

The Everyday

The Everyday:
Experiences, Concepts, and Narratives

Edited by

Justin Derry and Martin Parrot

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The Everyday: Experiences, Concepts, and Narratives,
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INTRODUCTION

QUESTIONING EVERYDAY LIFE

JUSTIN DERRY AND MARTIN PARROT

In its simplest and broadest understanding, everyday life is what we know to be familiar, immediate and ordinary. It is, however, not so simple. Like many categories, it is equivocal, ambivalent, and knotted within a bundle of (too often) unquestioned commonplace notions and figures. Its customary registers, “natural”, “boring”, “ordinary”, “repetitive”, “mundane”, “unreflexive”, “passive”, “banal”, etc., all stem from diverse and historically situated understandings, conventions, and debates. While a seemingly immediate—and sometimes unconscious—familiarity never ceases to operate, everyday life, once signified, is always already related to multiple *topoi* of this or that particular series of experience. Unreflexive immediacy, ambivalence, and multiplicity generally trace the lived contours of the everyday. Whether reflecting on André Breton’s excursion to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, engaging with Indian folktales about the rhythms and potentialities of daily life, or seeking the temporalities of ordinary life through the camera lenses of *cinéma direct*, they constitute the elements with which scholars and critics of everyday life are confronted.¹

Michel de Certeau gestured, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, to the inherent tensions accompanying any attempt to write, depict or speak about everyday life:

Even if [the investigation of everyday life] is drawn into the oceanic rumble of the ordinary, the task consists not in substituting a representation for the ordinary or covering it up with mere words, but in showing how it introduces itself into our techniques—in the way in which the sea flows back into pockets and crevices in beaches—and how it can reorganize the place from which discourse is produced.²

¹ For details on these specific investigations, see chapters 1, 5 and 9, *infra*.

² de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 5.

De Certeau showed how everyday life (in being conceptually delicate) reflexively emerges as a significant epistemological problem that evokes the limits and tensions inherent to various knowledge producing practices and archives. These irresolvable tensions, however, also act to open unique ‘lines of flight’ within knowledge by positively marking sites for critical reflection and engagement. In such cases, everyday life (in its polyphony, multiplicity and diversity), does not act as a foil for theory, but rather, as an operative element historicizing—and of course, materializing—concepts and narratives.

The forms taken by this critical engagement are not limited to one particular disciplinary method (or to the work of de Certeau); everyday life is irreducible to any one specific disciplinary or discursive framework. In this, the lived flavors and distinct intricacies of everyday life are easily tempered by attempts at full representation. Anthropology, philosophy, cultural theory and history (though productive) are at a loss when confronting everyday life with the usual conventions of description and analysis. Beyond its obvious interdisciplinary quality, it is now common (following de Certeau) to see everyday life theories pointing to the limits of language, and the incongruity between knowledge and experience.³ In this, they invite us to problematize the idea of a clear fit between world and representation, entity and identity. The positive work done by everyday life theories has been to force us to think about, and attend to the various ways everyday experiences are knotted into concepts and narratives, and *vice versa*.⁴

In dialogue with these critical perspectives, this book seeks to reflect on the diversity of approaches and methodological modes through which cultural critics can and do attend to everyday life. However, this book does not engage with or aim to characterize one tradition of everyday life theory. Rather, it attempts to demonstrate the necessity of diverse approaches through which knowledge of everyday life is produced and

³ See Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*, 21-22: “[a]ttention to it [the everyday] involves a tension between knowledge and experience, or, the everyday brings out the tension with knowledge inherent in the idea of lived experience.”

⁴ See, for example, the epistemological critique laid out in the general introduction as well as in the tenth chapter of de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*; Gregory Seigworth’s and Michael Gardiner’s introduction to *Cultural Studies*’ 2004 special double-issue on everyday life “Rethinking Everyday Life: And Then Nothing Turns Itself Inside Out”; and Bruce Bégout’s methodological considerations leading to the philosophical foundations of a philosophy of the world of everyday life in the first section of *La découverte du quotidien*.

articulated. Furthermore, as it problematizes and unsettles non-reflexive notions of everyday life, this book provides a space for critical dialogue questioning and exploring the unique ways discourses are related to each other and inform specific cultural narratives. The main assumption driving this book is that the many approaches through which we attend to the lived experiences of everyday life often impact on and explicitly relate to the narratives, values and standards that mediate our daily life.

Everyday Life Theories

Everyday life has been a hotly contested and productive site of research in modern western philosophy, history and social theory throughout the 20th century, and continues in the 21st to be a critical and innovative force in western academic circles.⁵ Developed through the theories and approaches of phenomenology, psychoanalysis, sociology, *Annales* history, and ordinary language philosophy in the first half of the century, it has also been at the centre of developments in the fields of symbolic anthropology, post-structuralist semiotics, British cultural studies, *nouvelle histoire*, *microstoria* and *Alltagsgeschichte* in the mid to late 20th century academy.⁶ More recently, everyday life has also appeared as a common theme and continuing ontological and epistemological problem fostering new discursive practices in material history, new materialism, critical geography, affect theory, and new media and communication

⁵ For recent published work on the everyday see, among others, Michael Gardiner's *Critiques of Everyday Life*; Ben Higmore's *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction*, and *Ordinary Lives: Studies in the Everyday*; Michael Sheringham's *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*; Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects*; and Barry Sandywell's "The Myth of Everyday Life: Toward a Heterology of the Ordinary", and in general *Cultural Studies*, Volume 18, Issue 2-3, 2004.

⁶ On earlier developments, see, for example: Sigmund Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*; Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*; Edmund Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy*; Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life*; Lucien Febvre's *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècle*; Alfred Shütz's *The Phenomenology of the Social World*; and Harold Garfinkel's *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. For later developments, especially in relation to anthropology's influence on historians and the latter's renewed interest in culture and everyday life, see: François Dosse's *L'histoire en miettes*; Peter Burke's *What is Cultural History*; Carlo Ginzburg's "Microhistory: Two or Three Things that I Know about It"; and Sandrine Kott's "Alltagsgeschichte".

studies.⁷ This range of published work seeking to open fresh perspectives on the everyday testifies to the topic's continued popularity and re-emerging relevance as a tool for engaging specific intersections between self and world in the 21st century.

While differing conceptions of everyday life within this diversity of academic output are related to changing historical and cultural contexts, as well as to specific intellectual debates, understandings of what everyday life is, within the particular tradition of thought outlined here, are largely correlated to specific conceptions of "western modernity".⁸ It is generally within the broad tradition of "western modernity" that the specific contributions to the study of everyday life mentioned here have taken their point of origin, and because of this, there derives a number of shared, *a priori* elements and values framing how everyday life is generalized, perceived and understood. It is these *a priori* elements that need to be questioned and critically examined. Specifically, many scholars have commented that everyday life, as an epistemological concept, emerges or comes into focus as an index to be used to measure or become affectively attuned to the transformative processes characterizing a developing modernity.⁹ However, this seemingly immediate and unquestioned tethering

⁷ Particularly worth noting are Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects*; Ian Bogost's *Alien Phenomenology, or what It's Like to Be a Thing*; Giuliana Bruno's *Public Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts*; Miles Ogborn's *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies 1680-1780*; Judy Attfield's *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life*; Nigel Thrift's *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*; and Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*.

⁸ It should be noted that "western modernity" is not understood here as a linear or single historical narrative, but is itself comprised of numerous histories and opposing narratives.

⁹ It can be argued that the cultural contours of western modernity, whether explicitly or implicitly, orients the everyday life theories of scholars such as Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, Guy Debord, Michel de Certeau, Michael Gardiner and Ben Highmore (among others). For example, see Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction*, 2: "In modernity the everyday becomes the setting for a dynamic process [...] for getting accustomed to the disruption of custom; for struggling to incorporate the new; for adjusting to different ways of living. The everyday marks the success and failure of this process. It witnesses the absorption of the most revolutionary inventions into the landscape of the mundane." Also, see Gardiner, *Critiques of Everyday Life: An Introduction*, 6: "The key argument here is that [...] in the context of modernity systems are dominated by a technocratic or productivist logic. The overriding criterion of success within such systems is their efficient, utilitarian operation, rather than the satisfaction of non-instrumentalized needs as expressed by particular individuals and communities. It is to this technocratic rationality that the

of everyday life to modernity seems to also reinforce the binary opposites of the normal and the exceptional, familiar/strange, same/other that has driven much everyday life theory and 20th century cultural criticism in general. With this, and within the context of “modern western thought”, considerations of everyday life often swing between two internally related but dialectically opposed tendencies. Everyday life is either a naturalistic and familiar figure that then becomes “corroded” by the abnormal and exceptional socio-economic forces of modernity, or everyday life is itself an exceptional site of potentiality that can be creatively and dynamically harnessed in order to resist the administrative and standardizing “Iron Cage” of 20th century modernity.¹⁰ This is not to say that these understandings limit critical engagement with everyday life. They are, however, markers tracing the relative and general contours of what everyday life theories often produce in the humanities and social sciences.

These common elements, however, by no means point to the existence of a settled disciplinary agreement on the boundaries of an established field of scholarship on everyday life, nor does it limit the ways scholars or critics methodologically approach the everyday. Within this diverse body of work there are recurring epistemological elements, but also very clear differences.¹¹ Having said this, as an interdisciplinary and multi-discursive phenomenon, we think it is important to question the particular disciplinary investments that orient specific knowledge producing practices dealing with the everyday. Furthermore, we view it as important for scholars to be cautious of limiting critical works on everyday life to one single discipline or tradition (whether that discipline or tradition be phenomenology, cultural Marxism, affect theory, etc.). This being said, sketching out a brief history of modern western everyday life theories

‘non-logical logics’ of everyday life are generally contrasted and opposed by the theorists examined in this book.”

¹⁰ The first example can be seen, among others, in certain phenomenological and Frankfurt School traditions which map the impingement of scientific, technological and instrumental logics on naturalistic life worlds. The second example is characteristic of the artistic and political tactics of Surrealism, as well as of the Situationist International. Gardiner’s utopian position on these matters is exemplary for viewing the everyday as exceptional and potentially liberating. See Michael Gardiner, *Critiques of Everyday Life: An Introduction*, 17: “[a]lthough the possibility remains that the complexity, depth of experience, and intensity of interpersonal relationships located within everyday life will be impoverished, this sphere also contains resistant or counter-hegemonic qualities that point towards the possibility of a radical dis-alienation and full ‘humanization’ of social life.”

¹¹ See Martin Parrot’s chapter, “*Cinéma Direct*, Everyday Life and the Eye of History”, *infra*.

necessarily entails identifying the broader conceptual apparatus drawn upon when considering everyday life, and understanding some of the key figures and influential approaches shaping this field. With this, in the context of studies on everyday life, French intellectuals Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991) and Michel de Certeau (1925–1986) stand out as prominent figures.

The methodological approaches developed by Lefebvre and de Certeau in relation to everyday life differ, but both nonetheless have opened many debates on the everyday that continue to inform critics in the humanities and social sciences. Initially trained as a Jesuit, de Certeau later immersed himself in psychoanalysis, history, and anthropology. His game changing *L'invention du quotidien* [*The Practice of Everyday Life*], stemming from three years of public research with Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol, was edited by Giard and published in two volumes by the Parisian publisher 10/18 in 1980.¹² It has been an indispensable part of the academic landscape ever since, impacting diverse fields such as history, cultural studies, literary criticism, philosophy, and cultural anthropology. The influence of Lefebvre's sociological and Marxist work in everyday studies (and cultural criticism in general) is equally obvious and extensive. Lefebvre's vast contribution to the problem of everyday life came earlier than de Certeau's, but was made available to English speaking readers much more recently. Lefebvre's reflections on the everyday permeated most of his work spanning over six decades. His *Critique de la vie quotidienne* [*Critique of Everyday Life*] was published in three volumes at L'Arche éditeur in Paris: the first volume, later labelled as the introduction, in 1947; the second, entitled *Foundation for a Sociology of the Everyday*, in 1961; and the third, entitled *From Modernity to Modernism (Towards a Metaphilosophy of Daily Life)*, in 1981.¹³

Within a continental academic climate where structural linguistics, phenomenology, Althusserian Marxism, social history, and Foucauldian Power/Knowledge analytics aimed to account for social and historical change, the differing approaches of de Certeau and Lefebvre came together in the shared goal of probing the more-than-representational rhythms, practices, and temporalities exceeding disciplinary and representational enclosure. As de Certeau argued, everyday life is a mash-

¹² Giard, *L'invention du quotidien*, viii–ix. In 2012, in the ongoing wake of everyday studies, a new English edition of *The Practice of Everyday Life* was published again following its initial 1984 translation by Steven Randall.

¹³ Lefebvre's 3 volumes appeared in English at Verso translated by John Moore in 1991, 2002, and 2005. These have since been made available as a newly edited "Full set" trilogy by the editor.

up of “indirect or errant trajectories obeying their own logic.”¹⁴ Lefebvre, in the second volume of *Critique of Everyday Life*, tentatively safeguarding a particular concept of totality accounting for the specificities of everyday life, sets out a number of rules for a sociology of everyday life. These, he argues, “are not purely logical, nor are they purely empirical. They are an attempt to generalize a specific experiment. They refer to a praxis, the praxis of knowledge [...] and are concerned with the connection between relevance and irrelevance.”¹⁵ For de Certeau and Lefebvre, the everyday was a privileged site precisely because it constantly decenters the gaze of the political, economic, and scientific specialist, and in this it quintessentially remains elusively under-determined. In the alterity of the street, de Certeau and Lefebvre teach us, as pointed out by Highmore, that “critiques of the everyday will emerge in the practices of everyday life, not in the [over-determining] rarefied or deadening realist programs of political parties.”¹⁶ Always in tension with, but never fully recuperated into, the categorical, disciplinary, and specializing logics of Power/Knowledge, the everyday here becomes an entangled field of diverse practices and conventions where various “ways of doing” can be carved out through the agency of individual practice.

Inspired by de Certeau and Lefebvre (among many others, including Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, etc.), emerging British and North American cultural studies approaches in the late 20th century began to see everyday life as a cultural, historical and political site existing in trans-textual relation with hegemonic socio-economic structures. Furthermore, cultural studies approaches would later view everyday life as part of an approach to knowledge production that affirms the embodied and performative tendencies of historically and culturally located human agents. As noted cultural studies proponent Lawrence Grossberg argues, “[w]e might want to think about the conjunctural articulations of power along the three axes of the state, everyday life, and the body and how these produce a transversal system of power (e.g., the public/private, identity and collectivity, political economy, etc.).”¹⁷ With

¹⁴ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xviii.

¹⁵ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* vol.2: *Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, 274.

¹⁶ Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction*, 29-30.

¹⁷ Grossberg, “We Know Where We’re Going, but We Don’t Know Where We Are: An Interview With Lawrence Grossberg”, 107. Furthermore, for a detailed description of the emergence and theoretical orientations of British Cultural Studies, see Stuart Hall (et al.), *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79* and Stuart Hall, “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms”.

such cultural studies approaches, popular or mass culture would become a fertile terrain through which perspectives could be gained on how globalizing culture industries and neoliberal ideologies intersected with mid and late 20th century everyday life.¹⁸ The aim here was to study the coding and decoding processes of exchange occurring within and between textually and discursively mediated social, cultural, and political environments, and how this contributed to the construction of diverse forms of everyday subjectivity, embodiment and collectivity. In studying the many ways that everyday discourses and texts are mediated by particular ideological formations, critics thought it possible to carry out analyses identifying the micro and located ways power becomes inscribed in forms of everyday identity. In emphasizing the discursive and textual aspects of some cultural studies work, Grossberg notes that “questions of the politics of textuality and the problematic of cultural studies, taken together, [aim] to describe (and intervene in) the way messages are produced by, inserted into, and function within the everyday lives of concrete human beings so as to reproduce or transform structures of power and domination.”¹⁹

As cultural studies approaches turned their attention to the ways power becomes inscribed on and in the body, new approaches emerged in the last two decades that now considered the role of bodily affects in everyday life. Cultural criticism focusing on the intersection between affect and the everyday are exemplified by the work of Highmore, Stewart, and Berlant (to name a few).²⁰ As noted by affect theorist Patricia Clough, the “turn to affect and emotion extended discussions about culture, subjectivity, identity and bodies begun in critical theory and cultural criticism [...] to a

¹⁸ For example: “I have tried to talk about the strategies by which a new and shifting conservative alliance has attempted to construct the acceptance of (or surrender to) a radical reorganization of social, political, and economic spaces. I have argued that this has involved a strategic and affective political struggle to restructure and transform the lived geographies of everyday life” (Grossberg, “The Figure of Subalternity and the Neoliberal Future”, 60). And “the development of late capitalism (consumption society) with its increasingly sophisticated technology for the rationalization and control of everyday life; the proliferation of mass media and advertising techniques and the emergence of an aesthetic of images” (Grossberg, “The Politics of Youth Culture: Some Observations on Rock and Roll in American Culture,” 106). See also Shirley Fedorak, *Pop Culture: The Culture of Everyday Life* and R. Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*.

¹⁹ Grossberg, *Strategies of Marxist Cultural Interpretation*, 393.

²⁰ Highmore's *Ordinary Lives: Studies in the Everyday*; Stewart's *Ordinary Affects*; and Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*.

dynamism immanent to bodily matter and matter generally.”²¹ In aiming to emphasize the non-signifying role of different affects, cultural critics began to explicitly turn their attention towards the cultural and political aesthetics of everyday life. Here, everyday life is figured through the embodied distribution of located sensual experience and ordinary affects, and aims to emphasize the bodily, non-representational and non-signifying tendencies fundamental to mediating everyday life.

Following the cultural turn’s emphasis on discourse and language, Ben Highmore argues that “a good starting point would be to suggest that no form of discourse is ever going to be proper (appropriate) to everyday life. The everyday will necessarily exceed attempts to apprehend it.”²² In terms of theories of affect and cultural aesthetics, the problem that everyday life poses to knowledge, language, and representation is how the ongoing and differentiating “flow” of everyday experience and embodiment can be figured or presented to thought. Inspired by the artistic avant-garde, Highmore notes that his approach to the cultural and political aesthetics of everyday life, operating on the borders of representational categories, “offer a repertoire of formal devices for registering a world that appears chaotic, disrupted and radically new” while it also “fabricate[s] an alternative aesthetic for attending to the experience of modern everyday life.”²³ Attentive to the violence of language to arrest, delimit, and enclose that which it represents, the sensual and non-textual qualities of everyday life force cultural critics to engage in experimental, creative and non-linear modes of representation. Here, everyday life is both sensual and mental, mind and body, rational and irrational, organic and inorganic, discursive and more-than-discursive. From this perspective, theories of the everyday that do not adequately attend to these entanglements or consider the limits of knowledge and representation fail to articulate the depth, complexity, and richness that is ordinary, everyday life. Highmore even goes on to note that “as rationalist discourse expands to cover areas of life that are non-rational, that do not follow patterns of logical reasoning, what is lost is the very stuff-ness that made them urgent problems in the first place.”²⁴ In

²¹ Clough, “The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedia and Bodies,” 1. Or see Ruth Leys’ critical consideration of the role of affect in cultural criticism: “The whole point of the turn to affect [...] is thus to shift attention away from considerations of meaning or ‘ideology’ or indeed representation to the subject’s subpersonal material-affective responses, where, it is claimed, political and other influences do their real work” (Leys, “The Turn to Affect: A Critique,” 450-451).

²² Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction*, 22.

²³ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

this, these approaches to the everyday emphasize the multiple, non-linear and fluid articulations of everyday life, while challenging rationalist, representational, and categorical characterizations.²⁵

Without subsuming this diversity and heterogeneity of late 20th century and early 21st century work on the everyday into a single overarching meta-narrative, these different and at times oppositional approaches to the quotidian seem to all attend to the play of disparate events and differential forces in giving tone and character to our day-to-day relationships. Everyday life emerges, in this scholarship, as an assemblage beyond usual conceptual binarisms, and is appreciated as a site of interconnection bringing together individual bodies, desires, and capabilities with and in socio-economic structures that affect how differently situated individuals experience space and time. More specifically, despite numerous differences in their approaches and projects, most contemporary scholars of everyday life can be seen to explicitly or implicitly engage with the everyday through four parameters highlighted by Michael Sheringham in his impressive *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*. For Sheringham: (1) the everyday ought not to be relinquished to singular uses and practices, but rather must be seen as a manifold and layered experience; (2) it implies community; (3) it has a historicity of its own, escaping traditional perspectives on history; and finally, (4) it dissolves upon objectification.²⁶

With this, contemporary scholars of everyday life, including the authors of this collection, approach the everyday as a question with no definitive answer. The question that the scholars gathered here see everyday life posing to specific knowledge producing practices and approaches is how to attend to ordinary, everyday phenomena that are at once conceptually elusive, and yet immediate and seemingly self-evident. To be interested in everyday life as a scholar is to be interested in how knowledge and language can negotiate with phenomena that swing from being extraordinary to tedious.²⁷ What this book shares with scholars such as Highmore, Stewart, and Gardiner is dissatisfaction with the non-

²⁵ For example, see Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*.

²⁶ Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*, 360.

²⁷ For example, see Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction*, 17: "So while it is common practice to describe everyday life as a scene of relentless tedium, this tradition [of mid and late 20th century French theory] has often tried to register the everyday as the marvelous and the extraordinary (or at least to combine dialectically the everyday as both extraordinary and tedious)."

reflexive and unproblematized understandings of everyday life that too often seem to unconsciously figure the meanings of everyday life in both academic and nonacademic circles. We also share the perspective that everyday life poses an extremely unique and irresolvable problem for thought and knowledge. Everyday life is unique because it paradoxically touches and is experienced by all temporal and spatial individuals, yet it simultaneously frustrates or exhausts the pretenses of knowledge not only to “master” or contain experience, but to articulate accurately the quotidian comings and goings that fill out our daily lives. In recognizing that the experience and ontology of everyday life is different from what we read and know about it, everyday life teaches us first hand about the violence and limits, but also the unavoidability, of discursive representation and inscription.

Yet what separates this book from the impressive contributions of cultural theorists such as Highmore and Sheringham (for example) is that in not limiting or grounding the considerations of everyday life to one relatively coherent genealogy of 20th century theory (whether French or otherwise), we are explicitly multi-disciplinary and trans-discursive. As this introduction indicates, this book acknowledges the persistence of trajectories of thought that question everyday life. However, the chapters in this book are not necessarily based on, and do not feel obligated to explicitly address, a particular canon of everyday theory (whether affect, cultural or French). Everyday life is approached here as a question that opens and allows for a multiplicity of narrative approaches, archives, and trajectories. In dialogue with, yet not limited to, existing contributions to scholarly work on the everyday, the chapters here, in their depth and breadth, aim to figure or approximate an everyday life that is irreducible to any one academic tradition, and in fact requires a specificity and attention to a multiplicity of discursive and epistemological archives. As this book attests, mediating with everyday life requires both a strong interdisciplinary sensitivity and a broad literacy in different approaches to knowledge production. In being multi-discursive, multi-disciplinary and anchored in a multiplicity of knowledge archives, this book risks over-generalizing everyday life. Yet we argue that this diversity and multiplicity in approaches to everyday life reflects the collaborative approach to knowledge production that we view as necessary to attend to and figure both the specificity and complexity of the equivocal “nature” of everyday life.

Everyday Life: Experiences, Concepts, and Narratives

This book stems from an international conference entitled *The Everyday: Experiences, Concepts and Narratives*, hosted by York University's Department of Humanities in Toronto, in Spring 2010. The chapters found in this book comprise some of the strongest and most innovative research presented at this conference.²⁸ The goal of this event was to create a space allowing young inter-disciplinary scholars from North American and European academic institutions to investigate everyday life in its many forms and from various angles (humanities, art history, philosophy, history, anthropology, etc.), in order to develop critical perspectives on the different ways scholars engage with this slippery topic. Seeking to open these perspectives for discussion, we decided to structure the event around three main lines of inquiry: questions of being, questions of knowing, and questions of the telling everyday life.

Although not limited by questions of ontology, epistemology, and narrative, all eleven chapters in this book uniquely engage with (and problematize) everyday life in relation to one, two, or three of these fields of research. Concretely, this means asking, for example, how can everyday experience be defined? What are the conceptual frameworks and cultural contexts, past and present, informing how scholars think about and understand the everyday as a culturally and historically specific reality? How do different academic and non-academic knowledge archives, embedded in specific historical and cultural contexts, determine particular ways of thinking, speaking, and writing about the everyday? And how is the everyday communicated and taken up in various cultural narratives?

The first section, entitled *Everyday Aesthetics*, features thought provoking research on everyday life as it has been and continues to be conceptualized and approached within various art practices. Doing so, it asks, more specifically, how the malleability of everyday life unfolds as part of particular historical and cultural modes of being in relation to specific artistic practices. Julian Jason Haladyn's "Everyday Boredoms or Breton's Excursion to *Saint-Julien-Le-Pauvre*" sheds light on the operative qualities of everyday life in the context of André Breton's early Surrealist activities, and its role in Breton's aesthetic and philosophical

²⁸ We would like to thank again those who helped make the event possible by presenting, chairing, performing, and participating in fruitful discussions. Special thanks go to the Humanities Graduate Student Association for allowing us to organize this event, as well as to Nathan Cyprys, Faye Mullen, and Arun Nedra Rodrigo, who showcased and performed their artwork. As well, thanks go to Professors Miles Ogborn and Caitlin Fisher for two memorable guest lectures.

practice. Haladyn weaves a complex portrait of everyday life through space, spectacle, boredom and Breton's break with the Dadaist movement. Jessica Darveau's contribution studies the estranging, uncanny furniture of artist Yannick Pouliot in "The Equivocal Everyday: Unveiling Tensions in the Work of Yannick Pouliot". Darveau draws on art theory, the sociology of objects as well as contemporary phenomenology in order to show how the transformative processes of Pouliot's work renders quotidian objects strange and familiar furniture uncanny. Mark Clintberg's "Edible Manifestos: New Social Orders in Contemporary Art, Activism, and Gastronomy" engages with the Montréal art scene as it intersects with the everyday practices of food consumption and production. Clintberg's analysis of Spurse and ATSA (two art collectives organizing politically inclined events around edible art) dissects how many of these groups' events relate to, and question, everyday life practices and conceptions. Jessica Elaine Reilly's "Beyond (New) Babylon: The Urban Everyday of Guy Debord and the Situationist International" takes us back to the 20th century avant-garde with an impressive study of how Guy Debord and other Situationists' political projects and conceptions of everyday life were informed by very specific ideas of urban space and its transformative potentials.

The second section, *Everyday Narratives, Performances and Ontologies*, comprises contributions more clearly pursuing reflections on how culturally specific narratives inform particular conceptions and lived realities of everyday life and subjectivity. Mélissa Gélinas' "Articulating Ontologies of the Everyday: Perspectives on Indian *Bārahmāsās*" is a thorough investigation of Indian women's traditional folksongs and their performative role in developing women's agency and identity. Cultural, historical, and literary, Gélinas' approach relates the folksongs to very concrete daily practices informing women's representations of themselves, while at the same time, Gélinas questions the very tropes she uses to understand this reception. Natalia Lebedinskaia's work also focuses on questioning cultural identity, narrative, and daily life, while simultaneously inquiring into various critical approaches used to understand history. In "Within the Present of Looking: The Makortoff Family Collection of Photographs of Doukhorbor Daily Life 1920–1950," Lebedinskaia critically demonstrates how a collection of family photographs can inform us how a Russian religious community in exile represented its daily life. More specifically concerned with visual culture, Valerie Cools' "The Landscapes of Visual Culture," approaches everyday life as a changing landscape of images, and critically surveys recent contributions to the field of visual culture so as to test the limits of the

field's conceptual apparatuses. Doing so, she gestures towards novel ways to reflect on the physicality of everyday images, and how they call for embodied responses and movements. Eben Hensby's theoretically driven "Baudrillard and Zwicky: Entering the Everyday", critically appreciates Jean Baudrillard's and Jan Zwicky's theories of subjectivity, and how the latter can contribute to the development of a more "authentic" conception of the everyday.

The third and last section of the book, entitled *Everyday Life, Archives and Epistemologies*, more specifically problematizes "how" we come to know and produce knowledge about everyday life. Martin Parrot's "Cinéma Direct, Everyday Life and the Eye of History", seeks to problematize the treatment of subjects in Québécois *cinéma direct* while at the same time opening critical venues to address contemporary works on everyday life. In "Archive Cultures: Technicity, Trace and Metaphor", Joshua Synenko critically engages with and unpacks recent debates focusing on archival practices in the library and social sciences. He demonstrates with great acumen the disavowed *aporias* found within these debates and how these effect the way we are able to know and understand everyday life, while pushing for a more critically speculative conception of the archive rooted in Jacques Derrida's reading of Freud, a conception, he argues, which would bear on more productive approaches to knowing everyday life. Robert Brown's "Epistemology at the End of the World: Ecocriticism, Everyday Violence, and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*" performs an in-depth and unique reading of McCarthy's 2006 novel *The Road* in order to highlight the violence inherent in our attempts to contain everyday life in knowledge, text, and language. Yet, informed by his critique of the textual violence associated with the deep ecology movement, Brown gestures to an ecocritical lens that does not disavow the entwinement of violence and text, thus opening different possibilities for negotiating with the depth of everyday life.

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PART I

EVERYDAY AESTHETICS

CHAPTER ONE

EVERYDAY BOREDOMS
OR BRETON'S DADAIST EXCURSION
TO *SAINT-JULIEN-LE-PAUVRE*

JULIAN JASON HALADYN

What sprang up in 1919 in France in a small circle of literati [...] may have been a meager stream, fed on the damp boredom of postwar Europe and the last trickle of French decadence.¹

—*Walter Benjamin*

Dada is boring only in relation to one's expectations of it.²

—*André Breton*

April 14, 1921, André Breton organized a Dadaist excursion to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, a medieval church in the Latin Quarter of Paris located on the south side of the Seine directly across from Notre Dame. A photograph commemorating this event shows a crowd of approximately fifty people, including a number of key Paris Dadaists, standing in the rain in front of the decrepit structure of the church. The poster, which invited people to meet in the garden at 3 o'clock, provided no information as to what this *Visit to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre* would consist of aside from a short narrative text explaining the rationale for this excursion:

The Dadaists passing through Paris, wishing to remedy the incompetence of suspect guides and cicerones, have decided to organize a series of visits to selected spots, particularly those which really have no reason for existing.—It is a mistake to insist on the picturesque (Lycée Janson de Sailly), on historical interest (Mont-Blanc) and on sentimental value (the Morgue).—The game is not yet lost but we must act quickly.—To participate

¹ Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 2, Part 1, 1927-1930*, 207.

² Breton, "Artificial Hells: Inauguration of the '1921 Dada Season'," 140.

in this first visit is to become aware of human progress in possible works of destruction and of the need to pursue our action, which you will want to encourage by every means.³

As indicated by this poster, Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre was meant to be the first in a *series of visits to selected spots* throughout Paris but, due to the failure of this first attempt, which was primarily attributed to the fact that it rained, the possibility of future excursions was quickly abandoned. "One or two hundred onlookers were huddled there, silent under their umbrellas, to the point that we wondered whether Dada was ready to disappear," Breton tells us.⁴ Although most historical accounts of this period of Paris Dada quickly shift to the more prevalent *Trial and Sentencing of M. Maurice Barrés*—a mock trial also prompted and organized by Breton that in many ways represented the end of Dada—I would like to dwell on the failure of the excursion to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre.

What we know about this visit comes primarily from the random stories and recorded details made by Breton and his fellow Dadaists in the years following the event, which collectively provide us with a picture (however incomplete) of the general focus of this particular outing—arguably the first attempt to extend the Dadaist critique of culture into the everyday streets of Paris. Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes in his 1931 "History of Dada" describes the excursion as consisting primarily of singular improvisational acts, such as the tour that he conducted acting "as guide through the churchyard, stopping here and there to read definitions taken at random from a big dictionary."⁵ Among these acts was also a series of performed readings by a number of Dadaists, including a manifesto read out loud by Breton in the churchyard. "Is there a church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre?" Breton asks, noting later in the text that this excursion "[...] is but a preparatory meeting. All that has happened until now under the sign of Dada was just a sideshow [...]. The curtain will rise shortly on a play fantastic in other ways, which we have prepared with utmost care for a year now [...]. Simply turn your heads. We are in the middle of Paris."⁶

Yet, even though the spectators who attended this visit were physically *in the middle of Paris*, they nonetheless found themselves faced with an

³ Quoted in Ribemont-Dessaignes, "History of Dada," 115. I have slightly altered the punctuation of the translated quotation to conform more closely to the original text presented on the poster.

⁴ Breton, "Artificial Hells," 141.

⁵ Ribemont-Dessaignes, "History of Dada," 115-116.

⁶ Breton, "Artificial Hells," 140.

undesirable part of the city that was not typically included in the spectacular vision of Paris found, or more appropriately produced, in guidebooks and other popular media. According to Vanessa Schwartz, the city of Paris “became powerfully identified as an object by being widely disseminated as a spectacle in the new mass press,” being “transformed into spectacle in these texts through the invention of an ‘everyday’ that was then framed as textual representation and subsequently re-presented as sensational.”⁷ Breton’s choice of this site for the excursion, as well as his specific staging of the demonstration as a kind of ironic or parodic tour—reflecting the plethora of organized excursions and tours of picturesque, historical and sentimental locations throughout the city—must in this way be read as an active critique of Parisian tourism and its staging of everyday life. It is important to note that the Church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre was generally regarded as having little cultural and historical value in the 1920s, *no reason for existing* except as an lived environment—as a “garbage dump” for the local residents, Philippe Soupault claims in *Mémoires*⁸—that stood in stark opposition to the spectacular image of 19th and early 20th century Paris. “For it was not the seemingly quotidian elements of Parisian life that served as the measure of the modern,” Schwartz continues, “[...] but rather the implication and the possibility that the everyday could be transformed into the spectacular and the sensational.”⁹ Whereas the tourist industry reframes the city in order to transform the everyday into a consumable commodity object-event, Breton’s tour aimed at allowing people to discover the marvelous within the mundane, everyday space of an abandoned church—what Walter Benjamin calls *profane illumination*, describing the “overcoming of religious illumination” through “materialistic, anthropological inspiration” that he believes is one of the greatest Surrealist legacies.¹⁰

Undermining the spectacularization of Paris, the Dadaist excursion to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre reframes the city by focusing on a site that does not support the common sense representation of the modern metropolis. The critique of everyday life that would become central to Surrealism is, I propose, first explored within this *failed* project—in which, as Michael E. Gardiner argues, the “mundane world became the privileged site of revelation, mystery and the poetic,” an experience of a *profane illumination* through which the everyday becomes an extension of “human

⁷ Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-siècle Paris*, 13-16.

⁸ As quoted in Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton*, 152.

⁹ Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*, 16.

¹⁰ Benjamin, “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,” 209.