use of information and information resources (see Savolainen 2008, 203–4). De Certeau's work has the potential to enrich our understanding of the meaning of both everyday contexts and mundane information practices, in particular, in studies of marginalized or nonelite populations. For example, how do daily, taken-for-granted information practices (such as those related to media use like reading the newspaper or browsing the Internet) lend stability or disrupt the place of the family or the household? De Certeau gives us a lens by which to see and framework with which to privilege banal and, often, invisible daily information practices.

Given de Certeau's reliance on travel metaphors as well as his insistence on the capacity of users to create an "indefinite plurality of meanings" as they wander through "an imposed system" (1984, 169), it seems that his work could be productively used in studies of the information practices of library users. For example, de Certeau's ideas could frame an analysis of the strategies of database producers who create and market particular information products, along with those of academic librarians in their efforts to impart literature searching and research skills to students. Such a study would ask questions of what students make of the products of these strategies: how do they navigate the database structures, what do they make of tutorial exercises and handouts? Add to their voices those of other users, other producers (for example, reviewers or information technology workers), to gain access to the plurality and polyvalence that de Certeau's framework demands.

More work could be done in LIS on the place of the public library using de Certeau's sense of place and space. How does the library continue to exert social power to stabilize its place in society? What are the explicit strategies to issue from such a place that permits a continuing "triumph of place over time"? How do users exert tactical resistance using library policies, programs and services as overlapping frames of reference?

A similar framework could be brought to the study of some of our enduring library associations. What kinds of self-defining and self-supporting strategies permit the establishment and continuance of associations that span more than one hundred

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years? In this case, how do librarians and other library workers use the products of their associations? What are the “mobile elements” in such consumption?

It is my hope that readers will be inspired to explore de Certeau’s work to find their own questions (and answers) informed by the record of de Certeau’s thought. The bottom line for LIS researchers interested in using de Certeau’s ideas about everyday life practice is that they need to be prepared to explore, creatively, the spaces in between comforting binaries such as production-consumption, reading-writing, and space-place. De Certeau does not give us a theory that can be applied to our data, to our findings, but does give us analytical tools and methods for thinking about our research, pushing it into new and exciting directions, that allow us to enunciate taken-for-granted, understudied, marginalized, or invisible information practices.

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NOTES

1. A reprint of this pamphlet, translated into English by Tom Conley, is found in Michel de Certeau's (1997a) *The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings*.
2. As noted on the inside jacket cover of de Certeau's *Heterologies* (1986).
3. For a complete bibliography of de Certeau's works, see Giard 1987. For a sustained analysis of de Certeau alongside other cultural theorists of everyday life, see Highmore 2002.
4. Readers are also encouraged to examine *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Living and Cooking*, ed. Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol (1998) as it provides research narratives based on empirical studies of "living" and "cooking" that illustrate some of the more theoretical formulations found in the first volume.
5. See Savolainen's *Everyday Information Practices: A Social Phenomenological Perspective*, published in 2008, for an exhaustive review of the development of this area of study.

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