

What does a focus on everyday life add to our understanding of cultural and political geography?

The walkers live down below, below the threshold at which visibility begins, [their] walking is more than traversing spaces, it is an act akin to speech, a “space of enunciation” that works with existing possibilities and interdictions...they compose paths in the manner of turning phrases as their walking ‘affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, the trajectories it “speaks”’

Emerging, critical epistemologies of everyday life deepen, by means of destabilising, our current understandings of cultural and political geography. Indeed the very rubric of everyday life evokes rebelliousness ‘below the threshold’ - a ‘fertile soil with a secret life and a richness of its own’ (Lefebvre, 1976) - the everyday resists ‘because it is never fully assimilated to the capitalist rhythms that want to ‘decorporate’ and colonise the spaces of modern life. Situated in 1950s Paris, and reacting against the de-realisation of everyday life, commodity fetishism and labour exploitation, Lefebvre would write: the body manifests sensuous, inarticulate desires and impulses that cannot be fully colonised by [these] rationalised systems.’ His critique emerges dialectically, cognisant of the everyday in both its repressive (routinized, static and unreflexive) and liberatory (dynamic, ‘becoming’, the carnivalesque) elements. Fundamentally, this essay explores how, intellectually, ‘everyday life studies’ (Highmore, 2002) moves cultural and political geographies away from abstraction (simple dichotomies of structure and agency) and foundationalism (universal space and time) towards more nuanced understandings of social reproduction as both ‘the fleshy, messy and indeterminate stuff of everyday life and a set of structured practices that unfold in dialectical relation to production, with which it is mutually constitutive and in tension’ (Katz, 1991).

Deepening ideas of social reproduction in space and time, I argue that a focus on the everyday attends to the the mix of social ordering and disordering through which spatio-temporal patterns are laid down and the normative everyday rhythms and spaces of the capitalist city produced and resisted, McCormack (2010) writes: ‘cities are ceaselessly (re)constituted out of their connections, the twists and fluxes of interrelation through which multiple networked mobilities of capital, persons, objects, signs and information are brought together to produce a particular, but ever-changing complex mix of heterogenous social interactions, materialities, mobilities, imaginaries and social effects.’ Such a definition of the city stresses the ‘elusive, phantasmic, emergent and often only just there fabric of everyday life.’ I trace the chasing of its ephemera from time-geography (1960s) (body ballets, individuals bounded by speeds of movement) through structuration theory (1980s) to the non-representational theories of the present (the human and non-human materialities of social life as processually emergent), and suggest how much of this historical theorization was unintentionally complicit in the creation of the exhaustive, unsocialised ‘absolute space’ of capitalism Lefebvre so feared.

Current focuses on the everyday elide (destabilise) the boundaries between culturalism (subjectivistic phenomenology) and economism (objectivist structuralism) in a substantive way by reigniting “postmodern” problems - difference, identity, language, body and rhythm - in “outdated” if not forgotten materialist, dialectical and marxist theoretical contexts: geographies of affect and emotion in geopolitics (Dittmer et. al, 2010; Pain et. al, 2010) and ‘rhythmanalysis’ in migration and feminist studies (Felski, 2000) that explore the entanglements of linear and cyclical rhythms, phases of growth and decline within the carceral/liberating spaces of (non)home (Edensor, 2011). The elision of cultural and

political is bound to the logic of creating a 'heterodox and open-ended historical materialism that is committed to an embodied, passionately engaged, and politically charged form of critical knowledge' (Highmore, 2002). The everyday in this sense substantiates political and cultural attempts to map the differentiated experiences of capitalist modernity, Harootunian (2004) writes: 'it is precisely by bringing together the global generality of modernisation with the specificity of regional and historical cultural continuities and discontinuities, that the everyday is seen as a particularly appropriate perspective for cross-cultural studies of modernity.' For instance, digging beneath 'the fertile soil' into the everyday rhythms (space-times) and resistances of youth engaged in 'timepass' (non-movement) in Northern India (Craig Jeffrey, 2010) or elderly care in Africa (Evans, 2010) deepen understandings of the relational nature of transitions from youth to adulthood.

Kaplan and Ross (1987) presciently observe that any such focus on the everyday is immediately politicised and mobilised - 'the emancipatory interest' and utopian impulse - in its social context, they write: the 'everyday harbors the texture of social change and to perceive it all is to recognise the necessity of its conscious transformation.' A focus on everyday life is thus a focus, and contribution, to the real-time rhythm(s) and realisations of social and political change. Edensor (2010) suggests that by translating 'social tensions into narratives [we actively] intervene in the imaginary landscape of a place', destabilising its knowledges and creating a situation of momentary "de-familiarity" wherein critical consciousness and the 'potentialities of (an)other order and way of life temporarily overcome the present apparatus of reification under capitalism.' In this aspect, I draw heavily from Pinder (2011) and his exploration of modern detournement and the poetics of the political: how the act of a man 'dribbling a thin line of green paint' in Jerusalem calls into question the 'power and (il)legitimacy of past, present, and possible future lines in the city.' Such a focus on the 'tactics' (de Certeau, 1956) of the everyday, Sheringham (2006) suggests, stirs the 'sociological imagination' and a 'radical reflexivity' within cultural and political geography, 'whereby people can develop a heightened, [and comparative] understanding of their circumstances and use this comprehension as the basis of conscious action designed to alter repressive social conditions' (e.g Tschakert et. al, 2013). It is by focusing on the local, grounded human experience - the 'walkers [that] live down below' - that everyday epistemologies deepen, by means of destabilising (abstractions), our understandings of cultural and political geography.

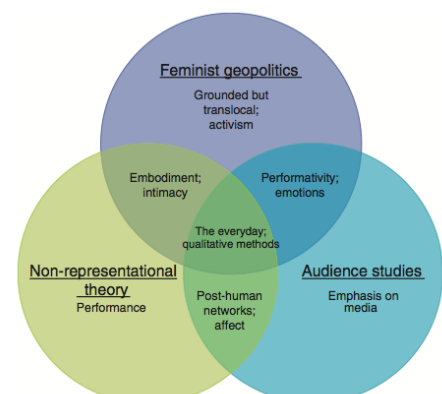
Every particular history and geographical situation is tied to the past and the future by multiple temporal rhythms. As such, translating and re-contextualising the past intellectual work of Lefebvre and de Certeau provides the basis for understanding and tying up the everyday(s) of the present. Their writings are often construed as a reaction against the de-realisation of everyday life, the 'emptying out' of the richness and complexity of daily experience by a bureaucratic, functionalist logic that transforms living, dynamic relations between people into static, automated connections between things (reification). Along with the Situationists, with whom he had an intense association in the late 1950s, Lefebvre observed urbanism - the new towns and concrete 'grands ensembles' of Paris - to be a strategic instrument in the creation of a capitalist, absolute space that reduced inhabitation to habitat, and that constrained encounter, play and spontaneity through 'an intense, aggressive and repressive visualisation.' Developing on Marx's account of alienation, he concluded that everyday life had been colonised by the commodity and the state, remaining repressed because its rhythms of habit and repetition are belated, lagging behind the historical possibilities of modernity, progress and accumulation. Bourdieu extends upon this, suggesting that dominant groups - of class, caste, gender, or ethnicity - routinely perform 'symbolic violence' within fields of maneuver. Drawing attention to the material processes of

consensus building, tension and conflict that characterise quotidian competition, he emphasises the unfurling, ‘structuration of everyday life’ - people make fields (habitus) through their strategies, but the state and other institutions also shape the rules of the game within and across various fields.

Certeau (1984) similarly observed a ‘cancerous growth of vision’ (panopticon) in Parisian society, suggesting that - with its correlates of social atomism, moral nihilism and possessive individualism - it produced a desert of the city, in which ‘the meaningless no longer [took] the form of shadows but became an implacable light that produced an urban text without obscurities, and was created by a diffuse and technocratic governmentality’ (Pinder, 2011). However, rather than posit the ontology of the everyday as shallow, unliberated and essentially lost, both Lefebvre and de Certeau recognised the liberating energies and possibilities of a radical dis-alienation in its very fabric. Contrary to Foucault’s conceptualisation of the body as an ‘empty signifier’ that could be reconstructed ad infinitum through the operation of external discourses of power, Lefebvre acknowledged it as a focal point of resistance, with an organic vitality not easily suppressed, as a ‘sensual being, smelling, remembering, rhythmically moving, jostling with other bodies and in the process constituting active, perhaps multiple, urban subjectivities’ (Edensor, 2010). Prescient of this, Lefebvre writes: ‘the body makes its reappearance as one of the elements and foundations of subversion, rather than some ‘knowledge or other’’(Lefebvre, 1976). Believing alienation and reification to be so deeply rooted in society as to require radical and rupturing reflex, he suggests its rhythms and desires be used in the supersession of consumer capitalism and a complete transformation of society. In contrast, Certeau is more attuned the subtleties of ‘tactics’ and the transient moments of creativity and subversion within the parameters of existing society. As Highmore (2010) writes, for Certeau ‘his walkers remain blind to the possibilities of strategic struggles that would give resistance direction and bring into question the totality.’ Meyer transposes these differing modes of subversion and resistance loosely into current détournement practices:

‘there are two different if overlapping and contemporaneous nomadisms in contemporary art: one ‘lyrical’ [de Certeau], which tends towards poetic figurations of transience and random experiences of the everyday, and which leaves the material conditions that enable its mobility unaddressed; the other ‘‘anti-aesthetical’’ and ‘critical’ [Lefebvre], which ‘does not so much enact and record a discrete action or movement as locate the structures of mobility within specific historical, geographical, and institutional frameworks’ (Meyer, 1997).’

Lefebvre’s passionate critique for a ‘return to the concrete’ parallels Ernst Bloch’s argument that ‘critical thought must incorporate, in addition to the ‘cold stream’ of logical sociological investigation and analytical rigour, a ‘warm stream’ of impassioned and creative speculation that strives to transcend the conceptual closure effected by dominant ideological discourses.’ Current focuses of the everyday as such adhere to Bloch’s conceptualisation, engaging a (warm, micro) phenomenology of encounter with(in) (cold, macro) political structures; Gregory (2011) writes, ‘the task of phenomenology is not to assert the priority of the everyday world over the world of science, or of place over abstract spaces, but to understand



through ontological investigation how each is constituted in various historical projects of abstraction and thematisation.’ Emerging within critical and popular geopolitics is a move away from the deconstruction of texts into the practices of everyday life; Pain et. al (2010) explore the emotional geographies of geopolitical change as experienced by youth and destabilise the assumptions that young people internalise the ‘risk society’ and lack agency or critical capacities in relation to fear.

Pain et. al evoke the temporalities and rhythms of affect in everyday practice, they write: ‘fear does not dribble down from political events and discourses, saturating an absorbent population...it is already present in people’s lives and always changing; lived, felt, evaluated, negotiated and resisted’ (Pain and Smith, 2008). Furthermore, youth are already engaged in the ‘tactics’ of subversion ‘through suspicion of grand meta-narratives, and through their everyday negotiations with risky environments.’ As such, the possibility emerges that geopolitical fear might be resisted and even rejected (audience studies: the role of critic, fan or disinterested cynic) before it becomes an enduring part of the emotional landscape. In similar vein, Dittmer et. al (2010) produce a novel methodological framework - ‘popular geopolitics 2.0’ (Figure 1) - that incorporates the ‘emergent, non linear everyday’ and its ‘sites of complex encounter between human bodies, environments, material landscapes, technologies, and media, consider, for example, he writes: ‘a cemetery for the war dead; surely such a sight/site exceeds the discursive elements. The quiet; the feel of a headstone underneath a hand; the sound and then feeling of a quiet breeze making its way through the trees and then across a brow; these are all non-representational elements of the geopolitical that can resonate with discourses in unexpected ways and are deserving of analysis’ (Dittmer et. al, 2010).

Rhythmanalysis concerned with the temporalities of the everyday have increasingly emerged in migration and feminist studies, Felski (2002) explores how ordinary activities and repetitive social interactions are bound into structures that discriminate against women and reinforce gender hierarchies such that time’s arrow (progression, transcendence) is associated with masculinity and time’s cycle (repetition, immanence and emotion) with femininity. In particular ‘time-geography’ (Hägerstrand, 1962) - a theory that was central to Swedish welfare and urban planning in the 1970s - has deepened feminist discourse surrounding the reproduction of patriarchy in ‘the banal activities of everyday life’ (Rose, 1993). Its mantra relies upon the human condition that ‘everybody is subject to confinement in time-space within the limits formed by the bounded capacity of individuals to engage in more than one task at a time, by the speeds at which it is possible to move and assemble individuals, tools and materials, and by regulations of access and modes of conduct within domains of local order.’ Plotting the daily space-time paths, as Felski construes, places women in the static, ahistorical and conservative unfreedom of suburbia. Gillian Rose however criticises time-geography for its universal depiction of space and claim to exhaustiveness in which the social markers and agencies of embodiment, emotion and passion are left absent.

Desiring to move beyond Hagerstand’s positivism, structuration theory (Giddens, 1980) attempts to reconcile the social and the spatial through ‘a conceptualisation of the contextuality of social life that admits the human agent and structure in an integrated framework.’ Structuration - and its more recent offshoot non representational theory - has become an important analytical framework within migration studies and the study of state-individual relations. Gross (1982) relates migrants’ feelings of belonging, exclusion, uncertainty and expectation - the temporalities and subjectivities of the quotidian - to how states ‘integrate and coordinate industrial, cultural and ‘natural’ times, nationalising them at the

expense of local times.’ Similarly, Tschakert et. al (2013) approach the disjuncture between biological and social ageing in several isolated, Ghanaian villages marked by outmigration, endemic poverty, lack of government resources and climatic deterioration - the ‘simultaneous desiccation of environmental and social landscapes’ - poignantly they write: ‘[out of] these hollow homes, emerges solastalgia, a distinct feeling of homesickness while still being at home coupled with a sense of powerlessness and defeatist acceptance of unfolding trajectories. Such research presses on the utopian impulse of ‘everyday life studies’ by destabilising the ‘epistemological hierarchies’ in climate change discourses’ that marginalise and fail to recognise the experienced and lived worlds of poor and vulnerable individuals and communities. It furthermore dissolves the post-Enlightenment, positivist abstraction of nature and society as ruptured, as Katz et. al (1991) posit, ‘an examination of social reproduction and the ways in which social and biological relations are dialectically connected in everyday life helps recuperate the unity between nature and society.’

Bowlby et. al (2010) expose how a focus on everyday - informed by a time-space framework - enables the examination of the diverse, often contradictory nature of young people’s pathways and transitions between the generational boundaries of ‘childhood’, ‘youth’ and ‘adulthood’. Evans’ (2010) research on ‘children’s caring roles and responsibilities within the Family in Africa’ subvert and destabilise conventional (western) notions of children’s dependence on adults, instead positing the emergence of critical moments of ‘negotiated interdependence’ (Punch, 2002). The embodied, highly relational nature of life transitions is furthermore explicated in the changing language of youth geographies wherein ‘trajectories’, ‘navigations’, and ‘routes’ are replacing that of ‘life stages’, ‘transitions’ or ‘stages of man’. Jeffrey (2010) explores the everyday youth politics, and the coalescing of ‘tactics’ in Uttar Pradesh, India that resist the abstract, neoliberal space of shrunken opportunities: mundane ‘timepass’, the ‘doing of nothing’ as an expression of hardship (constraining) and kinship (enabling) occurs along with more absurd and symbolic protest (detournement such as the burning of ‘valueless’, schoolchildren-marked degrees).

Such poetics of the political furthermore can be evoked by the solitary individual; Pinder (2010) in observing the art of Francis Alys posits how his imaginative, city walks choreograph and ‘spark evocative images, events, and stories.’ He reminisces one such occasion, in which Alys walks and spills a trail of green paint along the outskirts of Ariel Sharon: ‘the green paint trail, soon trodden on and eroded, evoked both the memory and the arbitrariness of the original line, reawakening a demarcation that was erased following Israeli expansion after the 1967 war.’ Through its simplicity and strangeness, a critical conscience emerges in both the observed and observer questioning: the(il)legitimacy of past, present, and possible future lines in the city, on unequal access to territories, on the significance of urban space itself as the medium of political struggles, and on the ways in which for Palestinians the terrain is carved up, splintered, reduced, and policed by the wall and by Israeli settlements, highways, checkpoints, fences, ID controls, and surveillance systems.’ Emerging, critical epistemologies of everyday life dampen by means of darkening and deepen, by means of destabilising, our current understandings of cultural and political geography.

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