

HATING TRADITION PROPERLY

GUEST EDITORS

Scott McCracken and Antony Rowland

'One must have tradition in oneself, to hate it properly'

Theodor Adorno

The work of the Frankfurt School has returned to centre-stage in debates in cultural studies. *Hating Tradition Properly* reflects the arguments and discussions that currently surround the influence of the School in postcolonial theory, the study of music, urban culture and consumerism, psychoanalysis, and gender studies. The moment of critical theory is assessed in relation to the different political conditions of Germany, Britain and South Africa. The essays show the legacy of Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin and their associates to be a controversial one; but the issues raised by their work go to the heart of contemporary debates in cultural studies. Tackling some of the newest and most dynamic developments in the field, this edition of *new formations* argues for an engaged criticism that is against entrenched orthodoxies: for hating traditions, old and new, properly.

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of all those black-market Beatles albums and Levi jeans contributed significantly to the collapse of morale of Eastern bloc Communism. Cool represents a free market in personal relations and sexuality, and like it or not, many people all over the world now aspire to that freedom. What's more, they are unlikely to be gainsaid by mere moralising, for it would require dictatorship (perhaps following a colossal economic crash) or the military triumph of some religious fundamentalism to divert them from it. The USA, as Mark Lilla pointed out, must be our model for what happens when a society embraces the free market both in labour and leisure, while losing interest in party politics: unprecedented prosperity for the many, misery for the few, Wall Street at an all-time high, and a total lack of any truly oppositional - as opposed to knee-jerk reactionary - politics. Thomas Frank described this latest phase of capitalism in rather more radical terms as the 'construction of cultural machines that transform alienation and despair into consent'. The maintenance of a healthy democracy requires a perceptible difference between the parties of left and right and real confrontations over real issues: in this light the prospect of an apolitical cool generation is alarming. Cool tends to prefer images of rebellion offered by glamorous terrorists and wasted rock musicians to the hard slog of real politics, but we'd all do well to remember that Adolf Hitler was also a rebel with artistic pretensions, a distinctive haircut, big trousers and kinky boots.

CODA

February 1999: James Brown, the founder of *Loaded* magazine, resigned as editor of *GQ* following an article in the new lad stylesheet which called the Nazis and Field Marshal Rommel 'the sharpest men of the century'.

This article is extracted from Cool Rules: Anatomy of an Attitude by Dick Pountain and David Robins, to be published by Reaktion Books in spring 2000.

THE INVENTION OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Rita Felski

Everyday life is the most self-evident, yet the most puzzling of ideas. It is a key concept in cultural studies and feminism and an important reference point in other scholarly fields, part of a growing interest in micro-analysis and history from below. Yet those who use the term are often reluctant to explain exactly what it means. While doing the research for this paper, I was struck by how many recent books mention everyday life in the title and how few list everyday life in the index. This reticence may well be intentional; recourse to the everyday often springs from a sense of frustration with academic theories and hair-splitting distinctions. After all, everyday life simply *is*, indisputably: the essential, taken-for-granted continuum of mundane activities that frames our forays into more esoteric or exotic worlds. It is the ultimate, non-negotiable reality, the unavoidable basis for all other forms of human endeavour. The everyday, writes Guy Debord, 'is the measure of all things'.¹

The powerful resonances of such appeals to everyday life are closely connected to its fuzzy, ambiguous meanings. What exactly does it refer to? The entire social world? Particular behaviours and practices? A specific attitude or relationship to one's environment? At first glance, everyday life seems to be everywhere, yet nowhere. Because it has no clear boundaries, it is difficult to identify. Everyday life is synonymous with the habitual, the ordinary, the mundane, yet it is also strangely elusive, that which resists our understanding and escapes our grasp. Like the blurred speck at the edge of one's vision that disappears when looked at directly, the everyday ceases to be everyday when it is subject to critical scrutiny. 'The everyday escapes', writes Blanchot, 'it belongs to insignificance'.²

Yet everyday life is also a concept with a long history. Beyond the often cited work of Michel de Certeau, there is an extensive tradition of writing on the everyday. This includes not just the work of Henri Lefebvre, but also of philosophers and sociologists such as Lukacs, Heidegger, Heller, Schutz, Goffman, and Habermas amongst others. The fact that much of this writing has not been taken up in feminism and cultural studies may be partly due to its often abstract philosophical character. Given the current interest in the concrete and the particular, and the enormous variations in human lives across cultural contexts, in what sense is it meaningful to talk about everyday life in general?³

As a result of this focus on the particular, however, everyday life is rarely taken under the microscope and scrutinised as a concept. Like any analytical term, it organises the world according to certain assumptions and criteria. For example, everyday life bears a complicated relationship to the distinction

1. Quoted in Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, Verso, London 1995, p192.

2. Maurice Blanchot, 'Everyday Speech', *Yale French Studies*, no. 73, 1987, p14.

3. See, however, Roger Silverstone's *Television and Everyday Life*, Routledge, London 1994, which draws extensively on sociology, phenomenology and anthropology, and Meaghan Morris, 'On the Beach' in *Cultural Studies*, Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (eds), Routledge, New York 1992. See also Dorothy Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes 1987 for a brief discussion of Schutz, Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1995 for a feminist application of Lefebvre, and Nancy Fraser 'What's Critical about Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender', *New German Critique*, no. 35, 1985 for a feminist critique of Habermas' s conception of the life-world. As this article was going to press, I discovered Laurie Langbauer's stimulating *Novels of Everyday Life: The Series in English Fiction 1850-1930*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1999. Though she comes

to slightly different conclusions, Langbauer's survey of different theoretical conceptions of everyday life and their relationship to questions of gender reveals intriguing parallels to my own discussion.

4. Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, Transaction, New York 1984, p38. For the history of writing on daily life, see Alvin W. Gouldner, 'Sociology and the Everyday Life', in *The Idea of Social Science*, Lewis A. Coser (ed), Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York 1975.

5. Thomas Moore, *The Re-enchantment of Everyday Life*, Harper Collins, New York 1996.

between private and public; it includes domestic activities but also routine forms of work, travel and leisure. Furthermore, everyday life is not simply interchangeable with the popular: it is not the exclusive property of a particular social class or grouping. Bismarck had an everyday life and so does Madonna. What then, does the term signify? What are its parameters? To what is it opposed?

Lefebvre argues that everyday life is a distinctively modern phenomenon that only emerged in the nineteenth century. The claim seems counter-intuitive, going against the presumed universality of the everyday. There is in fact a long history of writing on daily life extending from ancient Greece to medieval Christianity to the Enlightenment.⁴ But it is true that everyday life becomes increasingly important in the nineteenth century as an object of critical reflection and representation in literature and art. What is the cause of this new visibility? Lefebvre points to the impact of capitalism and industrialisation on human existence and perception. As bodies are massed together in big cities under modern conditions, so the uniform and repetitive aspects of human lives become more prominent. Similarly, Alvin Gouldner suggests that the rapidly changing fabric of ordinary lives creates a new awareness of the mundane. That which was previously taken for granted becomes newly visible, in both its new and its traditional, disappearing forms.

Everyday life is also a secular and democratic concept. Secular because it conveys the sense of a world leached of transcendence; the everyday is everyday because it is no longer connected to the miraculous, the magical or the sacred. (Hence, a recent New Age bestseller is entitled *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*).⁵ Democratic because it recognises the paramount shared reality of a mundane, material embeddedness in the world. Everyone, from the most famous to the most humble, eats, sleeps, yawns, defecates; no one escapes the reach of the quotidian. Everyday life, in other words, does not only describe the lives of ordinary people, but recognises that every life contains an element of the ordinary. We are all ultimately anchored in the mundane.

At the same time, some groups, such as women and the working class, are more closely identified with the everyday than others. Everyday life is not just a material by-product of capitalism, as Lefebvre argues, but also a term that is deployed by intellectuals to describe a non-intellectual relationship to the world. For Lukacs and Heidegger, for example, the everyday is synonymous with an inauthentic, grey, aesthetically impoverished existence. Lefebvre views it with more ambivalence; everyday life is a sign of current social degradation under capitalism, but it is also connected to bodily and affective rhythms and hence retains a utopian impulse. More recently, for some scholars in cultural studies, history, and related fields, everyday life has emerged as an alternative to theory and an arena of authentic experience. Faced with a legitimisation crisis about the value and purpose of humanities scholarship, intellectuals have often found an alibi in the turn to the ordinary. Everyday life, in other words, is rarely viewed with neutrality.

The concept is marked by a rich history of hostility, envy and desire, expressing both nostalgia for the concrete and disdain for a life lacking in critical self-reflection.

Yet as a term, everyday life remains strangely amorphous. As Lefebvre notes, it is often defined negatively, as the residue left over after various specialised activities are abstracted. One of these activities is philosophy. Conventionally, scholars have opposed everyday life to critical reflection and speculation. It is synonymous with the 'natural attitude' rather than the 'theoretical attitude', with the realm of common-sense and taken-for-grantedness rather than hard-headed scepticism.⁶ A second influential distinction is between the everyday and the aesthetic. This distinction is addressed in Alice Walker's well-known story 'Everyday Use', which turns on the differing attitudes of two daughters to some old family quilts. For one daughter they are simply useful objects in her daily life, while for her college-educated sister they have become examples of authentic folk art, to be hung on the wall and admired.⁷ To contemplate something as art is to remove it, at least temporarily, from the pragmatic needs and demands of the quotidian. Finally, everyday life is typically distinguished from the exceptional moment: the battle, the catastrophe, the extraordinary deed. The distinctiveness of the everyday lies in its lack of distinction and differentiation; it is the air one breathes, the taken-for-granted backdrop, the commonsensical basis of all human activities. 'The heroic life', writes Mike Featherstone, 'is the sphere of danger, violence and the courting of risk whereas everyday life is the sphere of women, reproduction and care'.⁸

As Featherstone's statement makes clear, gender has been an important factor in conceptions of everyday life. Lefebvre, like some other theorists, regards women as the quintessential representatives and victims of the quotidian. 'Everyday life weighs heaviest on women', he writes. 'Some are bogged down by its peculiar cloying substance, while others escape into make-believe ... They are the subject of everyday life and its victims'.⁹ Women, like everyday life, have often been defined by negation. Their realm has not been that of war, art, philosophy, scientific endeavour, high office. What else is left to woman but everyday life, the realm of the insignificant, invisible yet indispensable?

Such a negative view of the quotidian is, however, open to criticism. Both feminism and cultural studies have questioned the view that the everyday exists only as something to be transcended, as the realm of monotony, emptiness and dull compulsion. Furthermore, such a division between the everyday and the non-everyday slides imperceptibly into a ranking of persons: those exemplary individuals able to escape the quotidian through philosophy, high art or heroism versus the rest of humanity. Recent scholarship has argued, by contrast, that critical thinking is not simply the province of philosophers, that aesthetic experience need not be severed from everyday life, and that there are other forms of heroism besides war or Oedipal conflict.

6. Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World*, vol. 1, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1983.

7. Alice Walker, 'Everyday Use', in *Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women*, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York 1973.

8. Mike Featherstone, 'The Heroic Life and Everyday Life', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 9:1, 1992, p165.

9. Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, 1984, op. cit., p73.

Is it possible to think about the everyday in ways that do not simply treat it as negative or residual? A driving impulse behind some cultural studies scholarship has been the desire to invert this perception and to invest the everyday with supreme value and significance. In particular, De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* has inspired numerous readings of daily life as synonymous with acts of resistance and subversion. Yet this new account of the everyday often loses sight of the mundane, taken-for-granted, routine qualities that seem so central to its definition - the very everydayness of the everyday. By contrast, the phenomenological and sociological writing on everyday life focuses explicitly on this very question. From a reading of the work of Lefebvre, Heller and Schutz, I want to piece together an alternative definition of everyday life grounded in three key facets: time, space and modality. The temporality of the everyday, I suggest, is that of repetition, the spatial ordering of the everyday is anchored in a sense of home and the characteristic mode of experiencing the everyday is that of habit.

This vision of the everyday is interesting for several reasons. First of all, as I have suggested, it differs markedly from the way in which everyday life is conceptualised in contemporary cultural studies, where writers often rhapsodise about subversion, indeterminacy, nomadism and the like. I would like to explore these differences and to bring the various traditions of scholarship on everyday life into a more explicit dialogue. Second, the association of the everyday with repetition, home and habit often involves assumptions about gender and women's relationship to the modern world. These assumptions become most explicit in Lefebvre's sociological and Marxist-oriented account of everyday life. While I have found many of his insights useful, I want to question his view that the habitual, home-centred aspects of daily life are outside, and in some sense antithetical to, the experience of an authentic modernity.

REPETITION

Everyday life is above all a temporal term. As such, it conveys the fact of repetition; it refers not to the singular or unique but to that which happens 'day after day'. The activities of sleeping, eating, and working conform to regular diurnal rhythms that are in turn embedded within larger cycles of repetition: the weekend, the annual holiday, the start of a new semester. For Lefebvre, this cyclical structure of everyday life is its quintessential feature, a source of both fascination and puzzlement. 'In the study of the everyday', he writes, 'we discover the great problem of repetition, one of the most difficult problems facing us'.¹⁰ Repetition is a problem or, as he says elsewhere, a riddle, because it is fundamentally at odds with the modern drive towards progress and accumulation.

Lefebvre returns repeatedly to this apparent contradiction between linear and cyclical time. Linear time is the forward-moving, abstract time of modern industrial society; everyday life is, on the other hand, characterised by

natural, circadian rhythms which, according to Lefebvre, have changed little over the centuries.¹¹ These daily rhythms complicate the self-understanding of modernity as permanent progress. If everyday life is not completely outside history, it nevertheless serves as a retardation device, slowing down the dynamic of historical change. Lefebvre resorts at several points to the concept of uneven development as a way of explaining this lack of synchronicity. Because of its reliance upon cyclical time, everyday life is *belated*; it lags behind the historical possibilities of modernity.

Time, writes Johannes Fabian, 'is a carrier of significance, a form through which we define the content of relations between the Self and the Other'.¹² In other words, time is not just a measurement but a metaphor, dense in cultural meanings. Conventionally, the distinction between 'time's arrow' and 'time's cycle' is also a distinction between masculine and feminine. Indeed, all models of historical transformation - whether linear or cataclysmic, evolutionary or revolutionary - have been conventionally coded as masculine. Conversely, woman's affinity with repetition and cyclical time is noted by numerous writers. Simone de Beauvoir, for example, claims that 'woman clings to routine; time has for her no element of novelty, it is not a creative flow; because she is doomed to repetition, she sees in the future only a duplication of the past'.¹³ Here, repetition is a sign of women's enslavement in the ordinary, her association with immanence rather than transcendence. Unable to create or invent, she remains imprisoned within the remorseless routine of cyclical time. Lefebvre's perspective is less censorious: women's association with recurrence is also a sign of their connection to nature, emotion and sensuality, their lesser degree of estrangement from biological and cosmic rhythms. Julia Kristeva concurs with this view in seeing repetition as the key to women's experience of extra-subjective time, cosmic time, *jouissance*.¹⁴

Why are women so persistently linked to repetition? Several possibilities come to mind. First of all, women are almost always seen as embodied subjects, their biological nature never far from view. Biorhythmic cycles affect various aspects of male and female behaviour, yet menstruation and pregnancy become the pre-eminent, indeed the only, examples of human subordination to natural time and a certain feminine resistance to the project of civilisation. Second, women are primarily responsible for the repetitive tasks of social reproduction: cleaning, preparing meals, caring for children. While much paid work is equally repetitive, only the domestic sphere is deemed to exist outside the dynamic of history and change. For example, in his well-known discussion of industrial time, E. P. Thompson suggests that women's everyday lives conform to a pre-modern temporal pattern. 'The rhythms of women's work in the home are not wholly attuned to the measurement of the clock. The mother of young children has an imperfect sense of time and attends to other human tides. She has not yet altogether moved out of the conventions of "pre-industrial" society'.¹⁵

Finally, women are identified with repetition via consumption. For Marxist

10. Henri Lefebvre, 'The Everyday and Everydayness', in *Yale French Studies*, no. 73, 1987, p10.

11. Henri Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne* vol. 2, L'Arche, Paris 1961, p54.

12. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, Columbia University Press, New York 1983, pix.

13. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Picador, London 1988, p610.

14. Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, 1984, *op. cit.*, p17; Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', in *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology*, Nannerl O. Keohane, Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Barbara C. Gelpi (eds), University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1982. See also *Taking our Time: Feminist Perspectives on Temporality*, Frieda Johnes Forman (ed), Pergamon Press, Oxford 1989 for similar arguments.

15. E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present*, 38, 1957, p79.

scholars of the everyday, commodification is its paramount feature, evident in ever greater standardisation and sameness. As the primary symbols and victims of consumer culture, women take on the repetitive features of the objects that they buy. Femininity is formed through mass production and mass reproduction, disseminated through endless images of female glamour and female domesticity. Women become the primary emblem of an inauthentic everyday life marked by the empty homogeneous time of mass consumption.

The different aspects of women's association with repetitive time are captured in a suggestive passage that is quoted by Lefebvre, from a novel by the popular American writer, Irwin Shaw. As the hero of Shaw's novel walks down Fifth Avenue looking at women shopping, he idly imagines a museum exhibit devoted to the theme of modern femininity. Like the tableaux at the Museum of Natural History, with their stuffed bears opening honeycombs against a background of caves, this diorama would display modern American women in their natural habitat and engaged in their most typical activities. What would such an exhibition consist of? It would display to the curious viewer 'a set of stuffed women, slender, high-heeled, rouged, waved, hot-eyed, buying a cocktail dress in a department store'. While these women engaged in democratic acts of mass consumption, 'in the background, behind the salesgirls and the racks and shelves, there would be bombs bursting, cities crumbling, scientists measuring the half-life of tritium and cobalt'.¹⁶

This image eloquently crystallises the gendering of time. In the background, dwarfing the indifferent shoppers, is the technological sublime of science and war. This is cataclysmic time: the catastrophe of nuclear explosion, mass destruction, monumental history. But the female customers remain caught within the repetitive time of everyday life; passionate yet compliant consumers, they continue to buy dresses, oblivious to the possibility of catastrophe. They are governed by a law of repetition that is both social and natural. Creatures of artifice, they embrace the capitalist imperative to 'shop until you drop'. Yet they also embody the inexorable rhythms of nature. Like the stuffed animals at the museum, their behaviour is framed as the inevitable result of natural instinct combined with appropriate environment. Indistinguishable members of the species woman, they are caught within a repetitive cycle of natural desire.

Such visions of the horror of repetition, we need to recognise, are distinctively modern. For most of human history, activities have gained value precisely because they repeat what has gone before. Repetition, understood as ritual, provides a connection to ancestry and tradition; it situates the individual in an imagined community that spans historical time. It is thus not opposed to transcendence, but is the means of transcending one's historically limited existence. In the modern era, by contrast, to repeat without questioning or transforming is often regarded as laziness, conservatism, or bad faith. This disdain for repetition fuels existentialism's critique of the unthinking routines of everyday life, its insistence on the

importance of creating oneself anew at each moment. It is behind the shock of the new in modern art that is intended to liberate us from our habitual, entrenched, perceptions. And it is evident in Freud's view of repetition as a form of pathology, linked to the dark, anti-social urge of the death drive. Repetition is seen as a threat to the modern project of self-determination, subordinating individual will to the demands of an imposed pattern.

Yet the attempt to escape repetition is a Sisyphean project, for, as Lefebvre rightly insists, it pervades the everyday. He further argues that daily life is 'situated at the intersection of two modes of repetition: the cyclical, which dominates in nature, and the linear, which dominates in processes known as "rational"'.¹⁷ Here, as elsewhere, Lefebvre conceives of repetition as taking one of two forms: natural bodily rhythms or the regimented cycles of industrial capitalism. Yet many everyday routines cannot easily be fitted into either of these categories. They are neither unmediated expressions of biological drives nor mere reflexes of capitalist domination but a much more complex blend of the social and the psychic. Continuity and routine are crucial to early child development and remain important in adult life. Repetition is one of the ways in which we organise the world, make sense of our environment and stave off the threat of chaos. It is a key factor in the gradual formation of identity as a social and intersubjective process. Quite simply, we become who we are through acts of repetition. While recent cultural criticism has stressed the innovative dimensions of the everyday, it has paid much less attention to the need for routine in the organisation of daily life.¹⁸

Furthermore, there is a tendency, clearly visible in the work of Lefebvre, to equate repetition with domination and innovation with agency and resistance. Yet this is to remain trapped within a mindset which assumes the superior value of the new. In our own era, however, the reverse is just as likely to be true. Within the maelstrom of contemporary life, change is often imposed on individuals against their will; conversely everyday rituals may help to safeguard a sense of personal autonomy and dignity, or to preserve the distinctive qualities of a threatened way of life. In other words, repetition is not simply a sign of human subordination to external forces but also one of the ways in which individuals engage with and respond to their environment. Repetition can signal resistance as well as enslavement.

Finally, Lefebvre's often illuminating discussion of the quotidian is weakened by his persistent opposition of cyclical and linear time, the everyday and the modern, the feminine and the masculine. Yet the passing of time surely cannot be grasped in such rigidly dualistic terms. Thus acts of innovation and creativity are not opposed to, but rather made possible by, the mundane cycles of the quotidian. Conversely, even the most repetitive of lives bears witness to the irreversible direction of time: the experience of ageing, the regret of past actions or inactions, the premonition of death. The temporality of everyday life is internally complex: it combines repetition and linearity, recurrence with forward movement. The everyday cannot be

16. Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, vol. 1, Verso, London 1991, p28.

17. Lefebvre, 'Everyday and Everydayness', 1987, *op. cit.*, p10.

18. See, Silverstone's *Television and Everyday Life* for a systematic engagement with these issues.

19. Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, 1995, *op. cit.*, p198.

opposed to the realm of history, but is rather the very means by which history is actualised and made real.¹⁹ Thus repetition is not an anachronism in a world of constant flux, but an essential element of the experience of modernity. Rather than being the sign of a uniquely feminine relationship to time, it permeates the lives of men as well as women.

HOME

While everyday life expresses a specific sense of time, it does not convey a particular sense of space. In fact, everyday life is usually distinguished by an absence of boundaries, and thus a lack of clear spatial differentiation. It includes a variety of different spaces (the workplace, the home, the mall) as well as diverse forms of movement through space (walking, driving, flying). Moreover, our everyday experience of space is now powerfully affected by technology; thanks to television, telephones and computers we can have virtual knowledge of places and cultures quite remote from our own.

In spite of these varied locations, several philosophers of everyday life focus on the home as its privileged symbol. Agnes Heller writes: 'Integral to the average everyday life is awareness of a fixed point in space, a firm position from which we "proceed" (whether every day or over larger periods of time) and to which we return in due course. This firm position is what we call "home"'.²⁰ Like everyday life itself, home constitutes a base, a taken-for-granted grounding, which allows us to make forays into other worlds. It is central to the anthropomorphic organisation of space in everyday life; we experience space not according to the distanced gaze of the cartographer, but in circles of increasing proximity or distance from the experiencing self. Home lies at the centre of these circles. According to Heller, familiarity is an everyday need, and familiarity combines with the promise of protection and warmth to create the positive everyday associations of home.

Home is also important to Lefebvre's discussion of everyday life, but his attitude is more ambivalent. Home becomes an occasion for meditating on his own discomfort with the everyday lives of others. Describing a suburban development at the outskirts of Paris, he is unable to suppress his own sense of irritation. 'The owners' superficiality oozes forth in an abundance of ridiculous details: china animals on the roofs, glass globes and well-pruned shrubs along the miniature paths, plaques adorned with mottos, self-important pediments'.²¹ Home is a symbol of complacency, pretentiousness and petit-bourgeois bad taste. Yet Lefebvre is also critical of his own reaction. He admits that going into one of these suburban houses would probably seem like entering heaven to the migrant workers at Renault. 'Why should I say anything against these people who - like me - come home from work everyday? They seem to be decent folk who live with their families, who love their children. Can we blame them for not wanting the world in which they live reasonably at home to be transformed?'²²

This is surely a key citation in understanding the spatial dimensions of

20. Agnes Heller, *Everyday Life*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1984, p239.

21. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 1991, *op. cit.*, p43.

22. *Ibid.*, p43.

theories of everyday life. Home is not just a geographical designation, but a resonant metaphysical symbol. Lefebvre perceives the petit-bourgeois individual to be reasonably at home in the world. Being at home in the world is an implicit affront to the existential homelessness and anguish of the modern intellectual. Adorno writes: 'Dwelling, in the proper sense, is now impossible ... It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home'.²³ The vocabulary of modernity is a vocabulary of anti-home. It celebrates mobility, movement, exile, boundary crossing. It speaks enthusiastically about movement out into the world, but is silent about the return home. Its preferred location is the city street, the site of random encounters, unexpected events, multiplicity and difference. David Harvey, for example, sketches an image of the city as the 'place of mystery, the site of the unexpected, full of agitations and ferments'.²⁴ This chaotic ferment is in tune with the spirit of the critic, described as a restless analyst, constantly on the move. Home, by contrast, is the space of familiarity, dullness, stasis. The longing for home, the desire to attach oneself to a familiar space, is seen by most theorists of modernity as a regressive desire.

Home is, of course, a highly gendered space. Women have often been seen as the personification of home and even as its literal embodiment. Houses are often imagined as quasi-uterine spaces; conversely, the female body, notes Freud, is the 'former home of all human beings'.²⁵ As a result, feminists have often been eager to demystify the ideal of home as haven. One nineteenth-century female novelist, for example, imagined a utopian future in which the word 'home' would no longer exist.²⁶ Modern feminism, from Betty Friedan onwards, has repeatedly had recourse to a rhetoric of leaving home. Home is a prison, a trap, a straitjacket. In recent years, this critique of home has intensified: the discourse of contemporary feminism speaks enthusiastically of migrations, boundary crossings, nomadic subjects. Much of the same language pervades cultural studies. De Certeau dedicates *The Practice of Everyday Life* to 'a common hero, an ubiquitous character, walking in countless thousands on the streets'. His image of the agile pedestrian, adeptly weaving a distinctive textual path across the grid of city streets, has become a resonant symbol of the contemporary subject. Freedom and agency are traditionally symbolised by movement through public space. Cultural studies, in stressing the resistive dimensions of daily life, has drawn heavily on such images of mobility, as in Larry Grossberg's references to nomadic subjects 'wandering through the ever-changing places and spaces, vectors and apparatuses of everyday life'.²⁷

In response, Janet Wolff has suggested that such metaphors are masculine and hence problematic for feminism. She notes the persistent association of maleness with travel and femininity with stasis. But, as she also acknowledges, women have always travelled, and they now do so in vast numbers, as tourists, researchers, aid workers, guest workers, refugees. To describe metaphors of travel as inherently alienating to women seems too simple. Wolff also ignores the geopolitical dimensions of such metaphors.

23. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, Verso, London 1974, pp38-39.

24. David Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1985, p250.

25. Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, in *Sigmund Freud vol. 14: Art and Literature*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1985, p368.

26. Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1981, p137.

27. Lawrence Grossberg, 'Wandering Audiences, Nomadic Critics', *Cultural Studies*, 2, 3, 1988, p384.

The new feminist interest in nomadism, travelling and boundary crossing derives at least partly from greater interest in exploring the geographical, ethnic and cultural differences amongst women.²⁸

Still, it is true that such metaphors are partial, casting light upon particular aspects of experience only to relegate other parts of daily life to the shadows. In spite of the hyperbole in postmodern theory about nomadism, hyperspace and time-space compression, writes Doreen Massey, 'much of life for many people, even in the heart of the first world, still consists of waiting in a bus-shelter with your shopping for a bus that never comes'.²⁹ Similarly, Massey questions the assumption that postmodern global space has done away with the need for home and has left us placeless and disoriented. She notes the continuing importance of place and locality in everyday life, while questioning the belief that a desire for home is inauthentic or reactionary. This assumption, she argues, arises out a recurring tendency to see space and time as ontological opposites rather than as interconnected dimensions of human experience. Time, typically, is equated with history, movement and change, whereas space is seen as static, ahistorical and conservative.³⁰

The everyday significance of home clearly needs to be imagined differently. First of all, home is, in de Certeau's terms, an active practising of place. Even if home is synonymous with familiarity and routine, that familiarity is actively produced over time, above all through the effort and labour of women. Furthermore, while home may sometimes seem static, both the reality and the ideology of home change dramatically over time. Second, the boundaries between home and non-home are leaky. The home is not a private enclave cut off from the outside world, but is powerfully shaped by broader social currents, attitudes, and desires. Think, for example, of the Martha Stewart phenomenon. Here we see a distinctively new vision of the home as *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a highly stylised and labour-intensive blend of folkloric authenticity and postmodern chic.

Finally, home, like any other space, is shaped by conflicts and power struggles. It is often the site of intergenerational conflicts, such that an adolescent sense of identity can be predicated upon a burning desire to leave home. It can be a place of female subordination as well as an arena where women can show competence in the exercise of domestic skills. Home is often a place for displaying commodities and hence saturated by class distinctions; a recent ethnography of working-class women notes their embarrassment at the perceived insufficiency of their home.³¹ Home also acquires particularly poignant meanings for migrants and their descendants. In *Zami*, for example, Audre Lorde shapes the meaning of a life story around changing definitions of home. As a child, Lorde absorbs her mother's nostalgic yearning for her Caribbean homeland, as a young adult she must leave her mother's house in order to help create a 'house of difference' in the New York lesbian community, and finally she arrives at a vision of home informed by both her American lesbian identity and

her Caribbean heritage.³²

As this example suggests, the idea of home is complex and temporally fluid. Home should not be confused with a fantasy of origin; any individual life story will contain different and changing visions of home. My definition is intentionally minimal; it includes any often visited place that is the object of cathexis, that in its very familiarity becomes a symbolic extension and confirmation of the self. As Roger Silverstone argues, home is 'an investment of meaning in space'.³³ Such a familiar location fulfils both affective and pragmatic needs. It is a storage place, both literally and symbolically; home often contains many of the objects that have helped to shape a life-history, and the meanings and memories with which these objects are encrypted. Home is, in Mary Douglas's phrase, a 'memory machine'.³⁴ In this regard, Heller's focus on home as central to the spatial organisation of everyday life provides a useful corrective to the current infatuation with mobility and travel.

A number of feminist scholars, while not explicitly concerned with everyday life, are developing alternative visions of the symbolism and politics of home. bell hooks, for example, suggests that the history of home has very different meanings for African-American women as well as for men. 'Historically, African American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack) had a radical political dimension. Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanisation, where one could resist'.³⁵ The title of an early black feminist anthology, *Home Girls*, underscores this more positive, though by no means uncritical, vision of home as a potential source of warmth and strength.³⁶

In a recent essay, Iris Marion Young also makes a thoughtful case for rethinking feminist attitudes to house and home. Questioning the nostalgic longing for home as a place of stable identities predicated on female self-sacrifice, she nevertheless wants to recognise the symbolic richness and cultural complexity of 'home-making' (which is not just housework). Home, she argues, is a specific materialisation of the body and the self; things and spaces become layered with meaning, value and memory. This materialisation does not fix identity but anchors it in a physical space that creates certain continuities between past and present. 'Dwelling in the world means we are located among objects, artifacts, rituals, and practices that configure who we are in our particularity'.³⁷ Young explicitly tackles the oppressive aspects of home in a moving account of her own mother's failure to conform to the ideal of the 1950s housewife and its tragic consequences. Yet she also wants to insist that home can be a place of important human values, including safety, individuation, privacy and preservation, that need to be reclaimed, rather than disdained by feminism.

A masculinist cultural tradition, Meaghan Morris suggests, has perceived home as the site of both 'frustrating containment (home as dull) and of

32. Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name*, Sheba Feminist Publishers, London 1982.

33. Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*, 1994, op. cit., p28.

34. Mary Douglas, 'The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space', in *Home: A Place in the World*, Arien Mack (ed), New York University Press, New York 1993, p268.

35. bell hooks, 'Homeplace: A Site of Resistance', in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, South End Press, Boston 1990, p42.

36. Barbara Smith (ed), *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, New York 1983.

37. Iris Marion Young, 'House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme', *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy and Policy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 1997, p153.

28. Janet Wolff, 'On the Road Again: Metaphors of Travel in Cultural Criticism', *Resident Alien: Feminist Cultural Criticism*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1995.

29. Doreen Massey, 'A Place Called Home?' *New Formations* 17, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1992, p8.

30. Doreen Massey, 'Politics and Space/Time', *New Left Review*, 196, 1992, pp65-84.

31. Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender*, Sage, London 1997.

38. Meghan Morris, 'At Henry Parkes Motel', *Cultural Studies*, 2, 1, 1988, p12.

39. 'The domestic has become a complex and contradictory reality ... Do-it-yourself decoration and house improvement, the increasing personalisation of media and information technologies, consumption itself in all its various manifestations, the intensification of the home as a leisure centre, as well as a place of paid work, all signify its changing status'. Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*, 1994, op. cit., p51. For one case study of the gender politics of home, see Lesley Johnson, 'As Housewives we are Worms: Women, Modernity and the Home Question', *Cultural Studies*, 10, 3, 1996: 449-463. Jane Juffer's recent book *At Home with Pornography: Women, Sex and Everyday Life*, New York University Press, New York 1998 is an important contribution to rethinking the meanings of home, modernity and space as well as redefining feminist approaches to pornography.

40. Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, 1984, op. cit., p24.

41. Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues*, John Calder, London 1965, p19.

truth to be rediscovered (home as real).³⁸ In both cases, it has been seen as existing outside the flux and change of an authentically modern life. Yet home is not always linked to tradition and opposed to autonomy and self-definition: on the contrary, it has been central to many women's experience of modernity. A feminist theory of everyday life might question the assumption that being modern requires an irrevocable sundering from home, and might simultaneously explicate the modern dimensions of everyday experiences of home.³⁹

HABIT

The temporality of everyday life and its spatial anchoring are closely connected. Both repetition and home address an essential feature of everyday life: its familiarity. The everyday is synonymous with habit, sameness, routine; it epitomises both the comfort and boredom of the ordinary. Lefebvre writes: 'The modern ... stands for what is novel, brilliant, paradoxical ... it is (apparently) daring, and transitory', whereas 'the quotidian is what is humble and solid, what is taken for granted ... undated and (apparently) insignificant'.⁴⁰

The idea of habit crystallises this experience of dailiness. Habit describes not simply an action but an attitude: habits are often carried out in a semi-automatic, distracted, or involuntary manner. Certain forms of behaviour are inscribed upon the body, part of a deeply ingrained somatic memory. We drive to work, buy groceries, or type a routine letter in a semi-conscious, often dream-like state. Our bodies go through the motions while our minds are elsewhere. Particular habits may be intentionally cultivated or may build up imperceptibly over time. In either case, they often acquire a life of their own, shaping us as much as we shape them.

'Habit', writes Samuel Beckett dourly, 'is the ballast that chains the dog to its vomit'.⁴¹ Modern literature has exposed these congealed patterns of daily life and questioned the sleep-walking demeanour inspired by the tyranny of habit. Its relationship to the everyday is often paradoxical, seeking to both preserve and negate it. On the one hand, literature is often passionately interested in the ordinary; think of the great realist novels of the nineteenth century, the encyclopaedic scope of *Ulysses* as an 'inventory of everyday life',⁴² the domestic details of a postmodern novel such as *White Noise*. On the other hand, it also tries to redeem the everyday by rescuing it from its opacity, de-familiarising it and making us newly attentive to its mysteries. Yet this very act of magnifying and refracting taken-for-granted minutiae transcends the very dailiness it seeks to depict. Literature's heightened sensitivity to the microscopic detail marks its difference from the casual inattentiveness marking the everyday experience of everyday life.

A similar critique of habitual perception lies at the heart of contemporary critical theory. From Barthes, Althusser and others we have learned to see the taken-for-granted as the ruse of bourgeois ideology. Judith Butler has

shown that sedimented practices are the means by which repressive regimes of gender do their work. Postmodern accounts of the 'aestheticisation of everyday life', the invasion of our inner selves by the images and slogans of the mass media, only intensify this suspicion of everyday beliefs and attitudes. There is nowhere to run and nowhere to hide: no sanctum of the ordinary that escapes the tentacular grip of late capitalist consumer culture. The commonsense assumptions and routines by which we organise our lives are insidious precisely because they seem natural; their power can only be countered by ongoing critical vigilance. The work of theory is to break the spell of the habitual and the everyday.

Phenomenological studies of everyday life are, by contrast, much less censorious of habit. Indeed, they suggest that everyday life is self-evident and that this is necessary rather than unfortunate. Everyday life simply is the routine act of conducting one's day-to-day existence without making it an object of conscious attention. 'The reality of everyday life is taken-for-granted as reality. It does not require additional verification over and beyond its simple presence. It is simply *there*, as self-evident and compelling facticity. I *know* that it is real. While I am capable of engaging in doubts about its reality, I am obliged to suspend such doubt as I routinely exist in everyday life'.⁴³

In other words, everyday life is the sphere of what Schutz calls the natural attitude. This does not mean that the forms of everyday life are inevitable or unchanging. Long before the current interest in gender as performance, ethnographers such as Goffman were describing the performance of self in daily life and noting the socially constructed and conventional nature of our identities. The point is, however, that such performances are for the most part automatic, conducted with a constant, but semi-conscious vigilance. Unless a specific problem emerges to demand our attention, we rarely pause to reflect upon the mundane ritualised practices around which much of our everyday life is organised. As Berger and Luckmann point out, 'our natural attitude of daily life is pervasively determined by a *pragmatic motive*'.⁴⁴

Agnes Heller also insists on this point, claiming that it is impossible in principle to adopt a critical, self-reflexive attitude towards all aspects of everyday life. She writes: 'we would simply not be able to survive in the multiplicity of everyday demands and everyday activities if all of them required inventive thinking ... Disengagement is an indispensable precondition for ... continued activity'.⁴⁵ Heller's defense of habit is a pragmatic one; in order to survive in the world and get things done, we depend on routine. Certain facets of everyday life can be called into question, but it is simply impossible to doubt everything at once. Heller insists: 'It is absolutely imperative that in certain types of activity our praxis and our thinking should become repetitive'.⁴⁶ Habit is the necessary precondition for impulse and innovation.

Of course, phenomenological studies of everyday life are concerned with description rather than explanation and thus do not address

42. Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, 1984, op. cit., p3.

43. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1967, p37.

44. Schutz and Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World*, 1983 vol. 1, p6.

45. Heller, *Everyday Life*, 1984, op. cit., p129.

46. *Ibid.*, p259.

questions of politics and power. An over-reliance on habit can be personally constraining and socially detrimental, promoting a complacent acceptance of the way things are. In this sense, habit can serve conservative ends. Yet contemporary theory tends to overpoliticise the routines of everyday life in presenting the 'natural attitude' as nothing more than a vehicle of ideology. At its most extreme, this results in a denunciation of any form of fixity in favour of permanent flux. Habit becomes the enemy of an authentic life.

This is, however, to see habit only as a straitjacket and constraint, and to ignore the ways in which routines may strengthen, comfort and provide meaning. Furthermore, the distracted performance of routine tasks is surely a quintessential feature of the everyday, occurring across a wide range of histories and cultures. This is not to deny the vast differences between particular experiences of everyday life nor the fact, stressed by Foucault and Elias, that the modern era has led to distinctively new forms of internalised discipline. It is, however, to argue that the ritualised activity known as habit constitutes a fundamental element of being-in-the-world whose social meanings may be complex and varied.

From such a perspective, habit is not something we can ever hope to transcend. Rather it constitutes an essential part of our embeddedness in everyday life and our existence as social beings. For example, the contemporary city may constitute a chaotic labyrinth of infinite possibilities, yet in our daily travels we often choose to carve out a familiar path, managing space and time by tracing out the same route again and again. Furthermore, habit is not opposed to individuality but intermeshed with it; our identity is formed out of a distinctive blend of behavioural and emotional patterns, repeated over time. To be suddenly deprived of the rhythm of one's personal routines, as often happens to those admitted to hospitals, prisons, retirement homes or other large institutions, can be a source of profound disorientation and distress. Furthermore, even the most esoteric and elevated of activities contain routinised elements. Lefebvre notes that no cultural practice escapes the everyday: science, war, affairs of state, philosophy all contain a mundane dimension.⁴⁷

Paula Treichler has observed that cultural studies pays little attention to the daily life of academics, as if everyday life were something that only others experience.⁴⁸ As a result, everyday life often has the lure of the exotic. Cultural critics now treat it with reverential respect and endow it with the complexity and ambiguity previously attributed to the modern work of art. Within some versions of cultural studies, daily life constantly seethes with subversive energies. Yet everyday life is not just the realm of the other but of the self, not just the realm of transgression but also of familiarity, boredom and habit. To recognise that we all inhabit everyday life is not to deny social differences but simply to acknowledge a common grounding in the mundane.

Conversely, no life is defined completely by the everyday. Here I

disagree with the common claim that only the elite are free to transcend the quotidian, that 'most persons have *nothing but* that ordinary everyday life'.⁴⁹ This is to impose a fantasy of sameness and profound limitation onto the lives of ordinary individuals. Surely every life contains epiphanic moments, experiences of trauma and points of departure from mundane routines: religious ecstasy, sexual passion, drug-taking, childbirth, encounters with death or simply moments of distanced and thoughtful reflection on the meaning and purpose of one's life. Such heightened, intense, and often self-conscious episodes break just as dramatically with everyday routines as do the afore-mentioned realms of philosophy, high art or male heroism. It is hard to see how any specific transcendence of everyday life can be deemed more or less genuine than any other. Every life, in other words, contains elements of both the everyday and the non-everyday, though some lives are clearly more anchored in the mundane than others.

Everyday life, furthermore, does not afford any automatic access to the 'realness' of the world. Of course, it is true that daily life does involve certain forms of practical knowledge and skills without which we could not survive. Yet the assertion that everyday life is the realm of the concrete rather than the abstract needs to be qualified.⁵⁰ As both Heller and Schutz point out, everyday life is also the sphere of typification, that is, of a reliance on type, analogy and generality. Precisely because we cannot pause to question everything in the daily rush, we often depend upon common-sense assumptions and pre-existing schema that may not be supported by empirical evidence. According to Schutz, to live in the life-world is to take pre-existing knowledge as simply given 'until further notice', until a particular encounter or event serves to render it problematic. Heller suggests that everyday thinking is often fetishistic, accepting things and institutions as they are and bracketing them off from their origins.⁵¹

Of course we may also question our own beliefs; the everyday includes the ever-present possibility of innovation and change. Furthermore, everyday life should not be conceptualised as a homogeneous and predictable terrain. It embraces a diverse range of activities, attitudes and forms of behaviour; it contains 'broken patterns, non-rational and duplicitous actions, irresolvable conflicts and unpredictable events'.⁵² Nevertheless, we typically conduct our daily lives on the basis of numerous unstated and unexamined assumptions about the way things are, about the continuity, identity and reliability of objects and individuals. For Schutz and Heller this is a necessary condition of everyday life rather than a moral or political failing. They would agree with Wittgenstein that theoretical critique is a specific language game that cannot provide a guide for the conduct of an entire life. The everyday is not necessarily more real, more authentic or more immediate than the non-everyday, but it has a certain pragmatic priority simply because it is 'what we are, first of all, and most often'.⁵³

47. Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne*, 1961, *op. cit.*, p61.

48. John Fiske, 'Cultural Studies and the Culture of Everyday Life: Discussion,' in *Cultural Studies*, Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (eds), Routledge, New York 1992, p167.

49. Dorothee Wierling, 'The History of Everyday Life and Gender Relations: On Historical and Historiographical Relationships', in *The History of Everyday Life*, Alf Lüdtke (ed), Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. 1995, p151.

50. Fiske, 'The Culture of Everyday Life', in *Cultural Studies*, 1992, *op. cit.*

51. Schutz and Luckmann, *Structures of the Life-World*, 1983 vol. 1, p8; Heller, *Everyday Life*, 1984, *op. cit.*, p52.

52. Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*, 1994, *op. cit.*, p7.

53. Blanchot, 'Everyday Speech', 1987, *op. cit.*, p12.

In conclusion I want to draw together the various threads of my argument and to elaborate on its implications. How useful is the idea of everyday life? What exactly does it mean? How should it be applied? While much of my paper has focused on the contrasting definitions of everyday life in sociology and cultural studies, I now want to make more explicit connections to feminist scholarship.

Feminism has, of course, traditionally conceived itself as a politics of everyday life. In practice, this has meant very different things. On the one hand feminists have deployed a hermeneutics of suspicion vis-à-vis the everyday, showing how the most mundane, taken-for-granted activities - conversation, housework, body language, styles of dress - serve to reinforce patriarchal norms. The feminist gaze reveals the everyday world as problematic, in Dorothy Smith's phrase;⁵⁴ it is here, above all, that gender hierarchy is reproduced, invisibly, pervasively and over time. This sensitivity to the power dynamics of everyday life has been heightened by the impact of poststructuralist thought, with its suspicion of any form of fixity. As a result, much current feminist scholarship is involved in a persistent questioning of the commonsensical, taken-for-granted and mundane.

On the other hand, everyday life has also been hailed as a distinctively female sphere and hence as a source of value. The fact that women traditionally cook, clean, change diapers, raise children and do much of the routine work of family reproduction is perceived by some feminists as a source of strength. Because of this grounding in the mundane, it is argued, women have a more realistic sense of how the world actually operates and are less estranged from their bodies and from the messy, chaotic, embodied realities of life. Thus, from the perspective of feminist standpoint theory, women's connection to daily life is something to be celebrated. Here everyday life is not a ruse of patriarchy but rather a sign of women's grounding in the practical world.

My discussion has shown, I hope, that this ambivalence has a history, that everyday life has long been subject to intense and conflicting emotional investments. Without wishing to deny the new insights generated by feminism, I would suggest that it also continues a tradition of thought that has viewed the everyday as both the most authentic and the most inauthentic of spheres. It is in this context that one can speak of the invention of everyday life. In one sense the phrase sounds paradoxical, precisely because daily life refers to the most mundane, routine, overlooked aspects of human experience - those seemingly beyond the reach of invention, abstraction and theory. Yet I have tried to show that everyday life is not simply a neutral label for a pre-existing reality, but is freighted down with layers of meanings and associations.

One of these associations is, of course, gender. I have explored some of the ways in which everyday life has been connected to women, without simply

endorsing the view that women represent daily life. The problem with this view, as the work of Lefebvre makes particularly clear, is that it presents a romantic view of both everyday life and women by associating them with the natural, authentic and primitive. This nostalgia feeds into a long chain of dichotomies - society versus community, modernity versus tradition, public versus private - which do not help us to understand the social organisation of gender and which deny women's contemporaneity, self-consciousness and agency. Furthermore, to affirm women's special grounding in everyday life is to take at face value a mythic ideal of heroic male transcendence and to ignore the fact that men are also embodied, embedded subjects, who live, for the most part, repetitive, familiar and ordinary lives.

What I have found helpful in the phenomenological scholarship is that it takes seriously the ordinariness of everyday life without idealising or demonising it. Within cultural studies, everyday life is often made to carry enormous symbolic weight. Either it is rhapsodically affirmed and painted in glowing colours or it is excoriated as the realm of ultimate alienation and dehumanisation. Yet if the everyday is an indispensable aspect of all human lives, as I have argued, it becomes harder to endow it with an intrinsic political content. The everyday is robbed of much of its portentous symbolic meaning.

Thus it makes more sense to think of the everyday as a way of experiencing the world rather than as a circumscribed set of activities within the world. Everyday life simply is the process of becoming acclimatised to assumptions, behaviours and practices which come to seem self-evident and taken for granted. In other words, everydayness is not an intrinsic quality that magically adheres to particular actions or persons (women, the working class). Rather, it is a lived process of routinisation that all individuals experience. Certain tasks which at first appear awkward or strange - driving is an obvious example - gradually become second nature to us over time. Conversely, the everyday lives of others can seem deeply alien to us, precisely because the quotidian is not an objectively given quality but a lived relationship.

Such routinisation may be politically problematic or even dangerous in some contexts, but it is surely a mistake to see habit as such as intrinsically reactionary. The work of Heller and Schutz is valuable in affirming the pragmatic need for repetition, familiarity and taken-for-grantedness in everyday life, as a necessary precondition for human survival. As Susan Bordo points out in another context, it is an intellectual delusion to think that we can simply abandon our habits, blindspots and assumptions and embrace an infinitely shifting, self-undermining multiplicity of perspectives. This belief is a delusion because such habits form the very basis of who we are.⁵⁵ Influenced by modernist ideals of innovation and irony, contemporary theorists have tended either to excoriate the everyday for its routine, mundane qualities, or to celebrate the everyday while pretending that such qualities do not exist. It is time, perhaps, to make peace with the ordinariness of daily life.

Thanks to Sara Blair for helpful references and to Allan Megill for stylistic suggestions.

54. Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic*, op. cit.

55. Susan Bordo, 'Feminism, Postmodernism and Gender-Skepticism', in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, Linda Nicholson (ed), Routledge, New York 1990.