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КОНСПИРАТИВНЫЕ ПРОСТРАНСТВА:
АНАЛИЗ ИНСТРУКЦИЙ ЦРУ ПО МАСКИРОВКЕ
ПОЛЕВЫХ АГЕНТОВ ВО ВРЕМЯ ХОЛОДНОЙ ВОЙНЫ[©]

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Аннотация. В статье анализируется концепция конспиративных пространств, как она понимается в инструкциях ЦРУ «Случаи оперативного применения искусства маскировки» и «Опознавательные знаки». Рассматриваются два ситуативных момента: как агенты узнают друг друга в общественных местах и как осуществляется передача предметов. В первом случае конспиративное пространство, в котором действуют агенты, находится внутри общественного пространства, предписанного сценарием встречи. Характер выбранного публичного пространства определяет, какие именно знаки должны использоваться для узнавания. Во втором случае, который может быть продолжением первого, предполагается, что предмет, передаваемый одним агентом другому, всегда должен находиться внутри маскирующего объекта: в качестве «прикрытия нормальностью» внешний объект функционирует одновременно как знак семиотической неразрывности окружающего пространства и как секретное пространство, содержащее нужный предмет. В обоих случаях функциональная и социальная нормальность является основным правилом, которому необходимо строго следовать, чтобы не нарушить процесс.

Таким образом, цель автора состоит в том, чтобы исследовать основные свойства конспиративных пространств как части окружающего их общественного пространства и то, как ситуативные события корреспондируют с выбранной публичной локацией.

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Secret spaces: analysis of CIA's deception instructions for field agents during the cold war[©]

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Abstract. This paper examines the concept of secret spaces as perceived throughout the CIA guides *Some operational applications of the art of deception* and *Recognition signals*. Two situational instructions are addressed: the recognition between agents in public spaces and the transmission of objects. In the first case, the concept of secret space lies under the public space, which is the foreseen scenario for the act. It encompasses a secret space shared between agents, who must perform a particular activity while not attracting attention. Mostly the nature of the space dictates which sign must be used for recognition. In the second case, which might be a continuation of the first one, the object passed between agents should always be inside another one: as a "normality cover", the exterior object works simultaneously as a continuity sign for the surrounding space and as a secret space containing the required object. In both cases the functional and social normality is the main line that must be strictly followed, establishing a continuity that cannot be broken. Considering such matters, our purpose is to investigate the nature of secret spaces regarding the encompassing public space, and how the situational events relate to the encompassing space.

Keywords: secret; public spaces; signaling; espionage; semiotics.

Magicians have always understood that when someone looks without a particular commitment at a picture, landscape or object, their eyes are drawn to the discontinuities present. A flaw, dissonant color or building tends to redirect the gaze of the watcher. For this reason they disguise their tricks within natural movements or objects, and are usually not discovered by a mistrustful audience. Such movements are not accounted for as relevant, and are soon forgotten. In order to make use

of such knowledge during the cold war, the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency of the United States of America) employed John Mulholland, a professional stage magician, to develop techniques that could be easily applied by their field agents in foreign countries. The techniques convert principles of a magic trick into functional maneuvers for situations involving espionage, without requiring the same amount of expertise that a magician has. As a part of the guides containing these techniques was declassified and later published in book format [Melton, Wallace, 2009], it became a relevant source for the study of secrecy and what it involves.

These guides present practical instructions often with figures, minutely explaining procedures and requirements concerning the subjects, locality, social rules and several other details. Having them as the study object, we explore the concept of secret spaces, how it was understood and applied from a semiotic perspective, focusing on two situational events: the recognition signals employed by agents in public spaces, and the transmission of objects between them in a micro-secret space.

Public spaces as a secret stage

As constantly mentioned in the guides by John Mulholland, the importance of stage management is fundamental for the magician. "Proper stage management techniques provide reasons for the magician's audience to believe their eyes instead of their reason" [Melton, Wallace, 2009, p. 25–26]. However, when this is transposed to public spaces the stage becomes relatively inoperable depending on the circumstances. Although "always accessible", it is where values are implied and global and local perspectives are put to test, according to Lambert, Pellegrino and Jacot-Guillarmod [Lambert, Pellegrino, Jacot-Guillarmod, 1990, p. 12]. As the authors state, the concepts of public space and secrets do not match:.. s'il se dégage [l'espace public] comme un espace commun à chacun, c'est, dans le mythe de fondation d'une communauté, comme lieu où le secret, pour un climat d'instauration, semble levé parce que tout peut y être connu de tous, discuté et vérifié dans une interaction passagère entre termes provisoirement anonymes d'un groupement amorphe [ibid, p. 14].

The implementation of secrets in public spaces requires rethinking this "stage" in terms of variables and invariables. For instance, a spy will not be able to add physical structures or mirrors to the scenario; the only manageable object is himself, including his body, clothes and accessories.

In addition to that, a public space comprises a set of elements that allow establishing an agenda; its continuity or normality of things that are expected to happen there. According to Landowski [Landowski, 2006] this can be understood as the programming regime, opposed to the accident regime. Such an accident could be represented if the agents did not operate secretly, or if they were caught, therefore attracting attention and completely changing the nature of the given public space during this time.

Likewise to the functional agenda, there is a social one as well. Social interactions between two strangers are accepted as normality to a certain degree in a train station, while less interaction should be expected inside a library and much more inside a restaurant. Crossing these barriers would mean being noticed or judged, since the public space "est aussi ce lieu où toujours, quelqu'autre se donnant en spectacle, chacunquel qu'il suit peut se permettre d'en juger les performances comme des compétences" [Lambert, Pellegrino, Jacot-Guillarmod, 1990, p. 6]. Moreover, the spy should consider specific social rules characteristic of the culture where he would be acting. These agendas were then used in favor of the spies. Knowing what should be expected in a train or metro station sets what is continuity in such a space, which is different in a restaurant, library or at a swimming pool. The functional and social continuity becomes the invariable which the spy must consider. This creates a paradox that must be handled, because the agent must work in consonance with the continuity and still "in the shadows".

Recognition signals

Concerning the specific signals that should be used, Mulholland supplied some guidelines. For instance, "Whatever is used must be decided upon long before it ever is needed. Every detail then has to be studied, and fully understood, by everyone who ever may be called upon to use the method" [Melton, Wallace, 2009, p. 151], and the sig-

nals should be in accordance with the continuity of where the meeting is taking place – with special attention to the habits of the countries they were in. On some occasions the agents were allowed to meet and talk, on others they were oriented to never meet, and this was a factor that should be considered regarding the nature of the chosen signal.

In this choice comes the transposition from the stage magic to the espionage, since the magicians would occasionally make use of recognition signals in members of the audience, although with slight differences. Mulholland states that the most obvious device for magicians was called: "The Chrysanthemum in the Buttonhole Technique" [Melton, Wallace, 2009, p. 142]. It exemplifies the required features: a not unusual practice, instantly seeable, colorful (which draws attention and can be replaced by a singular size), and is meaningless.

A visual signal could be replaced by an audible signal if the circumstances allowed. In a crowded place, yelling could be a signal. In this case there is no secret; the yell means precisely the act of calling out for someone. However, this particular person being called is not necessarily a part of the crowd, thus the agents will not be connected and the exchange will not necessarily be performed in the same place. Lastly, Mulholland states that some signals or gestures were more appropriate for men, others for women, which ratifies the need for following specific social rules.

The signals were segmented into two groups, directly connected to visibility and to the scenario, which are for long / medium distances and for close distances. The first kind would be effective for short distances as well. They comprise:

– variations in clothing: feather in hat, type of necktie (with specific combination of colors);

– specific package, paper or knot of a gift being carried;

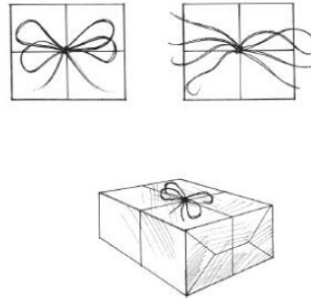– Court plaster, surgeon's tape, Band-Aids (of specific size or format).

Fig. 1. Source: Phil Franke [Melton, Wallace, 2009, p. 143]

The signals for close distance, on the other hand, were minimal features, such as:

– handkerchief / pen tip or pencil clip from the breast pocket; a different button in a shirt;

– shoelaces: variation in design;

– grommet in only one buckle hole of a belt;

– thumbtack in the heel of the right shoe.
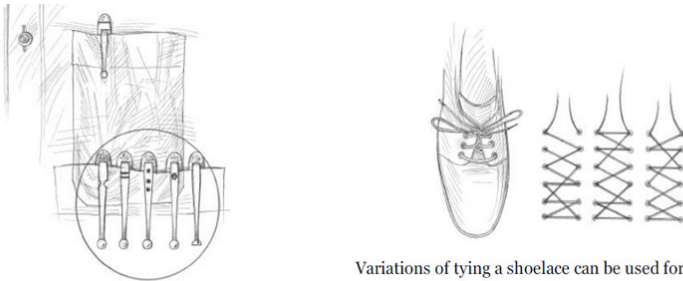
Variations of tying a shoelace can be used for signaling.

Fig. 2. Source: Phil Franke [Melton, Wallace, 2009, p. 147]

These signals portray something not out of the ordinary, which could be presented by any passerby and not be noticed. Nonetheless, when such a specific discontinuity is expected by another subject, who will sequentially compare it to what he is expecting, to the requirements of the signal, coincidence gives way to precision. Concerning this matter, Mulholland states that "To find a tack in a particular spot, in the

right heel, and on a particular day, and at a certain place and time, of a second person would be asking too much of coincidence" [Melton, Wallace, 2009, p. 147]. This sentence helps to clarify that in addition to the signal in itself, the external conditions would also be a component of the signal: the place, date and time. This leads to the reasoning that the secret signal is an artificial coincidence.

Such objects, which carry a message (summarized as: "I am what you are looking for") do not have as initial main purpose to communicate [Fontanille, 2020], the purpose is to be recognized as a message by a particular receiver. They presuppose other receivers though, who are to be avoided. As codes, they may facilitate communication through an economy of thought, although depending on their nature this economy is counterbalanced by the learning process, because in some of these cases they may even have to be practiced. The purpose of their creation being to assure their comprehension only by a select few, here they should first be recognized as codes only by a select few, if not by a single person. If a code can be used to transmit a message disguised as another one, like an anagram, here the false or apparent message stands for: "there is no message", or nothing out of the ordinary. Considering that these agents were in other countries acting as soldiers of sorts, we may picture these messages as dressed by usual patterns, sometimes typical to each country, when their actual content was politically against those countries. Observing the codes by the garments applied to them, such ways of coding and decoding fall into recursiveness, since they hold no link with the actual message. The recognition works as a border or gate to the semiosphere [Lotman, 1989] of the espionage context. Compared to the narrative path [Greimas, Courtés, 1979], the recognition represents a qualifying trial for the second agent, the sequential reading being assumed as the decisive trial in this particular mission.

Having crossed the line of recognition, the same signal may be providing additional information. If a package were the signal, for instance, the configuration of rubber bands could point out a different message, such as "proceed" or "stop" [Melton, Wallace, 2009, p. 150].
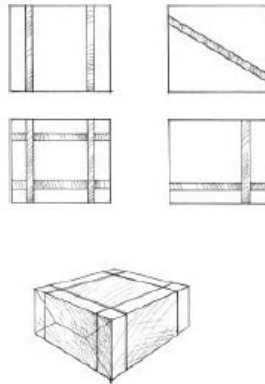
Fig. 3. Source: Phil Franke [Melton, Wallace, 2009, p. 150]

The regular lines of perception

Putting together all the examples supplied in the guides, it is possible to visualize how they could be made present in an actual scene. In the following picture, used as a model, we highlighted where these signals could be present: carried objects, head accessories, parts in shoes, belts or buttons of a shirt.
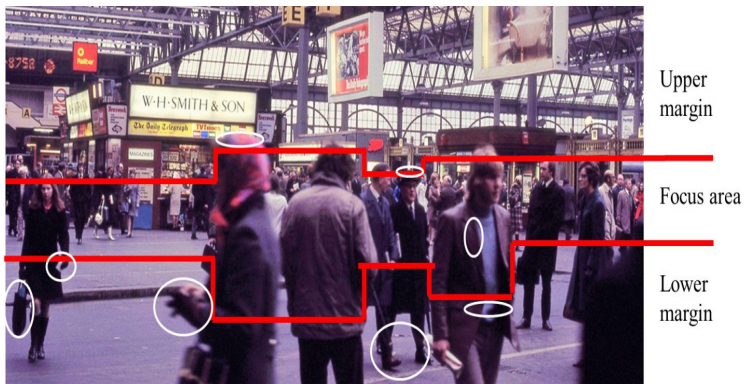

Fig. 4. Source: Glen F. Waterloo Railway Station, 1972

From that we notice that the majority of signals would be placed outside the central image of a person comprising the face and torso, in the upper or lower margins. The signals placed within this "focus area", agreeing with this remark, would be the ones categorized as close distance signals, therefore smaller details which would not be easily seen from a medium or long distance. The bigger signals would still need to be verified from a closer distance, what causes them to operate as an invitation to approach for the potential reader. Only this reader would be able to perceive significance in a meaningless discontinuity, because all of the signals bring forth differences, but still within the wider and acceptable continuity of the place and situation.

It is important to state that these actors who operate in secrecy aim to keep their actions hidden not only from the authorities, but from everyone. To be noticed would mean becoming the focus, or to polarize: "Le comportement individuel d'un acteur qui s'y donne en spectacle polarise, dès les premiers mouvements, un tissu intéractionnel et définit un espace de relations avec un groupe de pairs jouant le rôle d'un jury de même qu'avec un public rassemblé par l'assignation d'un sens possible à une situation présente" [Lambert, Pellegrino, Jacot-Guillarmod, 1990, p. 6]

Consequently, they would act in order not to set any space of relations among other people, nor anything that could be remembered. Hence the visual configuration of the signals used matches this conceptual reasoning of staying out of focus.

After the signal was recognized, the first agent should be acknowledged too. The recommendation for this acknowledgement states that it should be done in a simple, quick and natural way. Some examples for it include: rubbing the back of the neck under the collar (with the balls of the fingers and with the fingers straight) – which particularly separates the two actors in the space, since the receiver of the first message is turning his back to the original sender; smoking or drinking; between waiter and patron, or clerk and customer: asking for something unusual but not too odd; and touching the special button, clip or shoelace used as the first message. These examples set a hierarchical order of separation and distance. In the second case the actors are not required to establish a separation line between them like in the first one. In the third case they are not separated at all, since they engage in conversation. In the last case touch is allowed. All of them only become a

message as a chaining of events. That is to say, the sender is expecting that someone will perform the acknowledgement act after recognizing the original secret signal by looking at or hearing it.

The guides provide sound codes as methods of acknowledgement as well, when a visual signal could not be used. These codes would usually be counting, followed by a stop at the desired number and an audible sound. Other examples are "[…] moving the foot along the floor (easier to do when seated), tapping a cigarette four times on something hard such as a table or matchbox (the fourth tap is the signal to start counting), clearing the throat" [Melton, Wallace, 2009, p. 140], etc. The sound codes can be included in the second level of distance, since they do not separate the agents; nor do they approximate them in the scenario. All acknowledgement codes fall into the category of coincidences expected in the place where they are performed, and for that matter Mulholland states that no signal is made twice [Melton, Wallace, 2009, p. 139], ensuring that they cannot be more than a coincidence for any possible witness.

Transmission of secret objects

The second situational event addressed here is the transmission of secret objects. This could be either a sequence for the recognition discussed above or not, if more than one agent was to be working as a team. The transmission was not necessarily designed to be performed in public spaces, although it could be. The nature of the "secret object" is not thoroughly approached in the guides, but the author assumes it could be poison or something stolen from the target. Whatever the object was, this transmission should follow the same principles of the recognition signals, requiring a "normality cover" that would likely be considered as not unusual. However, in this case the cover would necessarily include a physical container, and "The covering object may be almost anything provided it is larger than that which it hides and is something which easily may be held by one hand" [Melton, Wallace, 2009, p. 138]. Therefore this scenario presents two secret objects, the inner space of the one used as a container and its content. One of the examples provided is a book in a library.

Fig. 5. Source: Phil Franke [Melton, Wallace, 2009, p. 139]

The book handled with is a regular one, possibly belonging to a library, whose function is transformed. It becomes a container for the secret object, not being secret by itself. The guides state that "The covering object may be a plate, a cigarette box, paper pad, or a countless number of other things. Neither person's task is at all difficult but both should practice the actions so as to be able to do them naturally" [ibid, p. 138], strengthening the continuity principle. During the transmission the continuity of the place and situation must be maintained, in addition to this physical disguise. The acquirer must notice and hold the secret object, preventing it from falling down, for instance, and sequentially remove it from sight. Apart from that, there are several instructions specific for interactions between men, women, or a man and a woman, ratifying how normality must be kept. Here it should be noted that in most cases this interaction – meaning the disguise – in itself is not out of the ordinary: two coworkers might exchange certain objects, a waiter is expected to bring a dish to a customer's table, etc. It is recommended to use visual signals instead of sound signals in this situation to express acknowledgement, because a sound may interrupt someone talking or be concurrent to other sounds, becoming unintelligible or attracting attention.

Other examples of re-signified containers that could be applied in a wider range of situations include a pencil, whose eraser compartment is used to store powders, and a modified pack of cigarettes. Whenever such items are to be employed, one important condition is that they must not appear as new, but rather as a common, worn out piece – but not too much, in order not to stand out [Melton, Wallace, 2009, p. 87–88].

Some other examples require more sophisticated work, such as modification of a fuel tank in a car in order to hide a person, and furniture where an escape tunnel could be added. Differently from the previous category of objects, these ones require a modification process that affects their functionality; they will be enabled to be used for both purposes.

Regardless, all of them are objects turned into spaces, whose apparent usual function works as a mask, the normality cover required in order to create a secret space inside the public one. Such a mask must agree with the continuity rules of the specific place, social etiquette, and interactions. The secret is made so as to be "inexistent" under the continuity rules. Even the possibility of verification must be accounted for; for this reason the modified "containers" are still operational in their regular purposes.

Conclusions

As the secret cannot deviate from the continuity patterns, in the first scenario it is made as continuity; and in the second case, where it cannot be altered, it is wrapped by continuity. Subsequently, the main difference lies in the nature and trajectory of each core secret – one is created, the other is carried. Since the carried secret cannot be altered, it requires the physical hidden container that cuts off the possible connections with any discontinuity, because just like the secret message it exists simultaneously within both realms, the public and the secret one, or continuous and discontinuous.

Therefore the secret space is a component of the normality of the place, something that, for an uncommitted observer, definitely belongs there and will not be remembered. They could also be understood as "empty spaces between things", as put by Merleau-Ponty: "La sensation n'admet pas d'autre philosophie que le nominalisme, c'est-à-dire la réduction du sens au contre-sens de la ressemblance confuse ou au non-

sens de l'association par contiguïté. [...] Notre champ perceptif est fait de "choses" et de "vides entre les choses"'' [Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 22–23].

If we observe these two situations backwards, it is possible to perceive the whole public space being operated as if it were a container in the first scenario, whose secret spot is the particular message, which remains apprehensible as a component of the place. Such a bigger container holds a secret cognitive content for the agents, but remains regular for everyone else. In the second scenario the cover plays this role, while the carried and pragmatic object is the main secret.

Concerning the concept of camouflage, as presented by Paolo Fabbri [Fabbri, 2012], two strategies are made present: disappearance and alteration. Disappearance means building the self-identity through the otherness, which appears in the first scenario. The very fabric of the message is constituted as a usual component of the world. Alteration, on the other hand, is made present in the second scenario when the functionality of a given object is exploited differently, especially when a pencil or a pack of cigarettes is modified in order to become something else, while still being able to perform their original functions. All of them are strictly secrets in the sense provided by Greimas and Courtés when describing veridicality [1979], being constituted by *to be* and *not to appear*. But at the narrative level they present two simultaneous narrative programs, since in this case there is a clear intent to simultaneously remain anonymous for the crowd and be identified by the partner. The multitude of choices involving the distance required for recognition, which particular object, pattern, gesture or sound will be employed, stand on the discursive level, directly tied to the spatial and social context of the topical space.

Yet, even for a passerby, a possible world might be established by such smaller discontinuities, since in the public space we find the representation of a possible world and of an existing state "Un monde possible n'annule pas le sens du monde présent, mais il le dépasse et l'inverse en se révélant des vertus restées implicites" [Lambert, Pellegrino, Jacot-Guillarmod, 1990, p. 14]. The spy, in this sense, exploits the array of possibilities offered at public spaces, aware that his presence could easily be expected, especially in the countries involved. His simultaneous effort is to keep the possible world of espionage as a virtual one for the audience.

In both scenarios, in addition to the material elements turned into a "normality cover", the program or normality of the place is identically explored. The discontinuity is hidden, being encompassed by continuity as well. Therefore, the camouflage works amplifying such continuities to the social and functional domains, not being limited to the visual one. There is a special concern on assuring that every act and object has two functions: to keep continuity going (on the outside) and to enable secret action (on the inside).

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