

Title	Knowing How to Bluff	Author	Fernando Cocchiarale
Date	October, 1979	Artist	Ivens Machado
Publication	<i>Linha de Corte</i> . Galeria Saramenha, Rio de Janeiro, 1979 (catalogue)		

Knowing How to Bluff

Diffusion of power in society and the maintenance of domination leave deep marks on the concrete spaces that constitute it. The configuration of such spaces, the way in which they are conceived and distributed are an inseparable part of power exertion, revealing in its materiality the rules of the game and the positions of the players. Cities, buildings, prisons, stadiums, schools, hospitals, etc., as they regulate the construction to secure the good performance to which they are destined, discipline space organizing it according to the optics of domination.

To do a reading of Ivens Machado's graphic interventions it's essential to apprehend the political character of spatiality. His drawings, his notebooks, the series of "Fluidos Corretores/Corrective Fluids", etc., are not related to space in a passive way – traditional levy that visual arts have paid: its representation needs a support/space for its production. Neither the Interventions aim at discussing, plainly and simply, the support and the issue of representation, or even its insertion into institutional spaces within the Art Circuit. The graphic interventions, although not ignoring such questions, place themselves beyond that, treating spatiality under a much broader viewpoint: what's at stake is the very revelation of the political character of a normative distribution of spaces.

The ruling line is a constant element in the artist's interventions. At a first glance, it comes through charged with familiarity to fundamental experiences in our society – the school days.

Ruling lines, graph paper, notebooks are surfaces branded by the exercise of learning how to write, of mathematics, etc. Spaces reserved for learning skills and registering transmitted knowledge. A place where an experience that is common to all is experienced by the physical involvement of the act of writing and, precisely so, a place of deep intimacy. Thence, perhaps, that strangeness feeling that one may get, for the lines aren't in their traditional place – displayed in another circuit, their imprint and familiarity leading us to expect some other type of thing.

The dislocation of the line into another circuit – the art circuit – is doubtlessly a key feature in these graphic interventions. What occurs, however, is not the sheer dislocation of a finished product into another context that is not its own. Ivens's intervention is more wide-ranging. Many of the lines are drawn, others are produced by direct manipulation of the ruling machine, etc. The sense of such a dislocation touches other questions: what is being dislocated? How is it being dislocated? What are the relations between the original context and the new one?

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The lines rule the paper's smooth surface, making it ready for its purpose. Their horizontal and parallel disposition indicates that our writing evolves in a certain direction. The margin on the left side of the page, the larger space at the top of the sheet show us in which direction we should use it. They prescribe, after all, a series of norms that must be followed to master writing skills. This mastering is one of the assumptions for knowledge transmission – function of the scholastic institution. Therefore, mastering the art of writing implies power relations. Relations that are inscribed, even at the moment when the blank pages of a notebook suggest the neutrality of their apparent silence. This is precisely what's dislocated by the artist. This is the charge launched from the outside into the art circuit. On the tension originated by this procedure lies the critical meaning of the interventions by Ivens. Tension triggered by the strangeness caused by a dislocated object. On the other hand, tension rendered viable through the material identity of the space being discussed.

Although School and Art occupy distinct institutional spaces, the material support for writing and for the graphic arts is the same – paper. The way art has conceived the use of this surface has changed. Even when it got free from the strictness of academic canon – allowing common sense to apprehend modern and contemporary art as undisciplined, subjective, creative – what was at stake were new ways of organizing space. Conflicting ways, of course, but all precisely prescribing the treatment of the surface. Precise ways to turn the silence of the support into language – art language. Even at that moment when it's being apprehended as language, the occupation and domination of the paper's space is still a normative way of envisaging it. To strictly guarantee art language's specificity is to guarantee a determinate territorial power – material and institutional territory. Marked-out space, differentiated from others, integrated to a broader territorial policy that ensures the efficacy of domination, also at the spatiality level.

The material identity of the two different supports – pedagogic surfaces and graphic/artistic surfaces – functions in Ivens's interventions as a Trojan Horse. Paper renders viable the dislocation of the ruled lines into art's citadel. It renders viable the tension and the confrontation between two power territories through the questioning of their frontiers. Due to this stratagem, it reveals in its production the political mechanisms of spatiality. Questioning that disrupts the space scrutinized by power, using and abusing its own rules.

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The drawings by Ivens – 1974 – faithfully reproduce, at a first glance, the ruled lines in a notebook. The drawing activity is reduced to the monotony of a gesture that organizes space according to writing's requirements. The sheet is occupied in its entirety, in conformity with this logic's viewpoint. Tight mesh displayed with all the possible forcefulness of its instrumental rendition. All of a sudden, we become aware that something has happened. The notebook page doesn't function as it should. There are, for instance, a few severed lines that hang like a virtual trap for writing. On another drawing, disrupted lines were reunited by a small knot. To the logic of power of such a space marked out for scripture, the artist imposes another logic. Pages of a notebook that will never be written on. The entirety of their space is compromised by a dysfunction of one of its parts. Disrupted lines break the logic that regulated them. Moreover, they will never bear any writing on them because their presentation is dislocated from their usual context, safeguarded by the new statute they possess – the statute of art.

Later on, the artist broadens his interventions. He starts working directly with the line-ruling machine. Again, dysfunction comes in as a critical element. The machine is improperly used. The result of such procedures becomes the register of interferences other than the expected functioning of the machine. In 1975, Ivens produces a series of works making use of flaws in notebooks bought in stationery shops. "Situações encontradas/Encountered situations", where exception becomes rule – the organizational criterion for this appropriation/dislocation. A noteworthy segment of this production: the simple exposure of the structures in their quasi-totality. In this segment, the action of the art circuit – consequently the achievement of its ideology – is indispensable for the conclusion of the work.

The corrections – "Fluidos corretores/Corrective fluids" – are interventions on stationery materials, non-artistic materials. Ruled sheets for notebooks, still uncut, are corrected, rectified, erased by means of corrective agents used in reproduction processes, even an eraser was used. Such corrective materials, instruments conceived to fix mishaps, participate in this series with a meaning opposed to the one they were destined to. Their intervention annuls, erases, corrects. But corrects what? Errors that would not comply with the writing norms? No, what's being 'corrected' is precisely the fundamental graphic assumption of a space designed for writing. Veiled lines. Lines that signal the impossibility of their utilization, being no good for the achievement of their purpose. Materials that were conceived as elements to recuperate possible accidents in writing are used as elements casting a new rule – undesirable for the good functioning of a pedagogic surface.

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To insert surfaces belonging to another circuit within the Art institution bears a precise meaning. In both of them – pedagogic and graphic art surfaces – the line is a constitutive element of its ruling, the paper sheet being the main material condition for its possibility. This affinity of features between the two circuits is superimposed on dislocation. The strategy in the graphic interventions takes advantage of this affinity. By producing ruled lines, notebooks that do not meet their purposes, sabotaging by failure the plenitude of a virtual power contained in these surfaces, what is revealed is the political penchant of such a space. Imparting the statute of Art – by dislocation, by its insertion into the art circuit – to such interventions is to propose an active, tense, political relationship with what tradition has acclaimed as the place par excellence of visual arts – the space, the surfaces for inscription of visual signs. Ivens Machado accepts the rules of the game and then disrespects them. He accepts the power of such rules to neutralize it by setting up new relations. Relations that place the artist in a dispute, in which the victory of the norm is not assured beforehand.

Fernando Cocchiarale

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