READING THE EVERYDAY
JOE MORAN
Copyrighted material

Reading the Everyday

Joe Moran

LONDON AND NEW YORK

A · H · R · B
arts and humanities research board

Copyrighted material

First published 2005 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

© 2005 Joe Moran

Typeset in Perpetua and Bell Gothic by
Florence Production Ltd, Stoodleigh, Devon
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin, Cornwall

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted
or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic,
mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented,
including photocopying and recording, or in any information
storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing
from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Moran, Joe, 1970–
Reading the everyday/Joe Moran
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
1. Sociology, Urban. 2. Civilization, Modern. 3. Popular culture.
I. Title.
HT153.M668 2005
307.76–dc22 2004029206

ISBN 0–415–31708–8 (hbk)
ISBN 0–415–31709–6 (pbk)

Copyrighted material

Contents

List of illustrations vii
Preface and acknowledgements ix

1 Introduction: waiting, cultural studies and the quotidian **1**

Reading the bus stop 3
Cultural studies and everyday life 7
The everyday and the public sphere 13
Rethinking everyday life 18
Ways of reading 22

2 Workspace: office life and commuting **29**

The rise of the *Angestellten* 30
Exploring office space 36
The fall of the middle manager 41
Ethnographies of commuting 48
On the Underground 53

3 Urban space: the myths and meanings of traffic **61**

Myths of the road 62
The cost of congestion 68
The secret history of the traffic light 72

Copyrighted material

The parking wars 77
Watching the pedestrians 83

4 Non-places: supermodernity and the everyday 94

The road to nowhere 95
Mapping Mondeo land 101
Roadside cultures 107
Imagining the new town 115
Wish we weren't here: boring postcards 124

5 Living space: housing, the market and the everyday 129

Houses and the pseudo-everyday 130
Location, location, location 134
The limits of tower-block chic 140
The politics of housebuilding 143
House viewings 151
Reading the market 158

6 Conclusion: the everyday and cultural change 163

Notes 170
Bibliography 177
Index 197

Copyrighted material

Illustrations

Figure 1.1	Adshel bus shelters, Liverpool	6
Figure 1.2	Stockbridge Village (Cantrill Farm), 1988	27
Figure 3.1	The Westway, London	63
Figure 3.2	Tom Phillips, '20 Sites *n* years': Site 18, Jones & Higgins, *c*.5.00pm, 1973, 1989 and 1992	87
Figure 3.3	From John Smith, *The Girl Chewing Gum*, 1976	90
Figure 3.4	From John Smith, *Worst Case Scenario*, 2002	92
Figure 4.1	Newport Pagnell Service Station (Welcome Break), M1 motorway, opened 1960	111
Figure 4.2	Tibshelf Service Station (Roadchef), M1 motorway, opened 1999	112
Figure 4.3	'The M1 Motorway'	124
Figure 5.1	David Rayson, *Griffiths Drive*, 2000	151
Figure 5.2	Chafford Hundred	157

Copyrighted material

Preface and acknowledgements

This book is about everyday life in contemporary societies. It focuses on those mundane, 'boring' aspects of the daily (what the French call *le quotidien*, with more precision than the English 'everyday') that have been theorized by European critics such as Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Siegfried Kracauer and Marc Augé, but have received relatively little attention within Anglophone cultural studies. As the book's title suggests, it aims to extend the primarily theoretical emphasis of recent, groundclearing works in everyday life studies[1] through detailed readings of the spaces, practices and mythologies of the quotidian. Indeed, one of the central arguments of *Reading the Everyday* is that the everyday is always already read: its lived culture cannot be easily separated from its representation in architecture, design, material culture, news media, political discourse, film, television, art and photography.

The book explores the ways in which important changes in Western societies over the last few decades – such as the privatization of public services, the deregulation of markets, the managerial revolution in the workplace and the promotion of homeownership – have been articulated through these practices and representations of daily life. I want to argue that everyday life has become a space for a new kind of 'post-political' politics, in which the quotidian coalesces with the political in unnoticed but pervasive ways. Many of the examples I discuss are British, although there is frequent cross-referencing to European and American culture. At a time when the subject matter of cultural studies is being increasingly internationalized, I want to argue that the study of mundane life demands a necessary concreteness and specificity alongside an awareness of the increasing globalization of everyday practices. Just as many of the pioneering theorists of daily life (Lefebvre, Certeau, the Situationists) used Paris as a *locus classicus* in their writings, several of my case studies are linked

Copyrighted material

to London, an increasingly global city whose everyday life still has its own distinctive landscapes and mythologies. I aim to show that quotidian spaces – offices, call centres, subway systems, traffic jams, new towns, suburbs, motorways and housing estates – are caught up in global processes while remaining tied to resilient local conditions and histories.

The introduction, 'Waiting, cultural studies and the quotidian', begins with a common daily experience – waiting for a bus – and uses it to suggest that the concept of the everyday in academic, media and political discourse has often neglected or obscured the specifically quotidian. The book is then divided into four main sections, each dealing with particular types of actual and discursive everyday space. Chapter 1, 'Workspace: office life and commuting', examines the representation of work culture and commuting in the context of recent changes in neo-liberal, globalized economies. Chapter 3, 'Urban space: the myths and meanings of traffic', discusses pervasive mythologies about vehicles and pedestrians in relation to questions of politics and the public sphere in the modern city. Chapter 4, 'Non-places: supermodernity and the everyday', investigates the dispersal of quotidian activity into liminal or peripheral spaces such as motorways, service stations and new towns, and explores the historical contexts and cultural politics of these supposedly blank environments. Chapter 5, 'Living space: housing, the market and the everyday', analyses ideas and representations of housing in contemporary capitalist societies, arguing that they serve both to romanticize and to conceal the everyday reality of the house. My conclusion, 'The everyday and cultural change', discusses the uneven development of daily life in a global context, in relation to colonialism, terrorism and social capital.

I would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Board, which granted me a research leave award for a semester to allow me to complete this book. I am also grateful to my colleagues in the departments of American Studies and Literature and Cultural History at Liverpool John Moores University, who covered my duties during this semester and a matching period of departmental leave. Rebecca Barden, Ross Dawson, Elspeth Graham, Michael Moran, Jonathan Purkis, Gerry Smyth and several anonymous reviewers for Routledge kindly read and commented on draft chapters of my book. Other people offered advice, information and various forms of help: Timothy Ashplant, Jo Croft, Rick Fell, Colin Harrison, Ben Highmore, Bob Kettle, Annette Kuhn, Liam Moran, Glenda Norquay, Joanna Price, Hazel Rayner, Cathy Wainhouse, Kate Walchester and members of the e-mail list, TheBusStopsHere. I am very grateful to the artists, filmmakers and photographers (Patrick Keiller, Martin Parr, Tom Phillips, David Rayson and Tom Wood) who have given me permission to reproduce images, helped supply me with film transcripts and reproductions and took the time to answer my questions about their work. Some brief sections of Chapter 5 appeared in my article 'Housing, Memory and Everyday Life in Contemporary Britain'

Copyrighted material

in *Cultural Studies* 18, 4 (July 2004) (http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals), and I thank the editors and publisher for permission to use this material again. Peter Wilby also allowed me to publish some of the research for this book in a very different form in the *New Statesman*.

This book is dedicated to my brother Liam, with love and respect; and my fellow passengers on the number 82 bus, with heartfelt sympathy.

Copyrighted material

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Waiting, cultural studies and the quotidian

IN HIS *CRITIQUE OF DIALECTICAL REASON*, Jean-Paul Sartre describes a queue forming early one morning at a bus stop on the Place Saint-Germain in Paris. He argues that those lining up at the stop 'achieve practical and theoretical participation in common being' because they have a shared interest, as people who regularly use the bus service and who all have business that day on the Right Bank (Sartre 1976: 266). But compared to people gathered together for some collective purpose such as a street festival or popular uprising, these bus-stop queuers produce only a 'plurality of isolations' (1976: 256). The bus passenger does not know how many people are going to be at the stop when he (*sic*) arrives or how full the next bus will be, and so is encouraged to see his fellow queuers as competitors for a potentially scarce resource. He takes a ticket from a machine by the stop, which indicates the order of his arrival and assigns him an order of priority when the bus arrives. By accepting this system, he acknowledges that his identity is interchangeable with that of the other passengers, a 'being-outside-himself as a reality shared by several people', which assigns him a place in a 'prefabricated seriality' (1976: 265).

What seems clear from this passage is that Sartre is not very interested in the actual experience of waiting for a bus. Indeed, the passage is typical of the slightly begrudging, tangential way in which the quotidian has emerged as a subject of intellectual inquiry over the last century. Sartre uses the bus queue as an easily understood example, raw material for a thought experiment that allows him to move on to weightier matters of politics and philosophy. He sees it as an abstraction of the laws of political economy, based on the competitive quest for a limited resource – in this case, seats on the awaited bus. The actual queue itself is devoid of any wider meaning: 'This unity is *not* symbolic . . . it has nothing to symbolise; *it* is what unites

Copyrighted material

everything' (1976: 264). The example only works because of the nature of the queue that Sartre describes. This orderly cohort of people taking tickets from a machine would certainly seem very strange to a contemporary British bus queuer.

The ability to queue patiently is often seen as part of the British, or more especially English, national character. The Hungarian humorist George Mikes argued in *How to be an Alien* (1946) that 'an Englishman, even if he is alone, forms an orderly queue of one'. For Mikes, uncomplaining queuing was 'the national passion of an otherwise dispassionate race' (1958: 48) and was symptomatic of other characteristics of Englishness: politeness to strangers, respect for order and deferral to absent authority. Writing in the early 1990s, though, Patrick Wright noted the more elaborate protocol of the London bus queue. While conservative commentators were lamenting the decline of the well-ordered bus queue as symbolic of national decline and social anarchy, Wright suggested that the reality was more complex. The West End was indeed a 'sordid scrum', in which unprincipled natives pushed past tourists with impunity. But in quieter, residential areas, aggression and cheek did not always win out, as 'each time a bus pulls up the crowd negotiates a messy but still intricately structured settlement between the ideal of the orderly queue and the chaotic stampede' (Wright 1991: 125). Wright's argument about the disintegration of the queue into less obvious, fragmented forms of social behaviour proved to be prescient. In 1994, a London Passenger Transport bylaw introduced in 1938, which made it illegal to stand more than two abreast at a bus stop, was repealed because it was no longer seen as workable (Jones 1994).

In the centre of London, since 2003, passengers have had to pre-purchase their tickets from kerbside machines before boarding the bus, but this does not assign them any order of precedence in a queue. One problem with the modern bus queue is that it lacks what Barry Schwartz calls the 'ecological supports' of waiting, such as 'queue this side' signs or queuing channels created by cords and metal poles (1975: 99). These supports are increasingly common in commercial environments such as supermarkets, banks and cinemas, where they are often supplemented by buzzers, digital displays and recorded voices saying 'cashier number 5 please'. Bus queuers, though, are left to improvise their own waiting arrangements. On my own bus route, I have seen this lead to near-fistfights, as hordes of passengers clamber on to already packed buses in no particular order, and drivers with half-full buses speed past stops teeming with angry commuters, because they know they will have to let everyone board or no one at all. The bus queue is a reminder that even the most mundane routines incorporate complex spatial politics and cultural meanings.

This introduction has five main sections. First, it examines the bus stop as a way of considering the unspoken economic and political contexts of

Copyrighted material

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Waiting, cultural studies and the quotidian

IN HIS *CRITIQUE OF DIALECTICAL REASON*, Jean-Paul Sartre describes a queue forming early one morning at a bus stop on the Place Saint-Germain in Paris. He argues that those lining up at the stop 'achieve practical and theoretical participation in common being' because they have a shared interest, as people who regularly use the bus service and who all have business that day on the Right Bank (Sartre 1976: 266). But compared to people gathered together for some collective purpose such as a street festival or popular uprising, these bus-stop queuers produce only a 'plurality of isolations' (1976: 256). The bus passenger does not know how many people are going to be at the stop when he (*sic*) arrives or how full the next bus will be, and so is encouraged to see his fellow queuers as competitors for a potentially scarce resource. He takes a ticket from a machine by the stop, which indicates the order of his arrival and assigns him an order of priority when the bus arrives. By accepting this system, he acknowledges that his identity is interchangeable with that of the other passengers, a 'being-outside-himself as a reality shared by several people', which assigns him a place in a 'prefabricated seriality' (1976: 265).

What seems clear from this passage is that Sartre is not very interested in the actual experience of waiting for a bus. Indeed, the passage is typical of the slightly begrudging, tangential way in which the quotidian has emerged as a subject of intellectual inquiry over the last century. Sartre uses the bus queue as an easily understood example, raw material for a thought experiment that allows him to move on to weightier matters of politics and philosophy. He sees it as an abstraction of the laws of political economy, based on the competitive quest for a limited resource – in this case, seats on the awaited bus. The actual queue itself is devoid of any wider meaning: 'This unity is *not* symbolic . . . it has nothing to symbolise; *it* is what unites

Copyrighted material

and practicalities of the more tiresome forms of waiting, such as standing at bus stops, do not support a market for surrogate waiters. In these contexts, it is difficult to separate the experience of waiting from its surrounding cultural practices and meanings.

In his classic study of queues, Schwartz argues that the experience of waiting and our attitudes towards it embody social differences (1975: 22). For the poorest members of society, waiting is simply a daily experience as they queue for public transport, state benefits and doctors' appointments. For the more affluent, waiting is less time-consuming and may be expected to come with compensatory props such as comfy chairs, bottomless coffee pots and reading matter. The changing fortunes of the British bus over the last two decades offer a case study in this differentiated experience of waiting. Under the 1985 Transport Act, the Thatcher government disbanded the National Bus Company and deregulated all local bus services outside London. To the act's supporters, it replaced inefficient local authority monopolies with healthy competition and consumer choice. To its detractors, it carved up the bus services into a morass of holding companies and private firms, with no integration of timetables or ticketing, less provision for unprofitable routes and nobody to blame when the bus did not show up. The view that deregulation confirmed the social marginalization of bus users was reinforced by a remark attributed, perhaps apocryphally, to Thatcher: 'If a man finds himself a passenger on a bus having attained the age of twenty-six, he can account himself a failure in life' (Grayling 1999).

When the Labour government came to power in 1997, it combined a new concern with the delivery of public services with an unwillingness to alter the economic and political landscape created by Thatcherism. As urban traffic congestion became a significant electoral issue, the Department for Transport published *From Workhorse to Thoroughbred: A Better Role for Bus Travel*, which set a target to increase bus use by 10 per cent by 2010. The government aimed to achieve this not through re-regulating the buses but through a 'Quality Partnership Approach' in which local authorities would work more closely with private companies to improve services (Department for Transport 1998: 2). It is a classic New Labour strategy: policy-making is not about weighing up competing priorities, but about public and private agencies working together to achieve pre-agreed ends, with 'everybody concentrating on what they do best' (1998: 2). While the local authorities could integrate and coordinate services, the private operators could show 'responsiveness to the customer', 'flexibility' and 'incentive to innovate' (1998: 22). The current status of bus travel suggests the limitations of such a policy. Labour is on course to achieve its target of increased bus use, but only because it has risen dramatically in London, which accounts for about a third of all bus journeys in Britain (*Social Trends* 2004: 188). The buses were never deregulated in the capital, and the Greater London Authority

Copyrighted material

formed in 2000 has exercised considerable central control. Almost everywhere else in the country, bus use is static or falling (Office for National Statistics 2003).

It would be difficult to find a piece of modern architecture that inspires less interest than the bus shelter. It is an omnipresent object of everyday life that, when it registers in the public consciousness, is usually only associated with graffiti and vandalism. But there has been an unnoticed bus-shelter revolution in recent years. Many of the world's shelters are now supplied by just two companies, both of which deal with outdoor advertising: Clear Channel Adshel and JCDecaux. These firms have built themselves into global brands since the 1990s, winning thousands of street furniture contracts throughout the world. As more and more local authorities contract out their public services to private companies, bus-shelter design has become an adjunct of the advertising industry.

In Britain, Adshel is the market leader with an 80 per cent market share. It supplies and maintains its shelters free of charge, in return for the right to display advertising on some of them in backlit '6-sheet' panels. Bus shelters will normally have just one advertising panel, but on prime sites in city centres they can have two or more, with rotating displays to maximize income. Adshel bus shelters are architect-designed, with trendy names for particular ranges: Metro, Classic, Skylight, Avenue. The company takes pride in the high quality of its shelters, which use graffiti- and etch-resistant materials, reinforced glass, bright colours and courtesy lights. A 2003 government White Paper on combating anti-social behaviour commended Adshel for its success in cleaning bus shelters and removing graffiti, and working with the police to reduce vandalism (Home Office 2003: 70). It is a public–private partnership that seems to benefit all parties: Adshel gets free advertising, while the local authority gets free shelters, and does not have to spend thousands of pounds cleaning them, removing graffiti and sweeping up broken glass. It is, according to Adshel's managing director, 'a win-win business model for all concerned' (France 2002).

But the sponsored bus shelter is also a case study in the colonization of urban landscapes by the market. Adshel has been supplying advertising in bus shelters since the 1970s, but it really began to boom because of two key developments in the late 1980s. The first was the installation of illuminated posters called 'Adshel Superlites'. The second was the advent of a data system called OSCAR (Outdoor Site Classification and Audience Research), providing information on vehicle and pedestrian traffic near poster sites (Sutherland 1989). These innovations allowed advertisers to direct their campaigns beyond the unglamorous target market of the habitual bus user. The ads are now also aimed at passing pedestrians and motorists, which is why they are big on visual impact and short on copy.

Copyrighted material

The economies of scale created by multinational advertising companies, combined with the need for these companies to sell attractive packages to city councils, have produced an interesting tension between global standardization and local difference. In Liverpool, the city where I work, there is a surprising variety of bus shelters built around the standard steel frame (see Figure 1.1). The contracts between the advertising companies and local authorities stipulate that the former will provide a certain number of shelters if they can advertise in an agreed proportion of them. The 'de luxe' shelters, with barrelled glass roofs, glass walls on all sides and dot-matrix displays with real-time passenger information technology letting passengers know when the next bus is due, do not have advertising. The shelters with adverts, which tend to be in the prime city-centre sites or the main routes into town, are much more rudimentary. They have a cantilevered roof or windbreak ends extending only part of their width, so that the ads can be seen by everyone. The outdoor advertising companies have understandably expended their energies not on prioritizing warmth and comfort for bus-stop waiters, but on developing new forms of advertising, such as talking adverts, triggered by motion sensors, and 'dynamic image' posters in which, for example, steam appears to rise from cups of Heinz soup (Clear Channel Adshel 2004).

Figure 1.1 Adshel bus shelters, Liverpool.
Photographs by the author.

Copyrighted material

formed in 2000 has exercised considerable central control. Almost everywhere else in the country, bus use is static or falling (Office for National Statistics 2003).

It would be difficult to find a piece of modern architecture that inspires less interest than the bus shelter. It is an omnipresent object of everyday life that, when it registers in the public consciousness, is usually only associated with graffiti and vandalism. But there has been an unnoticed bus-shelter revolution in recent years. Many of the world's shelters are now supplied by just two companies, both of which deal with outdoor advertising: Clear Channel Adshel and JCDecaux. These firms have built themselves into global brands since the 1990s, winning thousands of street furniture contracts throughout the world. As more and more local authorities contract out their public services to private companies, bus-shelter design has become an adjunct of the advertising industry.

In Britain, Adshel is the market leader with an 80 per cent market share. It supplies and maintains its shelters free of charge, in return for the right to display advertising on some of them in backlit '6-sheet' panels. Bus shelters will normally have just one advertising panel, but on prime sites in city centres they can have two or more, with rotating displays to maximize income. Adshel bus shelters are architect-designed, with trendy names for particular ranges: Metro, Classic, Skylight, Avenue. The company takes pride in the high quality of its shelters, which use graffiti- and etch-resistant materials, reinforced glass, bright colours and courtesy lights. A 2003 government White Paper on combating anti-social behaviour commended Adshel for its success in cleaning bus shelters and removing graffiti, and working with the police to reduce vandalism (Home Office 2003: 70). It is a public–private partnership that seems to benefit all parties: Adshel gets free advertising, while the local authority gets free shelters, and does not have to spend thousands of pounds cleaning them, removing graffiti and sweeping up broken glass. It is, according to Adshel's managing director, 'a win-win business model for all concerned' (France 2002).

But the sponsored bus shelter is also a case study in the colonization of urban landscapes by the market. Adshel has been supplying advertising in bus shelters since the 1970s, but it really began to boom because of two key developments in the late 1980s. The first was the installation of illuminated posters called 'Adshel Superlites'. The second was the advent of a data system called OSCAR (Outdoor Site Classification and Audience Research), providing information on vehicle and pedestrian traffic near poster sites (Sutherland 1989). These innovations allowed advertisers to direct their campaigns beyond the unglamorous target market of the habitual bus user. The ads are now also aimed at passing pedestrians and motorists, which is why they are big on visual impact and short on copy.

Copyrighted material

a kind of limbo between work and leisure in which no explicit demands are made on us but we are still trapped by the necessity of waiting (1971: 53). The very conditions that make waiting inevitable, though, give it low economic and cultural value. Wealth and status in advanced capitalist societies rest on the capacity to accumulate resources such as money, skills, knowledge and information. Waiting is the opposite of this kind of accumulated resource: it is simply the passing of time, time that could be spent doing something more useful.

For Lefebvre, waiting is a seminal experience because it encapsulates this essential tension in everyday life, between its inescapability and its dismissal as boring and marginal. His work sees a closely linked relationship between the lived experience of daily life and the meanings, ideas and mythologies that circulate around it. In both its practice and representation, he argues, the everyday exists as a kind of 'residual deposit' that lags behind the more glamorous, accelerated experiences of contemporary society, a 'great, disparate patchwork' that modernity 'drags in its wake' (Lefebvre 2002: 57; Lefebvre 1991a: 192). He suggests that the relative neglect of everyday life within the traditional academic disciplines is part of this same process of residualization. The everyday is a kind of remainder which evades conventional divisions of knowledge: it is 'defined by "what is left over" after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out by analysis' (Lefebvre 1991a: 97).

This value system is reinforced by people outside academia who expect scholars to engage in research projects of established significance. While they are happy to recycle statistics and surveys from obscure journals for lighthearted news stories, journalists often combine this with a dig at the 'boffins' who have little better to do with their time than focus on the trivia of everyday life. This dismissal takes on a ritualistic quality in the media coverage of the Ig Nobel Prizes, an annual event at Harvard sponsored by the Annals of Improbable Research, for academic projects that 'first make people laugh and then make them think'. The winner of the 2003 Literature Prize was John W. Trinkaus, an American social psychologist who specializes in brief papers on topics such as shoppers who exceed the number of items permitted in the express checkout lane, conversations between strangers in elevators and motorists who cut through store parking areas to avoid red traffic lights. One commentator summed up the general mood by describing this work as 'daft science cashing in on the bleeding obvious' (Henderson 2003). For some deadline-driven journalists, this pained attentiveness to unpromising material is nothing more than a form of tenured trainspotting. The problem with such research, though, is not that it is undertaken, but that it tends to work within the constraints of disciplinary science, reducing the quotidian to controlled experiments and statistical configurations without looking at broader social questions. Waiting for a bus is precisely the kind of common-

Copyrighted material

place activity unclaimed by the established disciplines, which might reveal unnoticed connections between everyday experience, cultural representation and issues of power, resources and public policy.

One of the key aims of cultural studies has been to develop an interdisciplinary project that will address these practices of everyday life. The evolution of cultural studies as an academic subject, though, has tended to militate against a concern with boring, routine activities – such as waiting at bus stops. In both its general and academic usage, the word 'everyday' refers to a wide range of practices undertaken by ordinary people, and specific subject areas have tended to define it differently according to their own concerns. As John Hartley argues, cultural studies has understood the everyday in relation to its own interest in the political-cultural construction of identity and meaning, and has therefore seen it 'as a symptom for something else – struggles, ideologies, oppressions, power structures' (2003: 121). At the risk of oversimplifying a diverse field, I would suggest that there have been two main ways in which the emerging discipline of cultural studies has thought about everyday life over the last few decades: as ritual and as popular consumption.

The first of these approaches was strongly influenced by an ethnographic notion of ritual as semi-formalized, symbolic action. Traditional ethnography sought to capture the minute detail of ordinary life through extensive fieldwork involving participant observation and in-depth interviews. It focused on specific activities that, if they could not be formally articulated, could at least be symbolically expressed. As Nancy Ries argues, the convention within ethnographic studies of 'primitive' societies was to begin with the mundane details of demography, work and daily life and move 'up' to 'the seemingly more esoteric realms of kinship patterns, exchange, religious belief, and ritual' (2002: 728). The ethnographer's main interest was in 'the symbolically charged practices which bridge the ordinary and the extraordinary': initiation rites, marriages, burials, communal feasts and other ceremonies. By examining the role of these rituals in establishing systems of social stratification, kinship relations and cultural identities, the ethnographer saw the everyday as '*the* preeminent temporal/spatial domain where nonalienated, culturally and existentially meaningful productivity occurs' (2002: 732).

The research conducted in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham from the late 1960s onwards shows the influence of this ethnographic understanding of the everyday. In Paul Willis's words, the CCCS's work on subcultural groups such as skinheads, bikers and punks identified forms of 'symbolic creativity' that were both embedded in daily routines and separate from them (1990: 1). This partly explains the CCCS's particular interest in youth cultures. Willis's *Learning to Labour* (1977) focuses on the socializing forces of education and school-leavers' jobs in all their oppressive mundanity, but in his later work he also suggests that young people are adept

Copyrighted material

a kind of limbo between work and leisure in which no explicit demands are made on us but we are still trapped by the necessity of waiting (1971: 53). The very conditions that make waiting inevitable, though, give it low economic and cultural value. Wealth and status in advanced capitalist societies rest on the capacity to accumulate resources such as money, skills, knowledge and information. Waiting is the opposite of this kind of accumulated resource: it is simply the passing of time, time that could be spent doing something more useful.

For Lefebvre, waiting is a seminal experience because it encapsulates this essential tension in everyday life, between its inescapability and its dismissal as boring and marginal. His work sees a closely linked relationship between the lived experience of daily life and the meanings, ideas and mythologies that circulate around it. In both its practice and representation, he argues, the everyday exists as a kind of 'residual deposit' that lags behind the more glamorous, accelerated experiences of contemporary society, a 'great, disparate patchwork' that modernity 'drags in its wake' (Lefebvre 2002: 57; Lefebvre 1991a: 192). He suggests that the relative neglect of everyday life within the traditional academic disciplines is part of this same process of residualization. The everyday is a kind of remainder which evades conventional divisions of knowledge: it is 'defined by "what is left over" after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out by analysis' (Lefebvre 1991a: 97).

This value system is reinforced by people outside academia who expect scholars to engage in research projects of established significance. While they are happy to recycle statistics and surveys from obscure journals for light-hearted news stories, journalists often combine this with a dig at the 'boffins' who have little better to do with their time than focus on the trivia of everyday life. This dismissal takes on a ritualistic quality in the media coverage of the Ig Nobel Prizes, an annual event at Harvard sponsored by the Annals of Improbable Research, for academic projects that 'first make people laugh and then make them think'. The winner of the 2003 Literature Prize was John W. Trinkaus, an American social psychologist who specializes in brief papers on topics such as shoppers who exceed the number of items permitted in the express checkout lane, conversations between strangers in elevators and motorists who cut through store parking areas to avoid red traffic lights. One commentator summed up the general mood by describing this work as 'daft science cashing in on the bleeding obvious' (Henderson 2003). For some deadline-driven journalists, this pained attentiveness to unpromising material is nothing more than a form of tenured trainspotting. The problem with such research, though, is not that it is undertaken, but that it tends to work within the constraints of disciplinary science, reducing the quotidian to controlled experiments and statistical configurations without looking at broader social questions. Waiting for a bus is precisely the kind of common-

Copyrighted material

routines of popular culture, such as watching the daily news or a soap opera on television, reproduce the repetitions of cooking and cleaning in more inventive form: 'Routine lives require routine pleasures' (Fiske 1989b: 65). Fiske's work contrasts the creative practices of everyday life with the dull monotony of quotidian routine.

Susan Willis's *A Primer for Daily Life* is in part a critical response to Fiske and others who see the everyday primarily as a space for individual creativity and subcultural resistance (Willis 1991: 13). Like Fiske, though, she equates daily life with the individual consumption of commodities, in the form of women's workout videos, children's toys, supermarket brands and theme parks. Willis makes a brief reference to Lefebvre's and Certeau's writings on '*la vie quotidienne*' at the beginning of her book, but argues that, while their work is a response to European urban experience, her own is written in an American and suburban context (1991: vi). This means that she focuses on the atomized consumer lifestyles made possible by the shopping mall, the car and the high-tech home. 'The bottom line in daily life', she argues, 'is the commodity form. Herein are subsumed all the contradictions of commodity capitalism and our aspirations for their utopian transformation' (1991: vi). Willis aims to show how commodity fetishism conceals or reinvents the use value of products, transforming the mundane into the desirable. It turns work into play in the form of children's toy cookers and shopping baskets, or historical theme parks promoting the authenticity of traditional crafts; or it taps into the needs and desires – for energy, abundance, democracy and community – that daily life does not usually provide. Willis argues that this commodified everyday always precludes the possibility of socialized consumption: 'Almost everything we do in daily life, we do as individuals' (1991: 175).

I want to argue that this emphasis on ritual or consumption in cultural studies has produced a limiting notion of the everyday that values the creative and recreational over the banal and boring. This has no doubt helped in the development of a relatively young discipline: the forms of symbolic creativity involved in our interaction with new forms of media, technology and consumption are rather more enticing topics for prospective students than quotidian routines. But it has tended to overlook a vast area of social life whose very 'boringness' makes it a significant arena for an unacknowledged cultural politics. It is significant that some of the most interesting reflections on everyday life in recent cultural studies have been on the uses of television, in which consumption has become relatively routine and domesticated, melded with daily patterns and behaviours (see Silverstone 1994; Gauntlett and Hill 1999; Moores 2000: 57–104); and on suburbia, where the separation of public from private space is often similarly linked to mundane practices and mythologies (see Silverstone 1996; Spigel 2001). My own book seeks to explore this routinization not so much in the sphere of domesticity and leisure time as in the banal, communal sites of everyday life such as the office,

Copyrighted material

commuter train, traffic jam and housing estate. If it is mainly concerned with exterior spaces, this is partly because I feel that the domestic and related realms of the everyday (cooking, housework, shopping) have already been well explored elsewhere, and partly because I want to focus on collective routines where the possibilities for consumerist reinvention are most limited.

As Meaghan Morris argues, the history of the word 'banality' partly 'inscribes the disintegration of old ideals about the common people, the common place, the common culture'. It was not until the late eighteenth century that 'banal', a word that had previously referred to compulsory feudal service, came to be associated with the workaday and routine (Morris 1990: 40). When banality is evoked in cultural studies, Morris argues, it is often a way of resisting these historically contingent, hierarchical value judgements. Employing a primarily ethnographic frame, with 'the people' as informants and critics as their translators, cultural studies has promoted a 'myth of transformation' of the banal as a way of challenging elitist distinctions between official and vernacular culture (Morris 1990: 35). In cultural studies, the banal is usually turned into something else, made interesting and significant by acts of subaltern resistance or semiotic reinvention. Morris's own work on motels and shopping malls, by contrast, has shown that these environments are not simply 'privileged sites of a road-runner *Angst*' (1988a: 2) or playgrounds for the 'cruising grammarian' (1988b: 195), but can also be non-recreational, semi-domestic and routine.

This approach is reminiscent of the work of some of the founding figures of cultural studies. Raymond Williams's essay, 'Culture is Ordinary' (1958), for example, begins with an account of a bus journey taken from Hereford into the Black Mountains, and goes on to criticize those who dismiss the ordinary comforts of modern working-class daily life such as 'plumbing, baby Austins, aspirin, contraceptives, canned food' (Williams 1989: 10). Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1958) deals with run-of-the-mill aspects of working-class culture, such as allotment-keeping, pigeon-fancying and pub-singing. Although the early work of these critics has its own implied distinctions between valued ritual and humdrum routine, and between 'good' and 'bad' popular culture, it is still informed by a notion of the banal as shared and communal.[3] As Ben Highmore points out, this is a difficult notion for contemporary cultural studies, with its crucial investment in the politics of identity, difference and otherness (2002b: 2–3). My book is an attempt to move beyond this difficulty without simply dismissing it, by focusing on widely practised, increasingly globalized routines that nonetheless produce difference and inequality in the way they are lived and represented. The apparently universal, taken-for-granted nature of quotidian culture makes it a powerful grounding for what Antonio Gramsci calls 'spontaneous philosophy' (1971: 323) – those forms of lay knowledge that, by virtue of being so firmly embedded in specific social contexts, conceal resilient power relationships.

Copyrighted material

In this context, 'the everyday' is a space where practice and representation are complexly interrelated, where the lived reality of the quotidian co-exists with clichés, mythologies, stereotypes and unsourced quotations.[4]

In *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, her study of French daily life between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s, Kristin Ross offers a model for this study of the dialectical relationship between practices and representations of the everyday. Ross uses a wide range of cultural texts – advertisements, novels, films, mass-market magazines, material culture – to suggest that the category of 'the everyday' in this period was a way of both imagining social change and defusing its politics. This new understanding of the everyday rested on a separation of public from private life, typified by the work and commuting routines of a new, status-conscious class of *jeunes cadres* (young executives), and the 'democracy of consumption' of the Ideal Home. These new life patterns became a way of celebrating but also 're-enfolding' modernization, naturalizing it and making it unthreatening to the middle classes, allowing it to function as 'the alibi of a class society' (Ross 1995: 89, 13). Ross argues that this version of everyday life served as both a distraction from the traumas of decolonization and a reproduction of colonial logic in its dispersal of the working classes to the suburbs and its policing of domestic space in the form of new concerns about household management. Like Ross, I am less concerned in this book with the ethnographic investigation of daily life per se than with 'the everyday' as a category that brings together lived culture and representation in a way that makes sense of, but also obscures, the reality of cultural change and social difference.

The everyday and the public sphere

I want to examine, in particular, the extent to which representations of the everyday have helped to transform notions of the public sphere in Euro-American societies in recent years. From the late 1970s onwards, Britain and other Western countries experienced a decisive shift to the political right, the implications of which are still being felt, even in those countries that now have nominally centre-left governments. There has been a series of social and political changes, such as the expansion of homeownership, the deregulation of markets and the managerialist transformation of the workplace, that have had an untold impact on everyday spaces and routines. But these changes have rarely been acknowledged as the product of political processes. Indeed, they seem to have coincided with increasing popular disengagement from mainstream politics. The turnout at the British general election in 2001 was 59 per cent, the lowest since the wartime election of 1918. In such a context, as Nick Couldry argues, the representational boundaries that separate 'the political' from 'the non-political' are crucially significant (2001: 131–2).

Copyrighted material

commuter train, traffic jam and housing estate. If it is mainly concerned with exterior spaces, this is partly because I feel that the domestic and related realms of the everyday (cooking, housework, shopping) have already been well explored elsewhere, and partly because I want to focus on collective routines where the possibilities for consumerist reinvention are most limited.

As Meaghan Morris argues, the history of the word 'banality' partly 'inscribes the disintegration of old ideals about the common people, the common place, the common culture'. It was not until the late eighteenth century that 'banal', a word that had previously referred to compulsory feudal service, came to be associated with the workaday and routine (Morris 1990: 40). When banality is evoked in cultural studies, Morris argues, it is often a way of resisting these historically contingent, hierarchical value judgements. Employing a primarily ethnographic frame, with 'the people' as informants and critics as their translators, cultural studies has promoted a 'myth of transformation' of the banal as a way of challenging elitist distinctions between official and vernacular culture (Morris 1990: 35). In cultural studies, the banal is usually turned into something else, made interesting and significant by acts of subaltern resistance or semiotic reinvention. Morris's own work on motels and shopping malls, by contrast, has shown that these environments are not simply 'privileged sites of a road-runner *Angst*' (1988a: 2) or playgrounds for the 'cruising grammarian' (1988b: 195), but can also be non-recreational, semi-domestic and routine.

This approach is reminiscent of the work of some of the founding figures of cultural studies. Raymond Williams's essay, 'Culture is Ordinary' (1958), for example, begins with an account of a bus journey taken from Hereford into the Black Mountains, and goes on to criticize those who dismiss the ordinary comforts of modern working-class daily life such as 'plumbing, baby Austins, aspirin, contraceptives, canned food' (Williams 1989: 10). Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1958) deals with run-of-the-mill aspects of working-class culture, such as allotment-keeping, pigeon-fancying and pub-singing. Although the early work of these critics has its own implied distinctions between valued ritual and humdrum routine, and between 'good' and 'bad' popular culture, it is still informed by a notion of the banal as shared and communal.[3] As Ben Highmore points out, this is a difficult notion for contemporary cultural studies, with its crucial investment in the politics of identity, difference and otherness (2002b: 2–3). My book is an attempt to move beyond this difficulty without simply dismissing it, by focusing on widely practised, increasingly globalized routines that nonetheless produce difference and inequality in the way they are lived and represented. The apparently universal, taken-for-granted nature of quotidian culture makes it a powerful grounding for what Antonio Gramsci calls 'spontaneous philosophy' (1971: 323) – those forms of lay knowledge that, by virtue of being so firmly embedded in specific social contexts, conceal resilient power relationships.

Copyrighted material

chattering classes'. Coined in the early years of the Thatcher era, this phrase is usually taken to mean a cadre of metropolitan, left-liberal intellectuals, spouting off about the country's problems at dinner parties. It suggests people who are detached from both the centre of political power and the straightforward, sensible aspirations of Middle England.

New Labour updated the imagery but essentially consolidated this construction of everyday life. Tony Blair's Third Way politics attempted to identify the instincts and interests of Middle England with apolitical common sense and a supposedly inexorable process of 'modernization'. The number of nicknames coined for the inhabitants of Middle England in recent years – 'Basildon Man', 'Mondeo Man', 'Sierra Man', 'Galaxy Man', 'Granada Woman', 'Worcester Woman', 'Pebbledash People' – is a testament to their perceived electoral importance. These terms identify people according to their mid-range cars, semi-detached houses or towns in the south-east or the West Midlands. They have supplanted the 'man on the Clapham omnibus', a once ubiquitous but now seldom-used phrase, coined by a High Court judge in 1903 to describe the average citizen. (The gentrified area of Clapham in south-west London is no longer the embodiment of ordinariness, and the bus passenger is not the sort of average citizen with whom politicians are keen to identify.) Increasingly testing and defining its policies through market research among focus groups of key voters, New Labour has aimed to short-circuit political processes and speak directly to a nominally homogeneous, but actually carefully targeted, 'people'. The courting of 'Soccer Moms' and 'Nascar Dads' (after the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing) in recent American presidential elections is part of a similarly circular process involving media caricature, popular psephology and policy-making.

This political reconstruction of everyday life in recent years has been crucially connected with its media representation. The predominantly right-wing British tabloids, particularly the two bestselling newspapers, the *Sun* and the *Daily Mail*, have been extremely effective in setting the agenda for the rest of the media in a country where newspaper reading is still widespread and television news is relatively non-partisan. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the *Sun* perfectly caught the mood of the aspirational working classes who supported Thatcher by speaking up for 'ordinary people' against the meddlesomeness of politicians and bureaucrats. In its famous 1992 election cover story, which it later claimed had swung the election for the Tories, the *Sun*'s banner headline pithily summarized the plight of mortgage-holders under an economically incompetent Labour government: 'Nightmare on Kinnock Street – He'll Have a New Home, You Won't' (*Sun* 1992).

The *Daily Mail*, the only tabloid newspaper whose circulation has risen in recent years, sees itself as the voice of 'Middle England'. Its perennial topic is the victimization of the middle classes, who it celebrates as the country's most economically dynamic, revenue-generating, law-abiding

Copyrighted material

citizens. According to the *Mail*, 'Middle England' is always being 'ripped off', 'mocked', 'ignored', 'oppressed', 'ground into the dust', threatened by 'tax bombshells', 'creeping burdens' and 'tinpot Trotskyists'. In its identification with the middle classes, the *Mail* hypes up 'good' news about house price rises, opposes high income-tax burdens on 'ordinary' families, supports motorists' protests against petrol taxes and criticizes many forms of traffic management such as speed cameras, road tolls and congestion pricing. The *Mail*'s editor, Paul Dacre, has said:

> I think some newspapers and a lot of the radio and television media are now run by liberal, politically correct consensors [*sic*] who just talk to each other and forget that in the real world there are people who feel differently.
>
> (Hagerty 2002)

Dacre's comment is typical of the ways in which competing media elites wage battle over the ideological terrain of everyday life. These elites often identify with 'ordinary' people by dismissing their opponents as out-of-touch metropolitans. It is interesting, though, that the most discussed, mythically tedious spaces of British daily life – such as the M25 London Orbital motorway, the London Underground, south-east commuter trains and gridlocked London traffic – are in the capital city and its environs. Of course, the south-east has particular transport problems because of its status as the country's economic powerhouse, but centralized media elites also help to define the typicality of particular everyday experiences. It is not just that commuter travel is a special concern in Greater London, a region that relies greatly on trains to transport its workers, but also that commuting is a disproportionately middle-class concern. Those in managerial and professional occupations are most likely to drive themselves to work and to travel by mainline or underground trains, and they travel furthest and most often on commuting or business trips (*Social Trends* 2004: 186; Department for Transport 2004: 36).

The difficulty with interpreting these media stories is that they deal with something more opaque than the sorts of 'folk devils and moral panics' (to borrow Stanley Cohen's phrase) that are more usually the subject of critical analyses of the news media. The media and political discourses that demonize youth gangs, welfare cheats, single mothers and asylum seekers tend to focus on specific social problems and clearly defined enemies. By contrast, these media stories about everyday life involve the construction of normalcy without *obvious* signifiers of otherness, although as I will argue later on, they can produce low-level folk devils – transit van drivers, traffic wardens, school-run mums, estate agents. In his preface to the third edition of his book, Cohen suggests that in recent years 'some of the social space once occupied by moral panics has been filled by more inchoate social anxieties, insecurities and fears'.

Copyrighted material

chattering classes'. Coined in the early years of the Thatcher era, this phrase is usually taken to mean a cadre of metropolitan, left-liberal intellectuals, spouting off about the country's problems at dinner parties. It suggests people who are detached from both the centre of political power and the straightforward, sensible aspirations of Middle England.

New Labour updated the imagery but essentially consolidated this construction of everyday life. Tony Blair's Third Way politics attempted to identify the instincts and interests of Middle England with apolitical common sense and a supposedly inexorable process of 'modernization'. The number of nicknames coined for the inhabitants of Middle England in recent years – 'Basildon Man', 'Mondeo Man', 'Sierra Man', 'Galaxy Man', 'Granada Woman', 'Worcester Woman', 'Pebbledash People' – is a testament to their perceived electoral importance. These terms identify people according to their mid-range cars, semi-detached houses or towns in the south-east or the West Midlands. They have supplanted the 'man on the Clapham omnibus', a once ubiquitous but now seldom-used phrase, coined by a High Court judge in 1903 to describe the average citizen. (The gentrified area of Clapham in south-west London is no longer the embodiment of ordinariness, and the bus passenger is not the sort of average citizen with whom politicians are keen to identify.) Increasingly testing and defining its policies through market research among focus groups of key voters, New Labour has aimed to short-circuit political processes and speak directly to a nominally homogeneous, but actually carefully targeted, 'people'. The courting of 'Soccer Moms' and 'Nascar Dads' (after the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing) in recent American presidential elections is part of a similarly circular process involving media caricature, popular psephology and policy-making.

This political reconstruction of everyday life in recent years has been crucially connected with its media representation. The predominantly right-wing British tabloids, particularly the two bestselling newspapers, the *Sun* and the *Daily Mail*, have been extremely effective in setting the agenda for the rest of the media in a country where newspaper reading is still widespread and television news is relatively non-partisan. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the *Sun* perfectly caught the mood of the aspirational working classes who supported Thatcher by speaking up for 'ordinary people' against the meddlesomeness of politicians and bureaucrats. In its famous 1992 election cover story, which it later claimed had swung the election for the Tories, the *Sun*'s banner headline pithily summarized the plight of mortgage-holders under an economically incompetent Labour government: 'Nightmare on Kinnock Street – He'll Have a New Home, You Won't' (*Sun* 1992).

The *Daily Mail*, the only tabloid newspaper whose circulation has risen in recent years, sees itself as the voice of 'Middle England'. Its perennial topic is the victimization of the middle classes, who it celebrates as the country's most economically dynamic, revenue-generating, law-abiding

Copyrighted material

> public matters – or more exactly, social matters – are seen not only as foreign and hostile but also as beyond people's grasp and not liable to be affected by their actions. It therefore sends people back into 'private life', or into a 'social life' in which society itself is never explicitly put into question.
>
> (Castoriadis 1988: 238)

This retreat from politics is, of course, based on highly politicized assumptions about 'private life' and 'ordinary people'. The 'ordinary man' to whom Certeau dedicates *Arts de Faire* is also a mythic figure referred to by politicians and journalists *ad infinitum* (see Ahearne 1995: 187).

Rethinking everyday life

This shift in political and cultural life over the last few decades suggests that we need to find new ways of theorizing the everyday. The thoroughgoing analysis of quotidian life developed in France in the decades after the Second World War.[5] The work of theorists such as Lefebvre, Castoriadis and the Situationists centred on what they called 'bureaucratic capitalism', a new kind of intervention by public and private managers into everyday routines. It is worth noting that these French theorists were writing within a national tradition of *dirigisme* that is still quite strong compared to other Western countries, even after a wave of privatization reform in France from the late 1990s onwards. But they were also reflecting a more general shift in western Europe in the early cold war period, as the state became increasingly involved in housing, transport and urban reconstruction, producing what Lefebvre called 'a parody of socialism, a communitarian fiction with a capitalist content' (1969: 40).

After his expulsion from the French Communist Party in 1958, Lefebvre made these links between 'state socialism' and 'state capitalism' more explicitly. In both the planned economies of the eastern bloc and the welfare states of western Europe, he argued, technocratic planning had created blandly functional environments that allowed hierarchical societies to run smoothly and reproduce themselves. Lefebvre and other French theorists were also influenced by decolonization, a process that took place in several European countries at this time but was particularly traumatic and protracted for the French. For Lefebvre, the transformation of everyday life in France in the postwar era mirrored the spatial relationships of colonialism in its pull between homogeneity and hierarchy, between a controlling centre and a periphery to which otherness and marginality were expelled. The most intelligent leaders in capitalist societies, he writes, have 'succeeded in getting out of the dead-end of colonialism' (Lefebvre 1969: 40) by investing their surplus

Copyrighted material

capital at home, in the rebuilding of cities, the development of suburban areas, and new consumer markets.

This French critique of everyday life was formulated during the massive rebuilding of Paris in the so-called *trente glorieuses*, the thirty years of social and economic reconstruction in France between 1945 and 1975. During this period, the city forced out its working-class and immigrant populations through compulsory purchase and rent increases, and built elaborate transport networks to allow them to commute to work from suburbs and new towns. A key symbolic element in this restructuring was the demolition in the early 1970s of Victor Baltard's beautiful nineteenth-century pavilions, which housed the old food market at Les Halles. This market, which was clogging up traffic by handling one-fifth of the country's meat and greengrocery (Ardagh 1988: 263), was eventually replaced in 1979 by a shopping centre-cum-interchange for the RER (the suburban express railway) and the Métro. Someone, perhaps a disgruntled *banlieusard*, wrote on a sign erected at Les Halles in the early 1970s: 'The centre of Paris will be beautiful. Luxury will be king. But we will not be here' (Baillie and Salmon 2001: 452). As city centres were increasingly given over to business, tourism and government, Lefebvre argued, the poorer members of society lived out an impoverished everyday life in peripheral areas. With their carefully zoned housing estates, and long, straight streets that could be easily surveyed and patrolled by police, these new suburbs even replicated the layout of colonial towns in an effort to control their populations (Lefebvre 1971: 59). The Situationists put it in typically emphatic fashion: 'Everyday life, policed and mystified by every means, is a sort of reservation for good natives who keep modern society running without understanding it' (Debord 1981: 70).

This body of work still offers significant insights that I have drawn on in this book, most importantly the notion that lived, social space is inextricably linked to represented, imagined space, and that both are central to an understanding of everyday life. But these theorists always imagined the everyday as a dynamic and historically evolving concept, and so they would not be surprised that more recent transformations in daily life have been bound up with different social and political problems. First, the uneven effects of globalization on the everyday lives of people throughout the world question the continued usefulness of Lefebvre's analogy of displaced colonialism – and, in any case, the primarily middle-class movement to the suburbs in Britain and America complicates his understanding of the shifting relationships between centre and periphery in urbanized society. Second, the resurgence of neoliberalism in the last few decades brings a new perspective to the Lefebvrian critique of large-scale planning and technocratic expertise. This neo-liberal orthodoxy has evoked the history of state planning in the form of high-rise flats, new towns and transport monopolies as a caution against all sorts of big government, often supplementing this with crude comparisons with the

Copyrighted material

former communist states. The New Right's ideological outmanoeuvring of the Left over the last few decades, in which it has appropriated an anti-statist rhetoric associated initially with progressive protest in the 1960s, has largely been fought on the terrain of 'everyday life'.

This political shift has been framed as an escape from the over-regulated public sphere into a private space in which we can all get on with our own lives, free from interference. The reality is that old-fashioned state regulation has been replaced by new forms of interventionism, usually termed 'the new public management', in which market imperatives increasingly colonize daily life. In Britain, this new public management has included the contracting out of public services to private firms under competitive tender; the establishment of internal markets in large public services such as the National Health Service; the regulation of these markets through the 'naming and shaming' of operators, quality incentive contracts, league tables and mission statements; the favouring of indirect taxes and private finance initiatives over direct taxation, which might be unpopular with key voters; and the valuing of the advice of managers and consultants over that of public-service professionals, now viewed as a self-interested elite protecting their own jobs and privileges.

The classic model for understanding the ideological landscape produced by Thatcherism is Stuart Hall's concept of 'authoritarian populism', first formulated in the late 1970s even before Thatcher came to power. Hall argued that Thatcherism owed its broad electoral appeal to its combination of traditionally conservative discourses of the nation, the family, the law and the 'enemy within' (trade unions, racial others) with populist notions of the free market, which appealed to the aspirational consumer and homeowner. Hall's work showed how Thatcherism grounded neo-liberal policies in an appeal to 'the little people' against 'the big battalions' (1983: 6). It seamlessly melded politics and everyday life, discovering 'a powerful means of translating economic doctrine into the language of experience, moral imperative and common sense' (1983: 28).

Bob Jessop and his colleagues criticized Hall's model of authoritarian populism, arguing that he overestimated Thatcherism's hegemonic hold over public opinion. For them, Thatcherism did not represent a new ideological paradigm but a much more pragmatic alliance between established power blocs and sections of the population benefiting quite specifically from low taxation and inflation, council house sales and rising consumer standards (Jessop *et al.* 1988: 68–98, 109–24). Their argument is partly confirmed by more recent studies of voter attitudes, which show that key Thatcherite policies, such as introducing market incentives into public services and accepting higher unemployment in return for lower inflation, never had majority electoral support (Heath *et al.* 2001: 31–57). Despite the moralistic rhetoric of many members of the Thatcher government, the economic liberalism of these years was also accompanied by increasingly liberal social attitudes. With the benefit of

Copyrighted material

capital at home, in the rebuilding of cities, the development of suburban areas, and new consumer markets.

This French critique of everyday life was formulated during the massive rebuilding of Paris in the so-called *trente glorieuses*, the thirty years of social and economic reconstruction in France between 1945 and 1975. During this period, the city forced out its working-class and immigrant populations through compulsory purchase and rent increases, and built elaborate transport networks to allow them to commute to work from suburbs and new towns. A key symbolic element in this restructuring was the demolition in the early 1970s of Victor Baltard's beautiful nineteenth-century pavilions, which housed the old food market at Les Halles. This market, which was clogging up traffic by handling one-fifth of the country's meat and greengrocery (Ardagh 1988: 263), was eventually replaced in 1979 by a shopping centre-cum-interchange for the RER (the suburban express railway) and the Métro. Someone, perhaps a disgruntled *banlieusard*, wrote on a sign erected at Les Halles in the early 1970s: 'The centre of Paris will be beautiful. Luxury will be king. But we will not be here' (Baillie and Salmon 2001: 452). As city centres were increasingly given over to business, tourism and government, Lefebvre argued, the poorer members of society lived out an impoverished everyday life in peripheral areas. With their carefully zoned housing estates, and long, straight streets that could be easily surveyed and patrolled by police, these new suburbs even replicated the layout of colonial towns in an effort to control their populations (Lefebvre 1971: 59). The Situationists put it in typically emphatic fashion: 'Everyday life, policed and mystified by every means, is a sort of reservation for good natives who keep modern society running without understanding it' (Debord 1981: 70).

This body of work still offers significant insights that I have drawn on in this book, most importantly the notion that lived, social space is inextricably linked to represented, imagined space, and that both are central to an understanding of everyday life. But these theorists always imagined the everyday as a dynamic and historically evolving concept, and so they would not be surprised that more recent transformations in daily life have been bound up with different social and political problems. First, the uneven effects of globalization on the everyday lives of people throughout the world question the continued usefulness of Lefebvre's analogy of displaced colonialism – and, in any case, the primarily middle-class movement to the suburbs in Britain and America complicates his understanding of the shifting relationships between centre and periphery in urbanized society. Second, the resurgence of neo-liberalism in the last few decades brings a new perspective to the Lefebvrian critique of large-scale planning and technocratic expertise. This neo-liberal orthodoxy has evoked the history of state planning in the form of high-rise flats, new towns and transport monopolies as a caution against all sorts of big government, often supplementing this with crude comparisons with the

Copyrighted material

as the relationship between politics and the media has become ever closer and more complex, the New Right's success has largely been founded on these public discourses of an apolitical 'ordinary life'. A key issue for democracy, particularly in a majoritarian electoral system in which many politicians believe that a few thousand votes in a small number of marginal constituencies can determine their futures, is how we define and think about this 'ordinariness'.

Ways of reading

In *Mythologies*, one of the founding texts in the study of everyday life in cultural studies, Roland Barthes offers a series of readings of margarine advertisements, soap powders, cookery columns, cars and other ordinary phenomena in 1950s France. Barthes shows how these everyday things generate 'metalanguages', secondary connotations alongside their more obvious meanings, which support the dominant values of petit-bourgeois society. Arguing that myth is 'a type of speech', Barthes writes that 'the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions. Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society' (1993: 109). He is interested in the semiotically rich resources of an emerging consumer society, a world in which commodities are newly charged with value and significance. In his virtuoso readings, these phenomena are always brimming over with meanings, a potent vehicle for hidden messages and half-formulated desires.

The mundane everyday life with which my own book is concerned may not be so hermeneutically suggestive. As I have already argued, quotidian culture *has* inspired its own 'mythologies' – on the one hand, the myth of the false normativity of ordinary life, which serves to demarcate the boundaries between the political and the non-political; on the other hand, the anti-mythology of the everyday as marginal and unworthy of attention. But these mythologies are so buried in unnoticed, habitual spaces and routines that they are relatively resistant to the kinds of analyses undertaken by Barthes. I want to find a critical strategy that acknowledges this boredom in everyday life, rather than one that simply seeks to transform it through resourceful readings that strip away the veneer of what Barthes calls the 'falsely obvious' (1993: 11).

For Lefebvre, the structuralism of Barthes and other French theorists of the 1950s and 1960s overestimates the role of language in the construction of reality. Structuralism's 'fetishism of signification', its desire to pin phenomena down to a textual meaning, is ill-equipped to deal with the blankness and boredom of daily life (Lefebvre 2002: 276). The everyday cannot simply be read like a literary text, because it is lived out in spaces and practices as much as in language and discourse:

Copyrighted material

as the relationship between politics and the media has become ever closer and more complex, the New Right's success has largely been founded on these public discourses of an apolitical 'ordinary life'. A key issue for democracy, particularly in a majoritarian electoral system in which many politicians believe that a few thousand votes in a small number of marginal constituencies can determine their futures, is how we define and think about this 'ordinariness'.

Ways of reading

In *Mythologies*, one of the founding texts in the study of everyday life in cultural studies, Roland Barthes offers a series of readings of margarine advertisements, soap powders, cookery columns, cars and other ordinary phenomena in 1950s France. Barthes shows how these everyday things generate 'metalanguages', secondary connotations alongside their more obvious meanings, which support the dominant values of petit-bourgeois society. Arguing that myth is 'a type of speech', Barthes writes that 'the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions. Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society' (1993: 109). He is interested in the semiotically rich resources of an emerging consumer society, a world in which commodities are newly charged with value and significance. In his virtuoso readings, these phenomena are always brimming over with meanings, a potent vehicle for hidden messages and half-formulated desires.

The mundane everyday life with which my own book is concerned may not be so hermeneutically suggestive. As I have already argued, quotidian culture *has* inspired its own 'mythologies' – on the one hand, the myth of the false normativity of ordinary life, which serves to demarcate the boundaries between the political and the non-political; on the other hand, the anti-mythology of the everyday as marginal and unworthy of attention. But these mythologies are so buried in unnoticed, habitual spaces and routines that they are relatively resistant to the kinds of analyses undertaken by Barthes. I want to find a critical strategy that acknowledges this boredom in everyday life, rather than one that simply seeks to transform it through resourceful readings that strip away the veneer of what Barthes calls the 'falsely obvious' (1993: 11).

For Lefebvre, the structuralism of Barthes and other French theorists of the 1950s and 1960s overestimates the role of language in the construction of reality. Structuralism's 'fetishism of signification', its desire to pin phenomena down to a textual meaning, is ill-equipped to deal with the blankness and boredom of daily life (Lefebvre 2002: 276). The everyday cannot simply be read like a literary text, because it is lived out in spaces and practices as much as in language and discourse:

Copyrighted material

> When codes worked up from literary spaces are applied to spaces – to urban spaces, say – we remain . . . on the purely descriptive level. Any attempt to use such codes as a means of deciphering social space must surely reduce that space itself to the status of a 'message', and the inhabiting of it to the status of a 'reading'.
>
> (Lefebvre 1991b: 7)

In the postwar period, Lefebvre argues, these social spaces have become even more difficult to 'read' as they increasingly form part of illegible technocratic systems, what he calls 'blind fields' (2003b: 29). The everyday can be read only in isolated 'moments' or 'rhythms', which fleetingly reveal the dynamic historical forces that underpin it (Lefebvre 2004). In his essay 'Seen from the Window', Lefebvre describes looking from the balcony of his Parisian apartment onto a busy intersection over a period of several hours. After a while he begins to notice patterns in this apparently chaotic street scene: the rhythm of the traffic-light cycle, the stop-start movements of cars and pedestrians, the contrast between moments of feverish activity and relative calm. He concludes that the everyday needs to be understood as a series of shifting, interconnecting elements that resist the modern notion that sight offers intelligibility: 'No camera, no image or sequence of images can show these rhythms. One needs equally attentive eyes and ears, a head, a memory, a heart' (Lefebvre 1996: 227).

Certeau's notion of reading as 'poaching', although it has tended to be appropriated in cultural studies as a model for the semiotic inventiveness of the consumer, also seeks to engage with these barely legible aspects of quotidian life. Much of his work is based on an opposition between *writing* as a cumulative activity attached to things or places (books, offices, libraries) and *reading* as an inarticulable experience lacking a specific place (Certeau 1984: 174). Certeau understands reading not as the deciphering of a pre-existing signifying system but as an anti-hermeneutics that fastens on slippery, non-discursive practices. In this sense, the textual reader's aimless 'drift across the page' mirrors the 'ephemeral dance' of those who participate in everyday practices (1984: xxi). Like Lefebvre, Certeau suggests that the 'imaginary totalizations produced by the eye', in a modern culture of insistent visuality, have largely erased these invisible, mobile practices (1984: 93). For all their political and theoretical differences, Certeau and Lefebvre both see the everyday as an elusive category, stretched out invisibly across urban space, incorporating wordless activities, and caught up in the nameless, indefinable feelings of alienation experienced in the relative comfort of Western consumer societies. At times, the 'everyday' in their work can seem almost unreadable, forever escaping analysis or interpretation, its structural relationships graspable only in disconnected fragments.[7]

Copyrighted material

In his *Theory of Film* (1960), Siegfried Kracauer suggests a different approach, which shares Certeau's and Lefebvre's scepticism about conventional social-scientific approaches to everyday life but focuses on a sphere that they tend to regard as inimical to the quotidian: the visual. When other social theorists were stressing the city's restless energy and phantasmagoric modernity, Kracauer wrote about the empty, purposeless moments that permeate the urban everyday, and that are filled with commuting, queuing and other forms of waiting.[8] He argues that the specific properties of film and photography can open up new ways of reading this mundane daily life that combine ethnographic investigation with careful textual analysis. Kracauer outlines a history of film in which the exploitation of its narrative potential leads to the progressive neglect of its mechanical possibilities. He shows how these contrasting creative directions were prefigured in cinema's earliest years in the work of two French directors, Louis Lumière and Georges Méliès. Lumière's short films, such as *Lunch Hour at the Lumière Factory* and *Arrival of a Train* (both 1895), recorded everyday happenings in public places that would still have taken place in the absence of the filmmaker. Méliès's films, such as *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) and *An Impossible Voyage* (1904), pioneered the use of the film studio and created a series of dramatic tableaux with the help of painted backdrops and special effects (Kracauer 1960: 30–3).

Hollywood filmmakers, who increasingly dominated the world film industry after the First World War, followed Méliès's studio model. The cinema closed itself off from the commonplace events of the everyday, staging instead an elaborate fantasy world of illusionism and escapism, in a way that was symptomatic of a more general tendency in popular culture to offer a short-lived fix of the needs and desires that quotidian life ignores:

> The more monotony holds sway over the working day, the further away you must be transported once work ends. . . . The true counterstroke against the office machine . . . is the world vibrant with colour. The world not as it is, but as it appears in popular hits. A world every last corner of which is cleansed, as though with a vacuum cleaner, of the dust of everyday existence.
>
> (Kracauer 1998: 92–3)

Kracauer sees the hegemony of Hollywood cinema as a particular tragedy because of film's potential affinity with the unstaged 'flow of life' (1960: 71). The mechanical automatism of the camera allows it to capture those everyday phenomena that we might prefer to ignore, or that we simply overlook because they are 'part of us like our skin, and because we know them by heart we do not know them with the eye' (1960: 55). In modern filmmaking, the use of continuity editing directs the viewer along a narrative line, and the close-up focalizes the narrative around its leading characters. But when film is reduced

Copyrighted material

Everyday life is a growing area of interest in cultural studies and cultural theory. *Reading the Everyday* provides an illuminating introduction to some of the key debates in this area with detailed readings of the spaces, practices and mythologies of everyday culture.

Drawing on the work of continental theorists such as Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Marc Augé and Siegfried Kracauer, Joe Moran explores the concrete sites and routines of everyday life and their representation in political debate, news media, material culture, sitcoms, reality TV shows, photography, CCTV and webcams.

Moran aims to rethink notions of everyday life within cultural studies, which have traditionally focused on questions of popular culture, consumption and lifestyle. He investigates some of the most under-explored, banal aspects of quotidian culture, such as office life, commuting, car parking, motorways, new towns and mass housing.

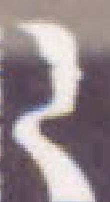
Reading the Everyday shows that analysing supposedly 'boring' phenomena can help us to make sense of cultural and social change; and it argues that the everyday has become a space for a new kind of 'post-political' politics which has obscured profound changes in work, domestic and public space.

Joe Moran is a lecturer in English and American Studies at Liverpool John Moores University. He is the author of *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* (2000) and *Interdisciplinarity* (Routledge, 2002).

Cultural Studies/Sociology

Cover photograph: © Joanna Shaw   Cover design: Jennifer Crisp

ISBN 0-415-31709-6



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
www.routledge.com
Printed in Great Britain

Copyrighted material