

Thoughts on the concept of 'everyday life'

"The everyday is the place where we supposedly define and shape our common pleasures, a place where a democracy of taste is brought into being...The everyday is demotic, spectacular, interactive - all things to all people, in fact - a space where the worlds of design, architecture, fashion and art coalesce, compete and constellate."
(Roberts, 2006:1)

Buchanan (2010:157-8) asserts that the term everyday life is highly contested but exists in order to explore the effect of social and cultural change through "life as a set of routines, practices, ways of living, thinking, and of doing things... [that aim] to see what is extraordinary about the ordinary." Highmore (2002:17) agrees that there is no defined theory of the everyday - cultural theorists approach the subject from differing positions and with divergent interests. They are united however, in their challenge that the idea of everyday life is self-evident and unproblematic. Gardiner (2000:208) also agrees in the lack of unified theory of the everyday, however, they are often connected by shared sensibilities. Studies in the everyday are interdisciplinary, and often critical or utopian, being concerned with "the transformation of daily life into something quite different."

Roberts (2006:2) recognises that one of the significant characteristics, and problems with the everyday is how it escapes or defeats our rational attempts to locate and describe it. Exploring major philosophical and political texts from 1917 to the present, he is interested in how everyday life and culture has been constructed under capitalism and how it may be transformed through proletarian emancipation and the democratization of cultural production. (Roberts, 2006:4-5) He concludes his survey with the assertion that to identify, defend and critique is to seek and reclaim the culturally and socially marginal, and that "the everyday is the site of the 'voiceless'" (Roberts, 2006:121) Gardiner agrees that ideology and the imbalances of power in the world are a significant factor in shaping our 'common-sense' view of everyday life. (Gardiner, 2000:7)

There is a dichotomy in our understanding of everyday life that is both ambivalent and contradictory "characterized by ambiguities, instabilities and equivocation." Commonly, the everyday has connotations with tedium, but is also often described as marvellous and extraordinary - something that many theorists recognise dialectically: that the everyday is both "extraordinary and tedious", "self-evident and taken for granted". (Highmore, 2002: 17) Everyday life can either be a sanctuary or oppressive boredom: "it may bewilder or give pleasure, it may delight or depress." (Highmore, 2002: 1) Gardiner agrees that the everyday must be understood dialectically as simultaneously an alienated and potentially

liberated state. (Gardiner, 2000:17) In *Ordinary Lives*, Highmore describes the tension inherent in everyday life, where habits and routines of the day-to-day can both press down like a dull weight and comfort with warm familiarity. This conflict between boredom and exuberance is explained with the belief that ordinariness is nothing without accident. (Highmore, 2011:1-2)

Johnstone (2008) notes a rise in art referencing the everyday which is best understood in terms of a desire to bring uneventful and overlooked aspects of lived experience into visibility. This can manifest as recognising value in ordinary behaviour or unveiling the 'accidentally miraculous'. It can also spark distrust in the heroic and spectacular and oppose the bureaucracy of controlled consumption. There is usually political intent and an aim to transform everyday life by challenging societies dominant discourses and ideologies. There is something in the "lure of the ordinary" that makes the everyday both authentic and democratic." (Johnstone, 2008:12-3)

Bibliography:

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