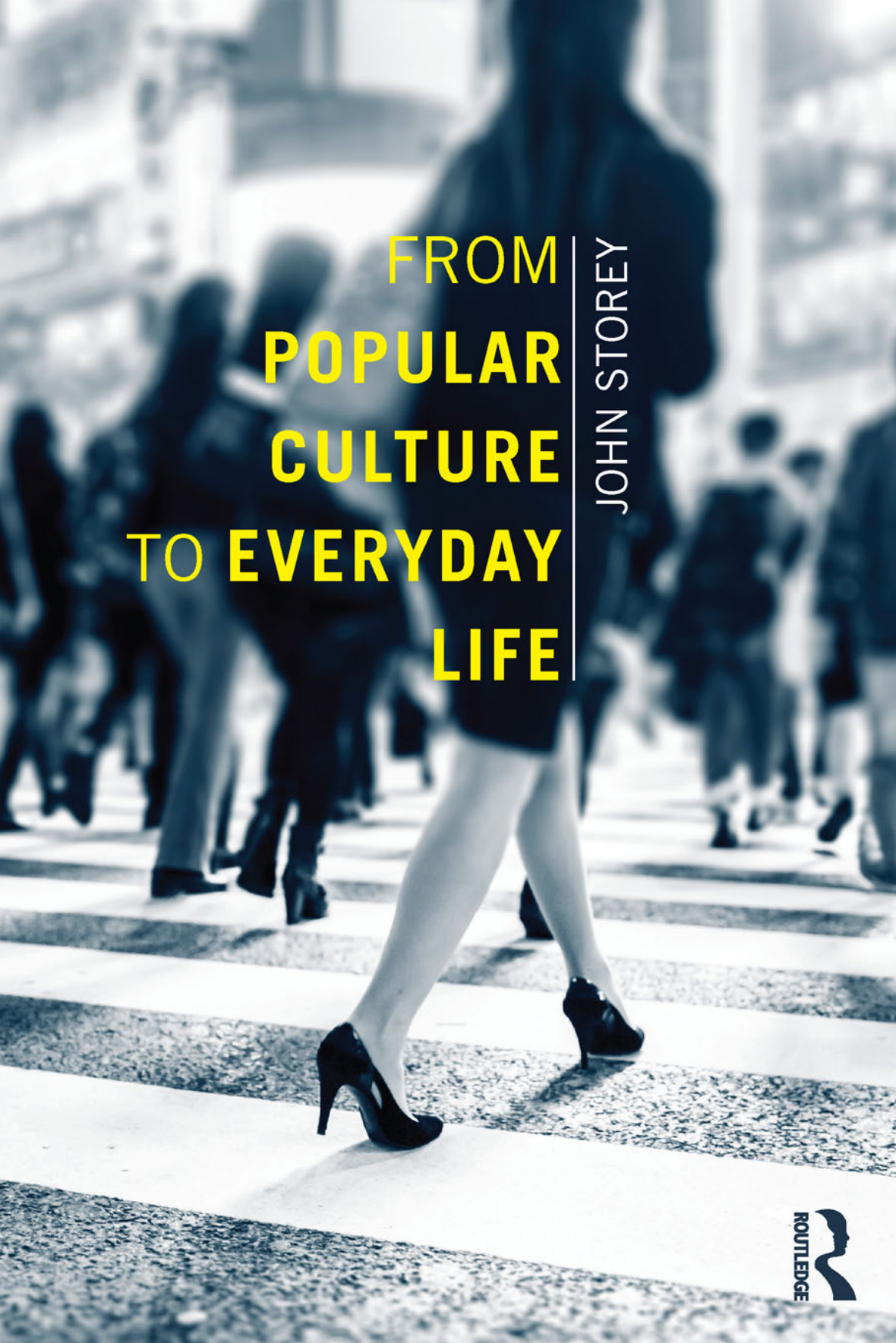
FROM
POPULAR
CULTURE
TO EVERYDAY
LIFE
JOHN STOREY
ROUTLEDGE

FROM POPULAR CULTURE TO EVERYDAY LIFE

From Popular Culture to Everyday Life presents a critical exploration of the development of everyday life as an object of study in cultural analysis and addresses the way in which it is beginning to replace popular culture as a primary concept in cultural studies.

John Storey presents a range of different ways of thinking theoretically about the everyday; from Freudian and Marxist approaches, to chapters exploring topics such as consumption, mediatization and phenomenological sociology. The book concludes, drawing from the previous nine chapters, with notes towards a definition of what everyday life might look like as a pedagogic object of study in cultural studies.

This is an ideal introduction to the theories of everyday life for both undergraduate and postgraduate students of cultural studies, communication studies and media studies.

John Storey is Professor of Cultural Studies and Director of the Centre for Research in Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Sunderland, UK. He has published widely in cultural studies; *From Popular Culture to Everyday Life* is his tenth book. He is also on the editorial/advisory boards of journals in Australia, Canada, China, Germany, Lithuania, Spain, the UK and the USA, and has been a Visiting Professor at the University of Vienna, the University of Henan and the University of Wuhan.

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FROM POPULAR CULTURE TO EVERYDAY LIFE

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CONTENTS

Preface viii

1 Popular Cultures and Everyday Life in Cultural Studies 1

2 Alienation and the Marxist Everyday 14

3 The Freudian Everyday: the psychopathology of everyday life 27

4 Mass-Observation: the everyday life of the 'masses' 40

5 Phenomenological Sociology and Everyday Life 54

6 Sociologies of Agency and Everyday Life 67

7 Consumption in Everyday Life 81

8 The Theatricality of Everyday Life: from performance to performativity 95

9 The Mediatized Everyday 109

10 Everyday Life in Cultural Studies: notes towards a definition 122

References 139
Index 143

PREFACE

Once upon a time popular culture was an innocent concept that could be used in an easy and straightforward way to indicate that we had left the highway of real culture. Cultural studies changed this with its insistence that we understand popular culture in all its multi-accentual complexity. The purpose of this book is to perform a similar theoretical trick on the concept of everyday life, that is, to bring conceptual clarity to the study of everyday life in cultural studies.

The book will present a critical exploration of the development of everyday life as an object of study in social and cultural analysis. My reason for doing this is my belief that everyday life is beginning to replace popular culture as a primary concept in cultural studies. If I am correct in this assumption, it is absolutely essential that we have a coherent understanding of what we mean when we use the term. With this in mind, the book will begin with a general discussion of popular culture and everyday life before examining a range of different ways of thinking conceptually about the everyday. The book will conclude, drawing from the previous nine chapters, with notes towards a definition of what everyday life might look like as a pedagogic object of study in cultural studies.

What the book will try to do is draw out definitions as they have emerged, explicitly and implicitly, in a range of work that has paid significant attention, knowingly and unknowingly, to everyday life. Some of the theoretical work I will discuss contains a very explicit definition of everyday life; in other work a concept of the everyday is only found in its proposed methodologies and its theoretical assumptions. As a consequence, sometimes I will need to explain how a tradition proposes to study it in order to be able explain what they understand by it. Paradoxically, then, the book will critically examine a series of traditions that use a concept of everyday life explicitly without defining it, and other traditions that do not seek to define it, but that nonetheless make an implicit contribution to how it might be defined.

Like popular culture, everyday life is a complex multi-accentual concept. There is, as Henri Lefebvre points out, 'a certain obscurity in the very concept of everyday life. Where is it to be found? In work or in leisure?' (1991b: 31). Rather than seek to answer this question in an absolute way, I will instead chart the various answers given in the different attempts that have been made to know and understand everyday life. Part of the purpose of this book is to provide a historical and theoretical account of the formation of this complexity. The book will take the reader on a journey through its uses and formations. As we shall see, everyday life can be many things to many people, a site of parapraxes, for example, or a human accomplishment. However, these different understandings can be divided, roughly, into two main groups, those that see everyday life as an ongoing human construction, only visible in social actions and interactions, and those that see it as a passive receptacle of these actions and interactions. Ultimately, it is my hope that the book will increase critical discussion and further work in this area.

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1

POPULAR CULTURES AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN CULTURAL STUDIES

Everyday life

When Henri Lefebvre embarked on his three-volume *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947, 1961, 1981) his aim was to formulate 'the concept of the everyday, bringing to developed language and conceptual clarity a practice that was named and yet not recognized – adjudged unworthy of knowledge' (2008: 10). As a result of his work, and the work of others, everyday life is no longer adjudged unworthy of knowledge. However, although there are now many books and articles that include everyday life in their titles, it is not clear that we have arrived at a clear definition. In other words, everyday life is continually named but rarely presented with enough precision to really know what it is that is being described or discussed. Let me give an example of the academic taken-for-grantedness of everyday life. It comes from an excellent book on *place*. I have chosen it because it occurs in a very knowing discussion of the problems of definition.

> Place is a word that seems to speak for itself. It is a word we use daily in the English-speaking world. It is a word wrapped in common sense. In one sense this makes it easier to grasp as it is familiar. In another sense, however, this makes it more slippery as the subject of a book. As we already think we know what it means it is hard to get beyond that common-sense level in order to understand it in a more developed way. Place, then, is both simple (and that is part of its appeal) and complicated. It is the purpose of this book to scrutinize the concept of place and its centrality to both geography and *everyday life*.
>
> *(Cresswell 2004: 1; my italics)*

Everything Tim Cresswell says about place is also true of everyday life. However, it is presented here as something that can speak for itself, but in seeming to be able to

do this, and being accepted as doing it, it is something that always runs the risk of everyone thinking they *just know* what it means, so there is no need to attempt to actually define it in a way that might be useful for academic discussion and debate.

It is almost at times as if everyday life is a concept without a critical history. It is so self-evident that there seems little to say about it. Its obviousness is captured in the saying, 'The birds don't talk about the sky'. But I think we should always be suspicious of what seems obvious. As Bertolt Brecht once said, 'When something seems "the most obvious thing in the world" it means that any attempt to understand the world has been given up' (1978: 71). Roland Barthes makes a similar point: we should always challenge 'the falsely obvious' and interrogate 'what-goes-without-saying' (1973: 11). As Brecht and Barthes suggest, it is always best to press beyond the obvious to try to understand what it might be concealing. Both would agree with Henri Lefebvre's point about the everyday, 'it is essential not to take it for granted but to see it in critical perspective' (2002b: 73).

Avoiding the falsely obvious does not mean that everyday life is easy to understand. Like popular culture, it is in fact a very difficult concept to define. But too often it is used without worrying too much about what it might mean. But of course in one sense it is difficult not to take it for granted: because we all *just know* it is the experience of the ordinary routines of daily existence and the structures and assumptions that normalize and legitimate these routines and make other routines seem abnormal and illegitimate. Such a definition tells us something we can all agree on, but it does not tell us much beyond this. It is in effect the equivalent to defining popular culture, to be discussed shortly, as culture liked by many people. While it seems fundamental to any definition, it is not in itself a fully adequate conceptualization. Should we, for example, accept everyday existence as a realm of only ordinary routines? Should we not be suspicious of the origins of such a way of seeing the everyday? Should this not make us think back to definitions of popular culture, again, to be discussed shortly, that see it as mass culture for duped masses?

Like popular culture, the everyday has tended to carry mostly negative connotations. As Michael Sheringham points out, 'Everydayness is more or less exclusively associated with what is boring, habitual, mundane, uneventful, trivial, humdrum, repetitive, inauthentic, and unrewarding' (2006: 23). To live an authentic and exciting life we have to escape the everyday, much in the same way as to produce culture we have to reject the popular (Storey 2003). But is this really true? It could also be argued, and sound just as convincing, that the everyday includes the extraordinary, the wonderful, profound sorrow and profound joy, love and sacrifice, politics and poetics. It should not, therefore, like popular culture before it, be seen as a residual category, the place for human experience once we have removed the beautiful and the sublime. What is certain is that everyday life has been made to carry many different meanings, many different ways it can be articulated and used. Paradoxically, for something that seems so obvious, as we shall see in the course of this book, it has been the subject of a great deal of debate and discussion. As Norbert Elias points out, 'the concept of the everyday has become

anything but everyday: it is loaded with a freight of theoretical reflection' (1998: 167). But almost all of this theoretical reflection has happened outside cultural studies. The chapters that follow will seek to explore and explain some of the different ways it has been or might be conceptualized.

But why worry about definitions of everyday life? Well, for the simple reason that how we define it determines how we study it. All the presuppositions of our theoretical framework help shape our perception of what we think we simply see as the everyday. We have to reject the conservative fantasy of the disinterested gaze. Everyday life is not self-evident; it has to be constructed as an object of study and how it is constructed matters in terms of what then counts as everyday life. This does not mean that everyday life is a mere fiction, invented differently by different theoretical traditions. However, what it does mean is that each different conceptualization makes everyday life visible to the critical gaze in a very particular way. Each competing conceptual framing, constructing it as an object of study, determines, by and large, what is seen when we fix our critical gaze on the everyday. But to say that something is constructed is not the same as saying that something is not true. Made up and made are not the same things: a well-constructed argument or a well-constructed building are not untrue but they have been made, they have been humanly constructed. The use of the word constructed is not intended to suggest that something is a fiction but to draw attention to the fact that it is not a simple gift of nature, it has been humanly made and could have been made differently. Therefore, before we study everyday life we have to construct it as an object of study.

Something else that might also seem obvious is this: there is a sense in which everyday life has always been an object of study in cultural studies. Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* might have been called *The Uses of Literacy in Everyday Life*. Similarly, Raymond Williams' *The Long Revolution* could have been called *The Long Revolution in Everyday Life*. Therefore, it could be argued that everyday life has always been a central concept in cultural studies, and to a certain extent this is true. But what is also true is the fact that it has always been an undefined or under-defined concept – something too often assumed without adequate conceptual definition. Too often it is simply assumed that we *just know* what it means and what it means is too obvious to need to waste time on explanation. There are of course some very good books in cultural studies that include everyday life in their titles. However, with few exceptions these tend to focus on examples (media, music, fashion, tourism, for instance) rather than on the concept itself. Sometimes the focus is entirely on examples, while at other times the examples are prefaced by a short survey of the problems with defining everyday life. But even when everyday life is approached as a concept, it is approached schematically in an introductory chapter in order to get to examples as quickly as possible. The problem with this is that a quick survey of competing definitions is presented as sufficient to then be able talk about examples as if they are now underpinned by a full conceptualization of everyday life. In other words, although everyday life is part of the vocabulary of cultural studies it is rarely defined as a working concept. I suppose

my argument is that we often use the term everyday life without being fully explicit what we mean by it. I have done this myself. In *Cultural Consumption and Everyday Life* (Storey 1999) I simply assumed that we know what I mean when I use the term. I had inherited a way of working that did not consider it necessary to actively engage with the everyday as a theoretical concept. The purpose of this book is to make it more difficult to act as I, and others, have acted in the past.

Popular cultures

When in the early 1990s I first started to think about the serious study of popular culture almost everything I read seemed to assume we knew what it was and, moreover, it was one thing; there seemed to be not any need to conceptualize it or historicalize it, but instead just analyse a wide variety of examples of it. Everything appeared so obvious and taken for granted. The rest of this chapter will concern itself with the difficulties of defining popular culture. In the first edition of my first book, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (1993), I attempted to move beyond examples of popular culture as obvious, self-evident and taken for granted, to an understanding of it as a theoretical and historical construct with a range of often-conflicting meanings. I later explored this from other perspectives in other published work (Storey 2003, 2005, 2009, 2010b). What follows will draw on this previous work. I am afraid that most of the examples I will use are from England. This means that the argument I make about the different ways of defining popular culture will have to be tested against other national traditions.

'Popular' is first used in England in the late fifteenth century as a legal term. An 'action popular' is a legal action which can be undertaken by anyone. For example, 'Accion populers in divers cases have ben ordeigned by many gode actes and statutes' (1490; quoted in Storey 2005: 262). Similarly, 'Accion populer. is not geeuen to one man specyally but generally to any of the Queenes people as wyll sue' (1579; ibid.). By the early seventeenth century popular is no longer restricted to legal discourse and is now being used to indicate something that is widespread or generally accepted:

1603: 'popular sicknesse'
1608: 'they keepe him, safe, rich, and populaire'
1616: 'popular error'
1651: 'where the diseases are most popular' (ibid.).

Building on this usage, from the beginning of the nineteenth century popular is used to designate forms of entertainment that are said to appeal to the tastes of ordinary people. For example:

1835: 'popular press'
1841: 'popular songs'
1855: 'popular music'
1898: 'popular art' (ibid.).

Across a period of about four hundred years the meaning of popular had expanded from non-elite legal practices to anything widespread and generally accepted to culture that is popular. The common thread in these shifts of meaning is the idea of non-elite practices of production and consumption. As we shall see, this haunts every further definition, sometimes as something positive, but mostly as something negative. It is the nineteenth-century use of popular that finally generates the definition of popular culture as culture that is liked by many people. This is mostly a quantitative definition. Although it is often not without a sense of evaluation, it mainly depends on counting the sale of things. Such counting now might include, for example, the sales figures for CDs, DVDs and books; the examination of attendance records at concerts, sporting events; the scrutinizing of market-research figures; looking at audience preferences. In other words, the popular is confirmed by its popularity. Although this may seem like an obvious way to define popular culture, the difficulty with the coming together of culture and popular in this way is that we are required to agree on a figure over which something becomes 'popular culture' and below which it is just 'culture'. Does something become popular after sales of one, four, ten or twenty million? Unless we can agree on such a figure we might find that liked by many people would include so much, including so-called 'high culture', as to be almost unworkable as a conceptual definition of popular culture. On the other hand, if we want a mostly non-evaluative, purely descriptive definition, this may be the only useful one.

The first really sustained, detailed and explicit intellectual linking of popular and culture was developed in the late eighteenth century, as a result of a growing interest in the culture of the so-called 'folk' (see Storey 2003). This is popular culture as culture that originates from 'the people'. In the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth centuries and into the early part of the twentieth century different groups of intellectuals, working under the different banners of nationalism, romanticism, folklore and, finally, folk song, 'invented' the first 'intellectual' concept of popular culture. For the 'folklorists', popular culture is culture that originates from 'the people' (i.e. the 'folk'). This produces a definition of popular culture as a form of agency that spontaneously emerges from 'below' as something communal and self-made.

According to this definition, the term popular culture should be used only to indicate an 'authentic' culture of the people. One problem with this approach is the question of who qualifies for inclusion in the category 'the people'? For example, the intellectuals involved in the 'discovery' of the folk distinguished between two versions of the people, the 'rural folk' and the 'urban masses', and, according to this distinction, only the 'folk' were producers of popular culture. Another problem with this definition is that it evades any significant discussion of the commercial nature of much of the resources from which popular culture as folk culture might be produced. For example, many of the so-called folk songs collected in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries turned out to be versions of once popular 'commercial' songs. Moreover, in modern capitalist societies it is very difficult to find instances of popular culture that can be really defined in this way. For

example, youth subcultures are often presented as folk cultures. But the problem with such analysis is that it evades the commercial commodities from which the subculture is constructed. What ever else they are, youth subcultures are particular patterns of conspicuous consumption. In other words, we recognize them by the commodities they consume that are crucial to their social visibility – a particular drug of choice, a specific dress code, the occupation of certain social spaces, the consumption and/or production of a particular type of music, etc. If there is authenticity here, it is authenticity in use, not in original production.

Rather than a problem with this definition, this may in fact point to a sub-division in the definition of popular culture as folk culture, in which the 'folk' element is not found in production but in consumption. The French theorist Michel de Certeau (discussed in Chapter 7 here) defines popular culture as the 'art of using' (1984: xv). While it may seem obvious that popular culture is produced by the culture industries, this is not true; what they produce are a repertoire of things that can *become* popular culture. What he means is this: it is what consumers do with these products, how they utilize them, how they make them 'habitable' (xxi) for their own uses and desires, that transforms them into popular culture. In other words, popular culture is the 'cultural activity of the non-producers of culture, an activity that is unsigned, unreadable, and unsymbolized, [but] remains the only one possible through which a productionist economy articulates itself' (xvii). The key question to ask is this: 'The thousands of people who buy a health magazine, the customers in a supermarket, the practitioners of urban space, the consumers of newspaper stories and legends – what do they make of what they "absorb", receive, and pay for? What do they do with it?' (31). It is what they do with it that decides whether it becomes popular culture. From this perspective, youth subcultures and fan cultures for that matter are both folk cultures in that, through acts of consumption, they make popular culture.

The 'discovery of the folk' not only produced a concept of popular culture as folk culture, it also helped to establish the intellectual tradition of seeing ordinary people as masses, consuming mass culture. This is because the 'discovery' of the rural folk was accompanied (and no doubt driven) by the 'discovery' of the urban masses. If the folk represented a disappearing 'positive' popular, the new urban masses represented an emerging 'negative' popular. This is popular culture as 'mass culture'. As Cecil Sharp, folk song collector and very influential advocate of this idea, made very clear in 1907,

> Flood the streets with folk-tunes, and those, who now vulgarise themselves and others by singing coarse music-hall songs, will soon drop them in favour of the equally attractive but far better tunes of the folk. This will make the streets a pleasanter place for those who have sensitive ears, and will do incalculable good in civilising the masses.
>
> *(quoted in Storey 2003: 12)*

According to this way of seeing, folk tunes are popular culture (produced by the rural folk) and music hall songs are mass culture (consumed by the urban masses).

In the new industrial and urban spaces of Europe and the USA defining popular culture as mass culture that is liked by many people increasingly assumed profoundly negative connotations. This way of seeing popular culture was able to draw on earlier negative usage. Although from the mid-sixteenth century popular is used as another term for 'the people', it is increasingly used to refer only to people of 'lowly birth', as in the phrases,

1552: 'commoun populair'
c1555: 'any popular or common person'
1610: 'Patricians and Populars'

(quoted in Storey 2005: 263)

By the eighteenth century, popular is being used to describe things that have undergone a process of simplifying or diluting in order to appeal to the supposed inferior tastes of ordinary people. For example,

1759: 'popular language'
1797: 'The popularization of the measure'
1849: 'in a popular style which boys and women could comprehend'

(263–64)

What was happening in these particular definitional shifts is that a greater negative emphasis was being placed on popular's non-elite origins. This usage undoubtedly contributes to the production of the concept of popular culture as mass culture: commercial culture, mass-produced for mass consumption, a culture that is supposedly consumed with brain-numbed and brain-numbing passivity. Its audience is said to be a mass of non-discriminating consumers, consuming what is formulaic and manipulative to the political right or left, depending on who is doing the analysis. However, what we know about the 'activities' of consumption should make us question this assumption (see Storey 1999 and Chapter 7 here). Moreover, consumption figures make this a difficult position to sustain. For example, as John Fiske points out, 'between 80 and 90 per cent of new products fail despite extensive advertising … [M]any films fail to recover even their promotional costs at the box office' (1989: 31). Simon Frith (1983: 147) also points out that about 80 per cent of singles and albums lose money. Such statistics should clearly call into question the notion of consumption as an automatic and passive reflex activity.

For some cultural critics working within the mass culture paradigm, mass culture is not just an imposed and impoverished culture, it is in a clear identifiable sense an imported American culture: 'If popular culture in its modern form was invented in any one place, it was … in the great cities of the United States, and above all in New York' (Maltby 1989: 11). The claim that popular culture is American culture has a long history within the theoretical mapping of popular culture. It operates under the term 'Americanization'. Its central theme is that other cultures have declined or are declining under the supposedly homogenizing influence of

American culture. There are two things we can say with some confidence about the United States and popular culture. First, as Andrew Ross has pointed out, 'popular culture has been socially and institutionally central in America for longer and in a more significant way than in Europe' (1989: 7). Second, although the availability of American culture worldwide is undoubted, how what is available is consumed is at the very least contradictory (see Storey 2010a). What is true is that in the 1940s and 1950s (one of the key periods in debates about Americanization), for many young people in Britain, American culture represented a force of liberation against the grey certainties of British everyday life. But this aspect and these possibilities of American culture mostly remain invisible because Americanization, as a theoretical position, tends to operate with a very limited concept of the 'foreign'. It usually assumes that what is foreign is always a question of national difference. But what is foreign can equally be a question of class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, generation, or any other marker of social difference. Moreover, what is foreign in terms of being imported from another country may be less foreign than differences already established by, say, class or generation. Furthermore, the imported foreign may be used against the prevailing power relations of the 'local'. Ken Worpole gives the example of how British working-class readers found a liberating realism in American fiction that they thought was absent in British fiction.

> Thus it was in American fiction that many British working-class readers found a realism about city life, an acknowledgement of big business corruption, and an unpatronizing portrayal of working-class experience and speech still not found in British popular fiction of the period – least of all in the English murder story, obsessed as it was with the corpse in the library, the Colonel's shares on the stock market and thwarted passion on the Nile.
>
> *(2008: 57)*

What is also clear is that the fear of Americanization is closely related to a distrust (regardless of national origin) of emerging forms of popular culture. As with the mass culture perspective generally, there are political left and political right versions of the argument. What is under threat are either the esteemed values of high culture, or the traditional way of life of a 'tempted' working class.

There is also what we might call a benign version of the mass culture perspective. In this version the texts and practices of popular culture are seen as forms of public fantasy. Popular culture is understood as a collective dream world. As Richard Maltby claims, popular culture provides 'escapism that is not an escape from or to anywhere, but an escape of our utopian selves' (1989: 14). In this sense, for example, cultural practices such as Christmas and the seaside holiday, it could be argued, function in much the same way as dreams: they articulate, in a disguised form, collective (but repressed) wishes and desires (see Chapter 3 here). This is a benign version of the mass culture critique because, as Maltby points out, 'If it is the crime of popular culture that it has taken our dreams and packaged them and sold them back to us, it is also the achievement of popular culture that it has

brought us more and more varied dreams than we could otherwise ever have known' (ibid.).

The supposed inferiority of popular culture becomes absolutely clear when 'popular' is attached to 'culture' as a residual category, a category there to accommodate texts and practices that have failed to be 'real' culture. Although the division can be categorized in different ways, art and entertainment, popular culture and high culture, popular culture and culture, what is always the case is that those who insist on this division usually also insist that it is a division that is absolutely clear and self-evident. Moreover, not only is the division clear, it is purportedly outside historical change and contingency. This point is usually insisted on, especially if the division is dependent on the supposed essential qualities of things – it is these supposedly unchanging differences that make the distinction self-evident to the 'educated' consumer. But even a little knowledge of cultural and social history should make us more than a little sceptical of such claims. The work of William Shakespeare, for example, is now seen as the very epitome of 'real' culture, yet as late as the nineteenth century, before the plays became poetry on the page rather than scripts to be performed, they were very much a part of popular theatre (see Levine 1988). Similarly, since its invention in the late sixteenth century, opera has been both popular and exclusive culture. Its reclassification as art during the course of the nineteenth century required the separation of opera from other forms of entertainment. To watch opera in Manchester until the 1860s was always to watch it alongside other forms of entertainment on what was often a very crowded bill. For example, a night's entertainment at the Theatre Royal on June 9, 1827, included *The Marriage of Figaro* alongside The Celebrated Herr Cline's Extraordinary Performance on The Tight Rope and a 'dog' melodrama, *Forest of Bondy; or, The Dog of Montargis* (see Storey 2010a). Such cultural hybridity, the mixing of what had not yet been successfully separated into the distinct aesthetic categories of art and entertainment, was very much seen as an aspect of a regrettable history by the 1860s, when opera became the sole item on the bill. From then on there was no cultural confusion or inappropriate hybridity; opera was, simply and straightforwardly, high culture.

There is a tradition, popular in the USA, which sees popular culture as a social construction. This is a position particularly associated with the American sociological tradition sometimes called 'production of culture theory' (see Crane 1992). It is a tradition heavily influenced by the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (especially Bourdieu 1984; see also Chapter 7 here). This position is marked by two claims. First, contrary to the previous definitions discussed, it argues that there is no 'essential' difference between high culture and popular culture. Any difference that exists has to be constructed – the categories and, crucially, the differences between them have to be humanly produced and reproduced. Put simply, what makes something art rather than entertainment is not how it is produced but how and by whom it is consumed. Therefore, 'culture' and 'popular culture' are social categories. Given that the content of the different categories is not marked by essential differences, it is open to historical contingency as texts and practices are

moved historically between them. For example, the works of Shakespeare and Charles Dickens have been considered both high and popular culture, as have film noir and opera. Second, the function of the consumption of culture, based on this distinction, is to make, mark and maintain social difference, what Bourdieu (1984) calls 'social distinction'. In this way cultural distinctions are used to create social distinctions – social exclusivity. In other words, cultural exclusivity produces social exclusivity. 'Cultural capital' (ibid. and see note 10 at the end of chapter 7 here) is the currency of social distinction: consuming 'legitimate' culture allows someone to feel superior. But if what is consumed becomes too popular, or worse still is redefined as popular culture, its cultural capital decreases in value. For example, in 1990 the BBC used Luciano Pavarotti's recording of Puccini's 'Nessun Dorma' as the theme tune for its coverage of the World Cup. Even the most rigorous defenders of high culture would not want to exclude Pavarotti or Puccini from its select enclave. But in 1990, as a consequence of the BBC's use of the aria, Pavarotti's recording of 'Nessun Dorma' went to number one in the British music charts. Such commercial success on any quantitative analysis (as in the first concept of popular culture discussed here) would make the composer, the performer and the aria, popular culture. In fact, one student I know actually complained about the way in which the aria had been supposedly devalued by its commercial success. He claimed that he now found it embarrassing to play the aria when others were around for fear that they might think his musical taste was simply the result of the aria being 'The Official BBC Grandstand World Cup Theme'. Other students laughed and mocked. But his complaint highlighted something very significant about the high culture/popular culture divide: the elitist investment that some producers and consumers put into its continuation. 'High culture' had become 'popular culture'; 'cultural capital' had been drained from 'Nessun Dorma', so for the student the aria had become less usable in the politics of social distinction. Therefore, the general point of this perspective is that 'culture' and 'popular culture' are empty categories. The content of these categories can and does change, but the distinction between them must be maintained, must be policed in the interests of social exclusivity. What is important, according to this tradition, is not the fact that what is popular and what is 'real' culture move up and down the 'cultural escalator', more significant (to quote Stuart Hall) are 'the forces and relations which sustain the difference … the relations of power which are constantly punctuating and dividing the domain of culture into … dominant and subordinate formations' (2009: 514).

Ideas about what constitutes popular culture have been transformed by recent thinking around debates on postmodernism. Postmodern culture is supposedly a culture in which the distinction between high culture and popular culture is said to have been in terminal decline since the 1960s. Two factors are claimed to have produced this decline. First, an intellectual attack on the distinction between high culture and popular culture, in which popular culture is taken very much more seriously. As Susan Sontag explains, writing in 1966, 'One important consequence of the new sensibility (with its abandonment of the Matthew Arnold idea of culture) [is] that the distinction between "high" and "low" culture seems less and less

meaningful' (1966: 302).[1] The second factor was a supposed new seriousness in popular culture itself. This is most evident in the work of performers such as Bob Dylan and The Beatles: there is a new seriousness in their work and their work is taken seriously in a way unknown before in considerations of popular music. Watch any film of Dylan being interviewed in the 1960s and it quickly becomes clear that he is not being treated as a pop star. Something similar happens to the Beatles in the final years before they break up. For some these changes are a reason to celebrate an end to exclusion and to an elitism constructed on arbitrary distinctions of culture. But for others it is a reason to despair at the final victory of commerce over culture; commerce presented as the very embodiment of the popular. The problem with this way of defining popular culture (or more accurately the denial it exists as a separate category) is that it is difficult to maintain the end of the distinction between high culture and popular culture, with the exception of a few examples, when we see the distinction all around us. Nevertheless, postmodernism may be the beginning of a change in which the term popular culture may signify little more than the definition with which we started, *culture liked by many people.*

The study of popular culture in British cultural studies is organized around an appropriation of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony (see discussion in Chapter 10 here). Hegemony is for Gramsci a political concept developed to explain a new form of power in the capitalist democracies. The concept is used to refer to a *condition in process* in which a dominant class (in alliance with other classes or class fractions) does not merely *rule* a society but *leads* it through the exercise of 'moral and intellectual leadership' (2009: 85). Hegemony, therefore, involves a specific kind of consensus, in which a class seeks to present its own particular interests as the general interests of the society as a whole. But hegemony is never simply power imposed from above, it is always the result of a 'negotiation' between dominant and subordinate classes – there always exists an ongoing 'compromise equilibrium' (Gramsci 1971: 161) between 'resistance' and 'incorporation'. There are of course limits to such negotiations and concessions. As Gramsci makes clear, they can never be allowed to challenge the economic fundamentals of class power. Moreover, in times of crisis, when moral and intellectual leadership is not enough to secure continued authority and legitimation, the processes of hegemony are replaced, temporarily, by the coercive power of the State: the army, the police, the prison system, etc. It is a common misunderstanding to forget that hegemony is always underpinned by the possibility of coercion.

The introduction of the concept of hegemony into British cultural studies in the 1970s brought about a rethinking of popular culture. It did this in two ways. First, although always seen as political, or potentially political, it brought about a rethinking of the 'politics' of popular culture: it was now seen as a key site for the production and reproduction of hegemony; an arena of negotiation and struggle between interests of dominant groups and the interests of subordinate groups, between the imposition of dominant interests and resistance of subordinate interests. Second, it brought about a rethinking of the 'concept' of popular culture. This rethinking involved bringing into active relationship two dominant ways of

thinking about popular culture, those that stress *structure* and those that stress *agency*. Popular culture as structure is popular culture as a culture imposed by the culture industries, provided for profit and ideological manipulation, establishing subject positions and imposing meanings. Examples of this approach include the Frankfurt School, political economy, and structuralism. Popular culture as agency is popular culture as a culture emerging from 'below', an 'authentic' subordinate culture; culture as 'expression' ('the voice of the people'). Examples include culturalism, some versions of cultural and social history ('history from below'), and all traditions that see popular culture as folk culture (see Storey 2009).

According to cultural studies informed by Gramsci's theory of hegemony popular culture is neither an 'authentic' subordinate culture, nor a culture imposed by the culture industries, but a compromise equilibrium between the two. That is, a contradictory mix of forces from both 'below' and 'above', both 'commercial' and 'authentic', marked by both 'resistance' and 'incorporation', involving both 'structure' and 'agency'. The key concept in this position is 'articulation'. In English, as Hall explains, articulate has a double meaning,

> [articulation] has a nice double meaning because 'articulate' means to utter, to speak forth … But we also speak of an 'articulated' lorry (truck): a lorry where the front (cab) and back (trailer) can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another. The two parts are connected to each other, but through a specific linkage, that can be broken. An articulation is thus the form of the connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions.
>
> *(1996: 141)*

According to this approach the meaning of something has to be articulated. That is, it has to be made to mean ('expression'), and it is always made to mean in a particular context ('temporary connection'). Another way of formulating this is to say that the same things can be made to mean in different ways in different contexts. For example, Bob Marley had international success with songs articulating the values and beliefs of Rastafari. This success can be viewed in two ways. On the one hand, it signals the circulation of the 'message' of his religious convictions to an enormous audience worldwide; undoubtedly for many of his audience the music had the effect of enlightenment, understanding and perhaps even conversion to, or further bonding with for those already convinced of, the principles of the faith. On the other hand, the music has made and continues to make enormous profits for the music industry (promoters, Island Records, etc.). What we have is a paradox in which the anti-capitalist politics of Rastafari are being articulated in the economic interests of capitalism: in other words, the music is helping to reproduce the very system it seeks to condemn. Nevertheless, the music is an expression of an oppositional (religious) politics, and it may circulate as such, and it may produce certain political and cultural effects. Therefore, Rastafarian reggae is a force for change that, paradoxically, stabilizes (at least economically) the very forces of power it

seeks to undermine and overthrow. Another example is Che Guevara. Although he dedicated his life to a struggle against capitalism, since his death his image has been used in unbelievable numbers to reproduce the system itself and can now be found on, for example, fashion posters, coffee mugs, coasters, t-shirts, bags, and swim wear. What should have promoted 'resistance' (and perhaps for some people still does) is now a profitable part of the processes of 'incorporation'. Therefore, in British cultural studies popular culture is a site of struggle and negotiation, a site of both the 'authentic' and the 'commercial', and can resemble, before detailed analysis is made, both folk and mass culture.

As we have seen, then, to study popular culture we must first confront the difficulties posed by the term itself. In short, there are many different definitions of popular culture, and each carries different theoretical implications and different research and pedagogical consequences when used. That is, in each of the different conceptualizations of popular culture different theoretical concerns, different cultural politics, even different texts and practices are brought to the foreground. Put simply, how we conceptualize popular culture enables and constrains how we study it. Therefore, before we study popular culture we have to theoretically construct it as an object of study. The chapters that follow will show that everyday life has similar definitional problems and, like popular culture, each conceptualization carries with it different theoretical implications and different research and pedagogical consequences when used. But more than this, as we shall see, it is at times almost unrecognizable as the same object of study as we move from conceptualization to conceptualization, from tradition to tradition. The next eight chapters will attempt to draw out these differences.

Note

1. Matthew Arnold was one of the first to divide culture into two distinct categories. His division was between 'culture' and 'anarchy'. The first consisted of what he called 'the best which has been thought and said' (he was confident he could make this distinction), the latter was the term he used for popular culture, especially working-class culture (Storey 2009 and Chapter 4 here).

2

ALIENATION AND THE MARXIST EVERYDAY

There are many ways from the perspective of Marxism to characterize everyday life: for example, a site of class struggle, a realm of commodity fetishism. In this chapter I intend to focus exclusively on alienation. I will begin with the concept as developed by Karl Marx and then explore how it is further developed, more explicitly in relation to everyday life, in the work of Henri Lefebvre. But before I do this, I will first discuss Marx's understanding of 'human nature', because to really comprehend what he means by alienation it is essential that we do not misunderstand what he means when he uses the term human nature.

Karl Marx: human nature and alienation

Writing in volume one of *Capital*, Marx distinguishes between 'human nature in general' and 'human nature as modified in each historical epoch' (1965: 609). Human nature in general consists of certain needs and capacities. These can be divided into those that are 'natural' and those that belong to our 'species being'. Our 'natural' needs and capacities we share with other animals (food, shelter, reproduction, etc.), those of our 'species being' are unique to us as humans and are historically and socially variable in their concrete manifestation. In other words, and contrary to many conservative accounts, human nature is not fixed and unchanging; it is not something set, but always in a state of becoming. What it means to be human in the contemporary world is very different from what it was 5,000 or 10,000 years ago. It will be different again in the future. We may be a biological bundle of needs and capacities, but these needs and capacities change as we change the world around us. As Marx claims, 'all history is nothing but a continual transformation of human nature' (Marx; quoted in Ollman 1976: 79). Our humanity, like the world in which we live, is a social production.[1]

Our species being manifests itself in two ways: subjectively in terms of our awareness of belonging to a species (we think about what it is to be human) and in

the objectively realized forms such as institutions and works of art. It displays itself in our consciousness of ourselves and of others acting in the world in the present, with an awareness of a past and the expectation of a future. Moreover, as humans we not only produce, we consciously consider and reflect on and modify how and what we produce. Humans are said to be the only animals that act in this way.

> The animal is immediately identifiable with his life-activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is its life-activity. Man makes his life-activity the object of his will and of his consciousness … Conscious life-activity directly distinguishes man from animal life-activity.
>
> *(Marx 2011a: 54)*

In other words, we are able to reflect on what we are doing, both at the time of doing it and later after it has been done, whereas animals, Marx believed, just do it – they produce to satisfy immediate physical needs. We are purposive in a way that animals are not.

> A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in the imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own that gives the law to his *modus operandi*, and to which he must subordinate his will.
>
> *(Marx 1965: 178)*

In this way, then, what makes us human and divides us from other animals is our capacity for reflective productive activity that goes well beyond our immediate needs. But it is important that we do not understand productive activity as simply labour; it is production more generally: 'active man creates the human world and, through the act of production, produces himself. He does not simply produce things, implements or goods; he also produces history and situations. He creates "human nature": nature in himself and for himself' (Lefebvre 2002a: 95). As Marx explains, making very clear the absolute importance of an expanded notion of production, 'the productive life is the life of the species' (2011a: 54). Human becoming is the gradual transformation of the natural into the human. We have biological needs and capacities but these are worked on and as they are worked on they become human and social: how we have sex and what we eat, for example, become more and more human as they become more and more historically and socially variable. Our relationship with nature (both our own and that external to us) is socially and historically mediated. We do not just satisfy our needs or exercise our capacities, we wonder about them, we reflect on what might be best or what might be possible. We write novels and poetry about our needs and capacities; we

sing songs about them; we produce films and television dramas and documentaries, and paint great works of art in an attempt to explain or celebrate them. We do not just have sex to reproduce, we do it for pleasure and for love; and we laugh and cry and dream about this in ways that are unimaginable to other animals. So what begins as the satisfaction of a natural need or the exercise of a natural capacity is gradually transformed into a social activity that helps define us as human. What was once a simple act of nature becomes a social practice available to be mediated in the highest forms of human reflection. What was once a natural act becomes a social act entangled in history and politics, open to law and regulation, helping to define what it is to be human. But we never lose contact with nature. To paraphrase Lefebvre, who will be discussed later in this chapter, we separate from nature without detaching ourselves from it (2002a: 192).

To be human is to fully develop all the aspects of ourselves, our species being, that distinguish us from other animals. Therefore any degradation or 'alienation' of our productive life is a threat to our very humanity. Alienation occurs therefore when we are prevented from realizing our full human capacities. Under the capitalist mode of production there has been an intensification of alienation: work has become less and less the manifestation of our species being and instead more and more a means only to maintain an existence outside work, a means to stay alive. As Bertell Ollman points out, 'Living, mere existence, has always been a necessary pre-condition for engaging in productive activity, but in capitalism it becomes the operative motive' (1976: 152). Rather than living to work, we work to live, and because a worker spends almost all her energy on working to survive, there is little left with which to live a productive life outside of work. Work under capitalism is 'active alienation, the alienation of activity and the activity of alienation' (Marx 2011a: 52). Writing about the industrial working class in the nineteenth century, Marx points to 'the contradiction between its human nature and its condition of life, which is the outright, decisive and comprehensive negation of that nature' (quoted in McLellan 1971: 113). In human history alienation first emerges, after the break-up of primitive communism, with the division of labour, when some people become predominantly one thing: for example, farmers, soldiers, priests or rulers. In each instance the nature of productive activity is more and more focused and reduced. However, it is under the capitalist mode of production that this focus assumes its most intensified and destructive form.

Marx starts his analysis of alienation from the assumption (as already discussed) that labour (a key aspect of our productive activity) is an essential part of our human nature. Through productive activity we externalize ourselves in the world. As I write these words I produce myself as a writer. Without writing I cannot claim to be a writer: the words I write produce and reproduce me as a writer. According to Marx, under capitalism (he is writing about nineteenth-century capitalism and thinking particularly of the new factory system), the alienation of labour manifests itself in four ways. First, the product of labour does not belong to the worker. The worker is paid to work; therefore the person or persons who pay the wage own what the worker produces. As a consequence, the worker encounters what he or

she has produced 'as an alien object' (Marx 2011a: 53) with an existence independent of their will. That is, once his or her labour is 'congealed' (50) in the object produced, it takes on an existence outside of his or her productive activity. According to Marx, 'The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him' (51). It is as a power confronting the worker that the second aspect of alienation becomes manifest. If I were a contemporary of Marx, a worker who made meat pies, my reward would be a weekly wage. Once this wage is spent, no matter how hungry I might be, the pies I had made, the objects of my labour, my labour made material ('congealed'), would confront me in a shop as alien objects that have the power to satisfy my hunger, but which I cannot eat unless I have sufficient money to buy one. What I have made now exists independently of my will, and I have no control over what becomes of what I have made; it is now a commodity that circulates in search of profit. To give another example, closer to home, the books I write exist in the market place beyond my control. If I want a new copy of one of my books I need to have sufficient money to buy one. I cannot simply go into a shop and take one: although I wrote these books, they now exist as alien objects that confront me as existing outside my productive activity. As Marx explains, as has been discussed already, what defines us as humans is our productive activity, therefore, if this productive activity is realized in an object existing outside our control, an alien object, we are in some way humanly diminished. 'It is the same in religion. The more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself. The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object' (ibid.). We invented God, invested him with our fears and desires, and then we let him rule over us as an alien being, independent of our will. Alienation in part happens when we take what is socially constructed or humanly made as if it were an expression of nature or divine law – the commodities the worker produces enter the market place as if they were objects that *just existed*. As Marx further explains it,

> Just as in religion the spontaneous activity of the human imagination, of the human brain and the human heart, operates independently of the individual – that is, operates on him as an alien, divine or diabolical activity – in the same way the worker's activity is not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to another, it is the loss of his self.
>
> *(52–3)*

A third feature of alienation concerns our relationship with others. If what a worker makes does not belong to him it is because it belongs to 'a man alien to labor and standing outside it … the capitalist' (57). A capitalist owns the product made by the worker; it is he or she, in search of profit ('surplus value'), that circulates the product in the market place. The capitalist is thus in a position to sell the product back to the worker who originally made it. The worker who produces

and the capitalist who exploits this production are in an alien, hostile relationship. As Marx points out, 'if the product of his labor, his labor objectified, is for him an alien hostile, powerful object independent of him, then his position towards it is such that someone else is master of this object, someone who is alien, hostile, and independent of him. If his own activity is to him an un-free activity, then he is treating it as activity performed in the service, under the dominion, the coercion and the yoke of another man' (56). As Marx summarizes, 'If the product of labor does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, this can only be because it belongs to some other man than the worker. If the worker's activity is a torment to him, to another it must be a delight and his life's joy. Not the gods, not nature, but only man himself can be this alien power over man' (ibid.).

The final aspect of alienation concerns the relationship between the worker under the capitalist mode of production and his or her species being (as already discussed, the socially developed needs and capacities that divide us from other animals). 'In tearing away from man the object of his production … estranged labor tears from him his species life, his real species objectivity, and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him' (55). In other words, under capitalism the worker is alienated from his 'essential nature' (ibid.).

> the fact that labour is external to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it's forced labor. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague.
>
> *(52)*

If, as Marx claims, 'The object of labor is … the objectification of man's species life' (55), the alienation of these objects to the ownership and control of another will fundamentally diminish our species being and severely stunt the realization of our full human potential. While it has always been true that we have had to work to live, under capitalism we live to work; productive activity, the very essence of our species being, has been reduced to no other purpose than a means to stay alive. Put simply, most humans are redefined as workers; they are valued to the extent they produce and they consume. Such a redefinition is an alienation of our full human potential. Increasingly under capitalism the worker 'has no existence as a *human being* but only as a *worker*' (Marx 2011c: 60). In this way, Marx argues, the worker sells his or her 'human identity' (Marx 2011b: 16).

Henri Lefebvre and the *Critique of Everyday Life*

Over a period of thirty-four years Lefebvre published his *Critique of Everyday Life* in three volumes (1947, 1961, and 1981). As Lefebvre himself explains the project, 'the *Critique of Everyday Life* was built entirely around … the concept of alienation' (1991b: 3). This is important because, 'For people who have been unable to overcome alienation, the "alienated" world – social appearances, the theories and abstractions which express these appearances – seems the only reality. Thus any criticism of life which fails to take the clear and distinct notion of human alienation as its starting point will be a criticism not of life, but of this pseudo-reality' (168). In other words, without an understanding of alienation we will not understand the everyday. Moreover, it is by overcoming alienation that we can fundamentally change everyday life for the better.

Everyday life is unavoidable; it is all around us. 'It surrounds us, it besieges us, on all sides and from all directions. We are inside it and outside it. No so-called "elevated" activity can be reduced to it, nor can it be separated from it' (Lefebvre 2002a: 41). What he calls 'superior, specialized, structured activities' (Lefebvre 1991b: 97) are unthinkable without the common ground of the everyday. In other words, everyday life is inescapable from these elevated activities: art and science may seem outside it, but without it they would not be able to exist. Moreover, often it is everyday life that is the measure of their success.

> In one sense there is nothing more simple and more obvious than everyday life. How do people live? The question may be difficult to answer, but that does not make it any the less clear. In another sense nothing could be more superficial: it is banality, triviality, *repetitiveness*. And in yet another sense nothing could be more profound. It is existence and the 'lived', revealed as they are before speculative thought has transcribed them: what must be changed and what is the hardest of all to change.
>
> *(Lefebvre 2002a: 47)*

It is also important to understand that Lefebvre's critique of everyday life is not just an attempt to simply understand it but an effort to transform it. His aim is 'to extract what is living, new, positive – the worthwhile needs and fulfillments – from the negative elements: the alienations' (1991b: 42). Although he is critical of everyday life in terms of what has been lost, he rejects the conservative nostalgia that looks back to what is claimed to be a former golden age. Instead he sees both positive and negative possibilities at work, containing both repressive and liberating tendencies.

> Everyday life is profoundly related to *all* activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond, their common ground … In it are expressed and fulfilled those relations which bring into play the totality of the real, albeit in a certain manner

> which is always partial and incomplete: friendship, comradeship, love, the need to communicate, play, etc.
>
> *(97)*

For Lefebvre the everyday is a site of contradictions, a 'double dimension' in which we find both 'platitude and profoundness, banality and drama. In one respect everyday life is nothing but triviality or an accumulation of commonplaces. Only those "lofty" activities which abstraction sets to one side possess breadth and elevation. In other words, they alone are profound. And yet it is in the everyday that human dramas ravel and unravel, or remain unravelled' (2002a: 65). However, judging human beings (their actions and interactions and their potential for different actions and interactions) by the repetitions and trivialities of everyday life is to confuse the historically contingent (the capitalist everyday) with what it is possible for humans to achieve. 'We must reverse this slide into contempt.' We must see differently those who 'philosophers condemn to "triviality"' and 'poets relegate to the shadows. Is it not in everyday life that he should fulfill his life as a man?' (Lefebvre 1991b: 127). Therefore the task is not to 'discredit' (130) everyday life, because of how it seems in a particular historical moment, but to transform it. It is here, and only here, that humans can make a better world. As he insists, we have to think of it dialectically: it is both a site of alienation and a site where alienation will eventually be overcome.

Attacks on everyday life have usually been made 'without discriminating between its two sides (the capitalist and the human)' (131). If we 'open our eyes … we will discover the immense human wealth that the humblest facts of everyday life contain. "The familiar is not necessarily the known", said Hegel' (132). But to do this we have to break with all those ways of looking at the everyday that fail to distinguish between what is truly human and what is historically contingent – 'the human (real and possible) and bourgeois decadence' (127). It is the difference between the everyday life 'made by the bourgeoisie [i.e. the capitalist everyday] and the life which a human being actually demands' (140) and we should not confuse the two. What he seems to mean by this is that everyday life, like Marx's idea of human nature, consists of certain fundamentals, and these change slowly, while at the same time everyday life always takes a particular historical shape, as a result of the specific mode of production and the class in power. So when we think of contemporary everyday life we should think of it as a capitalist phase in the historical development of the everyday. This is a historically particular version of the everyday; an everyday that has been increasingly colonized by 'capitalist leaders [who] treat daily life as they once treated the colonized territories: massive trading posts (supermarkets and shopping centres); absolute predominance of exchange over use; dual exploitation of the dominated in their capacity as producers and consumers' (Lefebvre 2008: 26). As part of this process 'daily life is insidiously *programmed* by media, advertising, and the press' (ibid.).

> Using highly sophisticated techniques, mass communications bring masterpieces of art and culture to everyone; they make history in its entirety, the

> 'world' itself, accessible to all … Modern techniques make taste more sophisticated, raise the level of culture, instruct, educate, and bring an encyclopedic culture to the people. *At the same time*, they make their audience passive. They make them infantile … [T]he mass media create nothing and do not stimulate any creativity … The mass media shape taste and cloud judgement. They instruct and they condition.
>
> *(Lefebvre 2002a: 224)*

Lefebvre's verdict on the media is very similar to judgements made by members of the Frankfurt School (see Storey 2009). But it does acknowledge human agency and the possibility of 'resistance'. The desire to transcend the everyday is encountered in the reading of popular texts. He believes this is particularly evident in the consumption practices of women. For example, magazines, horoscopes and romantic fiction play out for their consumers 'a deep desire to deny the triviality of the everyday by opening it up to the marvelous and to a kind of poetry, sometimes clumsy, sometimes subtle, which art and literature rediscover in their way but without being able to invest it in the everyday. This desire for another dimension of the everyday and the social may address itself to old-fashioned representations, but this does not make it any the less legitimate. It is like a serious game, an aestheticism for people deprived of art' (Lefebvre 2002a: 14). If we extend this beyond the rather patronizing account of women readers, we are getting close to the idea of the active consumer (see Chapter 7 here).

Whereas some practices seem an attempt to transcend everyday life, others seem to confirm it as not in need of change. For example, television news, he argues, produces passivity. 'The "news" submerges viewers in a monotonous sea of newness and topicality which blunts sensitivity and wears down the desire to know. Certainly, people are becoming more cultivated. Vulgar encyclopedism is all the rage. The observer may well suspect that when communication becomes incorporated in private life to this degree it becomes non-communication' (76). He is equally pessimistic about new towns: 'Everyday life has lost a dimension: depth. Only triviality remains' (78). Again, this is the same pessimism we find in the work of the Frankfurt School and in this instance it exhibits the same problem: no account is taken of the human agency of people who refuse to live lives of conformity and banality as supposedly dictated by town planning or technological invention.

Lefebvre's understanding of celebrity in everyday life, considering he was writing in 1961, is much more interesting. In fact it is more than interesting; it is quite brilliant. He notes with irony how, 'We are spared no detail of the everyday lives of princes and queens, of stars and millionaires, since "great men" and "bosses" and even "heroes" have an everyday life on a par with our own' (91). The celebrity industries churn out detail after detail: 'We "know" their bathrooms almost as well as we know our own, we "know" their mansions almost as well as we know our own flat, we "know" their bodies almost as well as we know our own' (ibid.). The circulation of information and images seem to restore 'grandeur and the sublime' to the everyday. 'The public becomes private and the private becomes public, but in

appearance only, since power retains its properties and wealth its possibilities. The humblest citizen knows his prince. He has been able to see him close up, almost as if he could touch him; but once he accepts this illusion, he has stopped being a citizen. The humblest farm hand "knows" queens, princesses and film stars. But if he really believes he has attained a "knowledge" of something, he is being trapped by one of modernity's strangest and most disturbing alienations' (ibid.).

The key to the transformation of the 'colonized' everyday is a revolution in human productive activity. For Lefebvre, as for Marx, work is too important to our human nature (as understood by Marx as certain needs and capacities that are historically and socially variable in their concrete manifestation) to be allowed to exist as it does under capitalism. 'The very things that make a man a social and human being, and not simply a biological creature that is born, grows up and dies steeped in natural life – namely his work, his social activity, his place and situation in the social whole – are the things that also limit him and confine him according to the way labour is currently organized' (148).

> When a proletarian believes that he is … destined to work because it is written for all eternity that every man 'must earn his bread with the sweat of his brow', he is being mystified. But how, and why? Because for him, his work is a laborious, exhausting burden in real terms, and – under certain pressures – if he does not understand (or know) that work can and must become something else, he may well interpret it as a fatality of the human condition or as his own personal misfortune.
>
> *(146)*

Trapped by the alienation of labour, leisure appears to offer a worker an escape to a non-alienated world: 'leisure appears as the non-everyday in the everyday' (40).

> We cannot step beyond the everyday … There is no escape. And yet we wish to have the illusion of escape as near to hand as possible. An illusion not entirely illusory, but constituting a 'world' both apparent and real (the reality of appearances and the apparently real) quite different from the everyday world yet as open-ended and as closely dovetailed into the everyday as possible. So we work to earn our leisure, and leisure has only one meaning: to get away from work. A vicious circle.
>
> *(ibid.)*

A worker has to survive to live. Work enables survival, but it opens little possibility to really live. Leisure is where we go to find and experience all the things our work tends to deny – excitement, creativity, fulfilment. But leisure, according to Lefebvre, fails to deliver: 'leisure is as alienated and alienating as labour … Once a conquest of the working class, in the shape of paid days off, holidays, weekends, and so on, leisure has been transformed into an industry, into a victory of neocapitalism and an extension of bourgeois hegemony to the whole of space' (Lefebvre 1991a: 383–84). Professional football offers a particular example. 'Every football

club has its "supporters" and a supporter can be someone who has never kicked a ball in his life. He goes to the match in his car, or by bus or metro. He participates in the action and plays sport via an intermediary. He quivers with enthusiasm, he fidgets frenetically, but he never moves from his seat. A curious kind of alienation' (36). Professional footballers play football for us and often earn money that is unimaginable to most supporters – a top player might earn in a week what an average worker might take five years to earn. We stand back, those of us who have been captured by this particular form of alienation, mostly unable to make any real contact with these gods of the playing field. But without us their divine power would quickly drain away. It is our eyes, our bodies and our voices that produce and reproduce their power. We pay to watch at the stadium or we pay to watch on TV. The television companies pay the football industry to screen the games because we watch; newspapers cover the games because we read; advertisers spend millions on sponsorship because we watch. If we all stopped paying attention there would be no point in TV or advertising companies paying out their money, stadiums would close, newspapers would find something else to write about, and professional footballers would cease to be gods of the playing field. We have made these gods and yet it is they who seem to have the power to shape our passions and identities, make us happy or sad, make us really concerned if our club does not pay millions to buy another player and pay him millions a year to play – in short, prepared to pay attention as if our very humanity depended on it.

The alienation resulting from leisure is of course as nothing when compared with the alienation derived from the widespread denial of the possibility of truly productive work. A living is earned, but, as Lefebvre points out, 'What life do we earn when we earn our living' (2002a: 70). It cannot be enough to work to live; we have to consider the life that work allows. Therefore, to fetishize work as an end in itself is to deny that work must allow us to develop and to live. The problem with work under capitalism, as we saw in the discussion of Marx on alienation, is that it rarely provides true human satisfaction, it does not enable us to continue our human development; rather it is only the means to buying satisfaction with the money we earn. Money is the objectification of human alienation: 'money is the only power which gives [workers] contact with the alien, hostile world of objects' (Lefebvre 1991b: 161). Money operates like a god demanding worship and wielding power over the very people who create it. Money is the worker's 'alienated essence, the projection beyond himself of his activities and his needs … functioning outside of men and yet produced by them, an "automatic fetish"' (ibid.). Money is like a god we have created, but which we now worship as if we had forgotten it was humanly made. It operates like an external power: 'commodities, money, capital, the State, legal, economic and political institutions, ideologies – all function as though they were realities external to man. In a sense, they are realities, with their own laws. And yet, they are purely human products' (169). Moreover, 'When we handle money we forget, we no longer realize, that it is merely "crystallized" labour, and that it represents human labour and nothing else; a deadly illusion endows it with an external existence' (179). Moreover,

> Money, currency, commodities, capital, are nothing more than relations between human beings (between 'individual', qualitative human tasks). And yet these relations take on the appearance and the form of *things* external to human beings. The appearance becomes reality; because men believe that these 'fetishes' exist outside of themselves they really do function like objective things. Human activities are swept along and torn from their own reality and consciousness, and become subservient to these things. Humanly speaking, someone who thinks only of getting rich is living his life subjected to a thing, namely money. But more than this, the proletarian, whose life is used as a means for the accumulation of capital, is thrown to the mercy of an external power.
>
> *(178–79)*

The everyday life of capitalist society has become increasingly structured around money and what can be got with it. As Ollman observes,

> People no longer feel drives to see, hear, love and think, but only to have, to own what is seen, heard, loved and thought about … For Marx, the desire to own is not a characteristic of human nature but of a historically conditioned human nature, and the desire to own everything with which one comes into contact is the peculiar product of capitalism.
>
> *(1976: 92)*

Since the financial crisis of 2008 everyday life has been haunted by the spectre of the 'markets'. We have been continually told that we have to accept austerity because 'the markets' would react badly if we did not. It is an argument that operates with the same formal structure as: *if you do not sacrifice one of your children the gods will continue to prevent the rain from coming that is needed to make a good harvest*. Both are examples of alienation. In both human activities are hidden behind the supposed activities of non-human forces. But behind these appeals to what is supposedly beyond our control are human activities, human relationships, and the actions and interactions of humans with power over other humans. This is the capitalist everyday, an everyday life terrorized by what appears to be outside our human control.

The everyday after alienation

Alienation is not just passively endured; it is resisted knowingly and unknowingly. It is challenged in literature and art, but also in everyday life. Michel de Certeau gives the example of what in France is called *la perruque* ('the wig'). 'La Perruque is the worker's own work disguised as work for his employer' (1984: 25). He gives this example,

> a cabinetmaker's 'borrowing' a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room … In the very place where the machine he must serve reigns

> supreme, he cunningly takes pleasure in finding a way to create gratuitous products whose sole purpose is to signify his own capabilities through his *work* and to confirm his solidarity with other workers or his family through *spending* his time in this way. With the complicity of other workers (who thus defeat the competition the factory tries to instill among them), he succeeds in 'putting one over' on the established order on its home ground.
>
> *(25–6)*

The cabinetmaker transforms work destined to belong to another into work of his own and in so doing he rediscovers a gratuitous creativity and a means to challenge the normal capitalist relations of work and the workplace. There is a hint here of an everyday life beyond the capitalist everyday.

Alienation fetishizes and disguises human activity and human relations. 'And this is precisely what human alienation consists of – man torn from his self, from nature, from his own nature, from his consciousness, dragged down and dehumanized by his own social products' (Lefebvre 1991b: 180). To escape alienation we have to transform the social conditions that support it. It is only in the future that humans, freed from alienation, will look back and try to understand the dehumanized lives of the many that are so fundamental to the capitalist everyday life in the twenty-first century. We must not take now as the end of history but as only a stage in history. We are prisoners of a particular regime of production, but like other regimes of production it is historical and therefore changeable. While our everyday lives are capitalist, and those of our ancestors were feudal, our great grandchildren may make and live very different everyday lives. Everyday life is a space of unrealized human potential. If we are to really understand everyday life, understand it in order to change it, 'Analysis must therefore distinguish between the real "human world" on the one hand, the totality of human works and their reciprocal action upon man, and, on the other, the unreality of alienation' (169). The capitalist everyday encourages certain tendencies of thought and their embodiment and embedding in social practices: either this is the best possible world or, if not, change is impossible. In both cases a desire for radical change is presented as pointless. But everyday life must be transformed to bring about a life as yet unrealized, a life beyond the horizon of what now seems possible.

Everyday life is characterized by the 'real … lagging behind the possible' (Lefebvre 2002a: 41). For Marx and Lefebvre art is the paramount human activity that confronts the real with the possible. To be an artist (i.e. someone who has control over their productive activity) is to transform human labour beyond alienation. Art is the Marxist model of human creativity and the end of alienation. Yet in order to decolonize everyday life, art must disappear into the everyday. To achieve this we have to build 'a society in which everyone would rediscover the spontaneity of natural life and its initial creative drive, and perceive the world through the eyes of an artist, enjoy the sensuous through the eyes of a painter, the ears of a musician and the language of a poet. Once superseded, art would be reabsorbed into an everyday which has been metamorphosed by its fusion with

what had hitherto been kept external to it' (37). Put simply, such a metamorphosis – the fusion of art into everyday life – would restore the 'initial creative drive' of human productive activity and bring to an end the condition of alienation. A transformed everyday life would be one that had allowed 'the everyday [to] catch up with what is possible' (63). In this utopian world, where poetry and art are the activities of all, where in fact such aesthetic activities do not exist other than as the everyday, we would all live our lives like artists and poets, our days unfolding in a truly human drama of the possibilities of unconstrained self-expression and self-making.

> In the future the art of living will become a genuine art … The art of living presupposes that the human being sees his own life – the development and intensification of his life – not as a means towards 'another' end, but as an end in itself. It presupposes that life as a whole – everyday life – should become a work of art … The art of living implies the end of alienation – and will contribute towards it.
>
> *(Lefebvre 1991b: 199)*

William Morris's novel *News From Nowhere* (written in 1890)[2] is a staging of this very process (see Morris 2003 and Storey 2009): the end of alienation and the opening up of a truly human world. To escape from alienation (or to at least reduce it to humanly acceptable levels) would be to establish a fully human everyday, one in which it is no longer the case that the few control and exploit the lives of the many in the name of forces (supposedly existing beyond human control) that purportedly demand that this must be so. It would no longer be the case that 'Money is the pimp between man's need and the object, between his life and his means of life' (Marx 2011d: 97). In such an everyday, without the power of money to dictate and distort human nature, there would be very different human relations in which 'you can exchange love only for love, trust for trust, etc.' (100). Such things will no longer be for sale.

Notes

1. We are social animals, 'but an animal which can develop into an individual only in society' (Marx; quoted in Ollman 1976: 105). Moreover, as individuals we remain dependent on society. Society enables us to be individuals and maintains the possibility of our individuality. For example, I may be the sole author of this book, but in order to write it I depend on the labour of others. Signs of this labour are all around me. The house in which I live; the water, gas and electricity that are supplied to it; the books I read; the laptop I use; the food I eat and the tea I drink – all of these are available to me as a result of the labour of others.
2. George Orwell dismisses Morris, and other socialist writers, as 'empty windbags' (in *The Road to Wigan Pier*; 2001: 171) but then reveals the poverty of his own vision of a socialist future as little more than a reformed capitalism.

3

THE FREUDIAN EVERYDAY: THE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF EVERYDAY LIFE

In this chapter I will begin with a discussion of the Freudian everyday, including Sigmund Freud's theory of repression that underpins it. I will then consider Surrealism's 'revolutionary' use of Freud's work as a way of both understanding everyday life and as a means to change it.

The return of the repressed in everyday life

Although, as Freud stated, 'psychoanalysis is a procedure for the medical treatment of neurotic patients' (1973a: 39), it also contains a theory of everyday life. For Freud the everyday is only on its surface a place of the ordinary and insignificant. Beneath what appears to be trivial and uninteresting is a bubbling realm of desire. To understand this we have to first understand his theory of repression. What we think of as civilization, he argues, is the result in the repression of basic human instincts and drives. Moreover, 'each individual who makes a fresh entry into human society repeats this sacrifice of instinctual satisfaction for the benefit of the whole community' (ibid.). To illustrate Freud's argument, let me recall a visit I made during my summer holidays. In the summer of 2013, when I was completing the writing of this book, I visited Knossos in Crete. It is here that Theseus is said to have fought and killed the Minotaur. It is the first story I can ever remember capturing my imagination. Was this because, as Freud might suggest, its importance is not that it is an exciting narrative of ancient Minoan culture but because it is a disguised telling of the repression that is essential to human civilization. Following the logic of Freud's theory we could argue that the story has survived for more than five thousand years because it tells us something fundamental about ourselves. In symbolic terms when Theseus kills the Minotaur (half man, half bull) he is really killing (or taming) the animal within himself – the killing is an act of repression. More precisely, it is an act of 'projection', a form of repression, in which we

unconsciously situate our own unacceptable desires and feelings onto another person or thing – in this example Theseus projects what is unacceptable – his own animal desires – onto the Minotaur. What is projected is both disowned and controlled. In this way, repression helps sustain the gains of civilization.

Fundamental to Freud's argument about repression is his discovery of the unconscious. According to Freud there are two fundamental parts to the human mind (the psyche – hence psychoanalysis), the conscious and the unconscious. The conscious is the part that relates to the external world, while the unconscious is the site of instinctual drives and repressed wishes. He then adds to this binary model the preconscious. What we cannot remember at any given moment, but know we can recall with some mental effort, is recovered from the preconscious. What is in the unconscious, as a consequence of repression, is only ever expressed in distorted form; we cannot, as an act of will recall material from the unconscious into the conscious. As we shall see, both dreams and parapraxes allow us limited access. In 1923 Freud transformed his binary model of the psyche into a tripartite model, introducing three new terms: the ego, the super-ego, and the id. The id is the most primitive part of our being. It is the part of 'our nature [which] is impersonal, and, so to speak, subject to natural law' (Freud 1984: 362); it 'is the dark, inaccessible part of our personality … a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations … It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organization, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle' (Freud 1973b: 106). The ego develops out of the id: 'the ego cannot exist in the individual from the start; the ego has to be developed' (1984: 69). As he further explains, the ego

> is that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world … Moreover, the ego seeks to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies, and endeavours to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle which reigns unrestrictedly in the id … The ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions.
>
> *(363–4)*

Freud compares the relationship between the id and the ego as similar to a person riding a horse: 'The horse supplies the locomotive energy, while the rider has the privilege of deciding on the goal and of guiding the powerful animal's movement. But only too often there arises between the ego and the id the not precisely ideal situation of the rider being obliged to guide the horse along the path by which it itself wants to go' (1973b: 109–10). The super-ego begins as the internalization or introjection of the authority of the child's parents, especially of the father. This first authority is then overlaid with other voices of authority, producing what we think of as 'conscience'. In simple terms, the super-ego is in many ways the voice of social convention. It is the warning voice that, like Jiminy Cricket in Disney's

animated version of Carlo Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, attempts to keep us on the path of the currently socially acceptable.

There are two particular things to note about Freud's model of the psyche. First, we are born with an id, while the ego develops through contact with culture and society, which in turn produces the super-ego. Second, the psyche is envisaged as a site of perpetual conflict. The most fundamental conflict is between the id and the ego. The id wants desires satisfied regardless of the claims of convention, while the ego, sometimes in loose alliance with the super-ego, is obliged to meet the claims and conventions of society. This conflict is sometimes portrayed as a struggle between the 'pleasure principle' and the 'reality principle'. For example, while the id (governed by the pleasure principle) may demand 'I want it' (whatever 'it' might be), the ego (governed by the reality principle) must defer thinking about 'it' in order to consider how to get 'it'. The struggle between Theseus and the Minotaur can be seen as the symbolic playing out of this conflict.

'The essence of repression', according to Freud, 'lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious' (1984: 147). In this way, then, we could say that repression is a special form of amnesia; it removes all the things with which we cannot or will not deal. But as Freud makes clear, we may have repressed these things, but they have not really gone away: 'Actually, we never give anything up; we only exchange one thing for another. What appears to be a renunciation is really the formation of a substitute or surrogate' (1985: 133). These 'substitutive formations' make possible the 'return of the repressed' (Freud 1984: 154). We do or say things that seem inexplicable in the context of our actions, but they can be explained, Freud would argue, as a staged return, the acting out of feelings we had previously repressed and had thought had disappeared. For example, a woman might reach out for a man in the night and whisper the name of an ex-boyfriend, unknowing that she still associates sexual intimacy with being with him. Theseus may worry that the Minotaur is not really dead. Dreams afford perhaps the most dramatic staging of the return of the repressed. Understanding Freud's theory of dreams, especially in terms of his theory of repression, provides an excellent introduction to his account of the psychopathology of everyday life.

Dreams, according to Freud, are always a 'compromise-structure' (1973b: 48). That is, a compromise between wishes emanating from the id and censorship enacted by the ego: 'If the meaning of our dreams usually remains obscure to us … it is because [they contain] wishes of which we are ashamed; these we must conceal from ourselves, and they have consequently been repressed, pushed into the unconscious. Repressed wishes of this sort and their derivatives are only allowed to come to expression in a very distorted form' (1985: 136). However, although censorship occurs, repressed wishes are expressed; that is, they are coded to elude censorship. According to Freud's famous formulation, 'a dream is a (disguised) fulfillment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish' (1976: 244).

Dreams move between two levels: the latent dream thoughts (unconscious) and the manifest content (what the dreamer remembers dreaming). Psychoanalysis

attempts to decode the manifest content in order to discover the 'real meaning' of the dream. To do this it has to decipher the different mechanisms that have translated latent dream thoughts into manifest content. Freud calls these mechanisms the 'dream-work' (2009: 246). The dream-work consists of four processes: condensation, displacement, symbolization, and secondary revision. Each in turn produces 'the transformation of thoughts into hallucinatory experience' (1973a: 250). The manifest content is always smaller than the latent content. This is the result of condensation, which can work in three different ways: (i) latent elements are omitted; (ii) only part of a latent element arrives in the manifest content; and (iii) latent elements which have something in common are condensed into 'composite structures' (2009: 247). He provides the following example, 'You will have no difficulty in recalling instances from your own dreams of different people being condensed into a single one. A compromise figure of this kind may look like A perhaps, but may be dressed like B, may do something that we remember C doing, and at the same time we may know that he is D' (ibid.).

Latent elements also appear in the manifest content via a chain of association or allusion Freud calls displacement. This process works in two ways:

> In the first, a latent element is replaced not by a component part of itself but by something more remote – that is, by an allusion; and in the second, the psychical accent is shifted from an important element on to another which is unimportant, so that the dream appears differently centred and strange.
>
> *(248)*

This first aspect of displacement operates along chains of association in which what is in the manifest content alludes to something in the latent dream thoughts. If, for example, I know someone who works as a schoolteacher, she may appear in my dreams as a satchel. In this way, affect (the emotional intensity attached to the figure) is shifted from its source (she who works in a school), to something associated with her working in a school. Or if I know someone called Clarke, she may appear in my dreams as someone working in an office – a clerk. Again, affect has been moved along a chain of association from the name of someone I know to an activity associated with her name. I may have a dream situated in an office, in which I observe someone working at a desk (it may not even be a woman), but the 'essence' of my dream is a woman I know called Clarke. These examples work metonymically in terms of similarity based on contraction: a part standing in for a whole. The second mechanism of displacement changes the focus of the dream. What appears in the manifest content is 'differently centred from the dream-thoughts – its content has different elements as its central point' (1976: 414). 'With the help of displacement the dream-censorship creates substitutive structures which … are allusions which are not easily recognizable as such, from which the path back to the genuine thing is not easily traced, and which are connected with the genuine thing by the strangest, most unusual, external associations' (1973a: 272). He illustrates this second aspect of displacement with a joke.

> There was a blacksmith in a village, who had committed a capital offence. The Court decided that the crime must be punished; but as the blacksmith was the only one in the village and was indispensable, and as on the other hand there were three tailors living there, one of them was hanged instead.
> *(2009: 249)*

In this example, the chain of association and affect has shifted dramatically. To get back to the blacksmith from the fate of one of the tailors would require a great deal of analysis, but the central idea seems to be: 'Punishment must be exacted even if it does not fall upon the guilty' (1984: 386). Moreover, as he explains, 'No other part of the dream-work is so much responsible for making the dream strange and incomprehensible to the dreamer. Displacement is the principal means used in the dream-distortion to which the [latent] dream-thoughts must submit under the influence of the censorship' (1973b: 50).

The third aspect of the dream-work, operative in the first two, is symbolization, the 'translation of dream-thoughts into a primitive mode of expression similar to picture-writing' (1973a: 267), in which 'the latent dream-thoughts … are dramatized and illustrated' (1973b: 47). Symbolization transforms 'the latent [dream] thoughts which are expressed in words into sensory images, mostly of a visual sort' (1973a: 215). But as Freud makes clear, not everything is transformed in this way: certain elements exist in other forms. Nevertheless, symbols 'comprise the essence of the formation of dreams' (2009: 249). Furthermore, 'The very great majority of symbols in dreams', as Freud maintains, 'are sexual symbols' (1973a: 187). So, for example, male genitals are represented in dreams by a range of 'symbolic substitutes' that are erect, such as 'sticks, umbrellas, posts, trees' and things that are able to penetrate, such as 'knives, daggers, spears, sabres … rifles, pistols and revolvers' (188). Female genitals are represented by things that share the 'characteristic of enclosing a hollow space which can take something into itself', such as 'pits, cavities … hollows … vessels and bottles … receptacles, boxes, trunks, cases, chests, pockets, and so on' (189). These symbolic substitutes are drawn from an ever-changing repertoire of symbols. He makes this clear in his discussion of the way in which objects that are able to defy the laws of gravity are used to represent the male erection. Writing in 1917, he points to the fact that the Zeppelin airship had recently joined the repertoire of such objects (1976: 188). Although these symbols are drawn from myths, religion, fairy stories, jokes, and everyday language use, objects are not consciously selected from the repertoire: 'the knowledge of symbolism is unconscious to the dreamer … it belongs to his mental life' (1973a: 200). Moreover, we should not think that these symbols have definitive meanings, as, say, in a dream dictionary. That is, for example, a bottle must always signify female genitals. Crucial to interpretation is what a bottle means to the dreamer (although this may be difficult to determine). Freud is absolutely clear about 'the impossibility of interpreting a dream unless one has the dreamer's associations to it at one's disposal' (1973b: 36). Symbols may provide a preliminary answer to the question 'What does this dream mean?' But it is only a preliminary answer, to be confirmed, or otherwise,

by an analysis of other aspects of the dream-work in conjunction with analysis of the associations brought into play by the person whose dream is being analyzed. As he insists: 'I should like to utter an express warning against overestimating the importance of symbols in dream-interpretation, against restricting the work of translating dreams merely to translating symbols and against abandoning the technique of making use of the dreamer's associations' (477). Moreover, symbols 'frequently have more than one or even several meanings, and … the correct interpretation can only be arrived at on each occasion from the context' (1976: 470). Again, context will be something established by the dreamer.

The dream-work's final process is secondary revision. This is the narrative placed by the dreamer on the dream symbolism. It takes two forms. First, it is the verbal account of the dream: the translation of symbols into language and narrative – 'we fill in gaps and introduce connections, and in doing so are often guilty of gross misunderstandings' (1973b: 50). Second, and more importantly, secondary revision is the final policing and channelling strategy of the ego, making meaning and coherence in an act of (unconscious) censorship.

We can now turn, hopefully with a good understanding of repression and the unconscious, to what Freud calls the psychopathology of everyday life. The everyday is marked by what he calls parapraxes. These can take various forms. We intend to say one thing and say something else instead. These slips of the tongue are now commonly known as 'Freudian slips'. Similar slips can also occur when writing. It can also happen when reading or listening: we misread what is written or we mishear what is said. The temporary forgetting of what we know can also be a sign of parapraxes, as can be the forgetting of something we intend to do. Similarly, temporarily forgetting where we have put something can indicate parapraxes. Freud also discusses how everyday life features many symptomatic acts in which the things we do reveal evidence of repression and unconscious motivation. What these all have in common is that they are temporary errors that are usually seen as trivial events. But like dreams, symptomatic acts and parapraxes more generally reveal the workings of the repressed and provide evidence of the unconscious. In each case what emerges 'can be traced back to incompletely suppressed psychical material, which, although pushed away by consciousness, has nevertheless not been robbed of all capacity for expressing itself' (Freud 1975: 344).

Slips of the tongue are probably Freud's most well known example of parapraxes. A slip of the tongue can occur when something that is repressed is allowed unintentional articulation. What is uttered reveals what had been unconscious. Discussing with a friend CS Lewis's novel *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* I described it as a Christian allergy. I wanted to say allegory, but my deep dislike of institutional Christianity replaced the intended word with one that more accurately articulates my atheism. A friend of mine has recently grown a moustache. When I asked him why, he told me that while on holiday he had been bitten on the lip by an insect. The bite had left a scar. He decided to grow a moustache to conceal it. However, what he actually said was, 'The moustache is to hide the scare on my lip'. Does this suggest that he was scared how others might react to the scar? Was

his motivation not to conceal it but to hide what scared him about the scar? Freud gives the example of a woman who said of her family, 'they all possess Geiz [greed] – I meant to say Geist [cleverness]' (106). The slip of the tongue revealed feelings of hostility she did not know she possessed. As he further explains,

> A young man addressed a lady in the street in the following words: 'If you will permit me, madam, I should like to "begleit-digen" you.' It was obvious what his thoughts were: he would like to 'begleiten' [accompany] her, but was afraid his offer would 'beleidigen' [insult] her. That these two conflicting emotional impulses found expression in one word – in the slip of the tongue, in fact – indicates that the young man's real intentions were at any rate not of the purest, and were bound to seem, even to himself, insulting to the lady. But while he attempted to conceal this from her, his unconscious played a trick on him by betraying his real intentions.
>
> *(110)*

Freud offers many interesting examples of everyday parapraxes. For instance he gives the example of the professor, who in the course of a lecture, said: 'In the case of the female genitals, in spite of many Versuchungen [temptations] – I beg your pardon, Versuche [experiments] … ' (122). Rather than a simple error we have here the expression of a different sense than what seemed to be intended, an unconscious meaning imposing itself on another intention. In other words, the slip of the tongue has a sense of its own: not what was intended, this intention has been disturbed, by something that was nevertheless in the professor's mind, an unconscious intention. Another example makes the idea of an underlying sense a little clearer. A woman at a social gathering made the following remark: 'Yes, a woman must be pretty if she is to please men. A man is much better off; as long as he has his five straight limbs he needs nothing more!' She had clearly mixed together two phrases, 'as long as he has his four straight limbs' and 'as long as he has his five wits about him' (119–20). In doing so she produced a sexual meaning she had not consciously intended. Similarly, a woman attending her first English class remarked, 'the teacher is a nice young Englishman. In the very first hour he gave me to understand "durch die Bluse" [through the blouse] – I mean, "durch die Blume" [literally, through flowers, i.e. indirectly] – that he would rather take me for individual tuition' (123).

Freud does not deny that parapraxes could result from physical or mental fatigue. But, he argues, these merely facilitate the parapraxes, they do not explain its content.[1] According to Freud, 'They are not chance events but serious mental acts; they have a sense; they arise from the concurrent action – or perhaps rather, the mutually opposing action – of two different intentions' (1973a: 70). And as he explains, 'By "sense" we understand "meaning", "intention", "purpose"' (88). In other words, parapraxes arise through a collision of intentions, where an unconscious intention disturbs the intended conscious intention – 'mutual interference between two different intentions, of which one may be called the disturbed intention and

the other the disturbing one' (89). The disturbing intention can be of three kinds. First it is a disturbing intention known to the speaker, something he or she acknowledges once the slip of the tongue is made. They had tried to control an intention but the intention has nevertheless been articulated. A second group is when the speaker was not consciously aware of what he or she was doing but recognizes the disturbing intention when made aware of it. In the third group the disturbing intention remains unrecognized by the speaker, who refuses to recognize it when it is pointed out. What all three have in common is that a slip of the tongue occurs as a result of repression. In the first it is deliberate, in the second it is recognized when pointed out, and in the third it remains unknown and unaccepted by the speaker. As Freud explains it, 'the suppression of the speaker's intention to say something is the indispensable condition for the occurrence of a slip of the tongue' (93). Moreover, what all three groups also point to is 'that there are purposes in people which can become operative without their knowing about them' (102).

Parapraxes can also take the form of faulty actions. Freud divides these into two groups: 'bungled actions' to describe instances in which the intended action is not carried out, and 'symptomatic acts' in which 'Dropping, knocking over and breaking objects are acts which seem to be used very often to express unconscious trains of thought' (1975: 227). Bungled actions are a common feature of everyday life. Like other forms of parapraxes, they 'are often used to fulfill wishes which one ought to deny oneself. Here the intention disguises itself as a lucky accident' (1973a: 106). He gives the example of a patient who had been forbidden to contact a girl he was in love with, and had done so 'by mistake' when trying to phone Freud.

Similar to bungled actions are symptomatic acts. Freud gives an account of a young woman who accidentally cut her finger while manicuring her nails. Trying to remove the soft cuticle at the bottom of her nail she had 'accidentally' cut the finger bearing her wedding ring. The accident occurred on her wedding anniversary, and, as Freud explains, 'in the light of this the injury to the soft cuticle takes on a very definite meaning, which can be easily guessed' (1975: 248). He sees this not as chance action, an accident, but as a symptomatic act. Such acts, according to Freud, 'give expression to something which the agent himself does not suspect in them, and which he does not as a rule intend to impart to other people but to keep to himself' (247). Therefore, the symptom of an unconscious thought that was being given expression in Freud's example was the articulation of the moment when the young woman lost her virginity.

Falling, stumbling and slipping can be symptomatic acts. 'I can recall a number of fairly mild nervous illnesses in women and girls which set in after a fall not accompanied by any injury' (229). He eventually got the impression that the falls themselves 'expressed … unconscious phantasies with a sexual content, which could be assumed to be the forces operating behind the symptoms. Is this not the same thing meant by a proverb that runs: "When a girl falls she falls on her back"' (239). We might wonder here if Freud is not himself revealing, what he might otherwise have tried to conceal, a rather prurient attitude to female sexuality.

Symptomatic acts fall into three groups. The first are habitual acts that occur on a regular basis. Such acts might include playing with your hair, jingling coins in your pocket, twisting a pencil between your fingers. According to Freud such acts always carry unconscious meaning. The second are symbolic acts. He gives the example of the elderly man who married a very young woman. On the first night of the marriage he arrived at the hotel without his wallet. In other words, he was 'without means' to pay. Freud sees this as symbolic of his fear of possible impotence. Thirdly, there are sporadic chance actions. Unthinkingly placing a coat on the seat next to you with the unconscious intention of preventing another joining you at a table. When you find yourself being unable to get a song out of your head, Freud suggests this is because the words of the song connect to something that is unconsciously preoccupying you.

The forgetting of names is a common occurrence in everyday life. As we have noted already, Freud rejects the idea that such forgetting is simply the result of, for example, fatigue, stress or intoxication (see note 1 here). As with other forms of parapraxes, these factors are merely the context for what is ultimately a psychical process. As he explains,

> Let us suppose that I have been imprudent enough to go for a walk at night in a deserted quarter of the city, and have been attacked and robbed of my watch and purse. I report the matter at the nearest police station in the following words: 'I was in such and such a street, and their *loneliness* and *darkness* took away my watch and purse.' Although I should not have said anything in this statement that was not true, the wording of my report would put me in danger of being thought not quite right in the head. The state of affairs could only be described correctly by saying that *favoured* by the loneliness of the place and under the *shield* of darkness *unknown malefactors* robbed me of my valuables. Now the state of affairs in the forgetting of names need not be any different; favoured by tiredness, circulatory disturbances and intoxication, an unknown psychical force robs me of my access to the proper names belonging to my memory – a force which can in other cases bring about the same failure of memory at a time of perfect health and unimpaired efficiency. *(60)*

In general terms there are two types of failure to remember a name and in both cases it is motivated by an attempt to avoid displeasure. Forgetting the name of a town, for example, may be motivated by an attempt to avoid unpleasant associations the town itself may generate or because the name of the town may provoke an unpleasant memory of someone with a name similar to that of the town. 'The name of a town in Italy escaped the subject's memory as a consequence of its great similarity in sound to a woman's first name, with which a number of memories charged with affect were connected' (67). So it is not the name of the town that motivates the forgetting it is the similarity between the town's name and the name of a woman; and it is the woman who is the true motivation of the parapraxis.

Ultimately, this type of parapraxes seeks to avoid displeasure. It works something like this: I remember the name of the town and this makes me think of a woman with a similar name and then I think about how she broke my heart. Not remembering the name of the town prevents this train of thought.

Freud gives an example of another kind of forgetting. A group of university students were discussing the origins of Christianity when a female student talked of a novel she had recently read. She said that the novel told the story of Christ from birth to crucifixion, but that she could not remember its title. The novel was in fact *Ben Hur* by Lewis Wallace. The forgetting seemed to result from a form of sexual repression. Hure is the German word for 'whore' and the expression 'bin Hure' (which sounds similar to Ben Hur) means 'I am a whore'. According to Freud, 'saying the words "Ben Hur" was unconsciously equated by her with a sexual offer, and her forgetting accordingly corresponded to the fending-off of an unconscious temptation of that kind' (82). In other words, her sexual desire for one of the male students had prevented her, unconsciously, from naming the novel. Freud also discusses another form of forgetting he calls screen memories. He argues that some seemingly insignificant memories we recall are in fact remembered in order to screen off other more significant and troubling memories. These substitutes – screen memories – prevent the experience of displeasure that remembering a difficult and troubling memory would bring about.

Parapraxes can also take the form of misreading. Some times the misreading is a defence mechanism; we misread because we do not want to acknowledge or accept what is actually written. Freud gives the following example. 'One day I picked up a mid-day or evening paper and saw in large print: *Der Friede von Gorz* [The Peace of Gorizia]. But no, all it said was: *Die Feinde vor Gorz* [The Enemy before Gorizia]. It is easy for someone who has two sons fighting at this very time in that theatre of operations [in the First World War] to make such a mistake in reading' (161). Slips of the pen, the mislaying of things and uncoordinated movements are all for Freud forms of parapraxes. For example, I may write a person's name incorrectly and this is motivated by my unconscious hostility to that person. In other instances I may write down the wrong word that, in terms of my unconscious intentions, is the right word. Freud gives the example of an American living in Europe who supposedly wished to reconcile his differences with his estranged wife and so invited her to join him in Europe. He recommended that she travel on the *Mauretania* but instead wrote the name of another ship, the *Lusitania* (170). The *Lusitania*, on a voyage from New York in May 1915, had been sunk by a German U-Boat. Of the 1,924 on board 1,119 were drowned. The dead included 114 Americans. It is not difficult to work out his unconscious intentions. Parapraxes can also take the form of mislaying. The object will often be found once the unconscious motivation for mislaying it has been resolved. Freud is very clear on this: 'If a survey is made of cases of mislaying, it in fact becomes hard to believe that anything is ever mislaid except as a result of an unconscious intention' (194). He is equally suspicious of the very common phenomena of encountering someone in a street or a corridor and being unable to pass them because each move

you make to the left or to the right is mirrored by the other person, until you end up face to face. He sees this as 'a repetition of an improper and provocative piece of behavior from earliest times and, behind a mask of clumsiness, [it] pursues sexual aims' (230).

Besides being a world of desire and repression, the Freudian everyday is undoubtedly a very bourgeois world. For example, when discussing bungled actions he comments, 'This may lead you to suspect that it is not always just an innocent chance that turns the hands of your domestic servants into dangerous enemies of your household belongings' (1973a: 107). Similarly,

> When servants drop fragile articles and so destroy them, our first thought is certainly not of a psychological explanation, yet it is not unlikely that here, too, obscure motives play their part. Nothing is more foreign to uneducated people than an appreciation of art and works of art. Our servants are dominated by a mute hostility towards the manifestations of art, especially when the objects (whose value they do not understand) become a source of work for them. On the other hand people of the same education and origin often show great dexterity and reliability in handling delicate objects in scientific institutions once they have begun to identify themselves with their chief and to consider themselves an essential part of the staff.
>
> *(1975: 227–28)*

It would seem that everyday life in middle-class Vienna might not have been as universal as some Freudians like to suggest.

Surrealism: revolutionary Freudianism

Surrealism sought to disrupt and defamiliarize what we normally take to be the reality of everyday life. Using Freudian techniques it tried to liberate desire and imagination from the ordinary and the habitual, 'to bring about an ever clearer and at the same time ever more passionate consciousness of the world perceived by the senses' (Breton 1978: 155–56). According to Andre Breton, founding member of Surrealism, the aim was 'a desire to deepen the real, and to apprehend ever more clearly and more passionately the world of the senses' (quoted in Sheringham 2006: 71). The project is captured perfectly in the words of the Romantic poet William Blake: 'If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite./For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern' (1973: 40). Both Blake and the Surrealists are driven by a utopian desire, expressed quite beautifully by Breton when he writes, 'the increasingly necessary conversion … of the imagined into the lived or more exactly into life as it should be' (quoted in Sheringham 2006: 108). Or as Blake expressed it, 'What is now proved was once, only imagin'd' (1973: 38). Surrealism sought to get beneath the routines of the everyday, to challenge 'the hegemony of the cogito' and to reveal 'the *marvelous* in everyday life' (Breton; quoted in Rosemont 1978:

97). A key means to do this was by liberating our imaginations. It is the imagination that offers 'some intimation of what *can be*' (Breton 1969: 5). But before we can reach out to this, it is necessary to free 'the imagination from a state of slavery' (4). The work of Freud, Surrealists argued, had made this a possibility. Breton called Freud's discoveries 'an exemplary instrument of liberation' (282). On the basis of these discoveries, 'the human explorer' may now press beyond 'the most summary realities. The imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights' (10).

Surrealism was an attack on the limitations and constraints of 'immediate reality' (Breton 1978: 182). But surreality is not another reality; it is a part of everyday reality. As Breton explains, 'surreality will reside in reality itself and will be neither superior nor exterior to it' (169). Everyday life, therefore, is not to be transcended in order to arrive at beauty, the marvellous and the end of alienation. These are to be found and revealed in the everyday itself. The repressed was not to be found only in dreams but in the waking life of the social actions and interactions of the everyday. This is not an attempt to escape from the everyday but an effort to intensify it, make it glow with hallucinatory marvellousness. Dream and reality were to be reconciled. As Breton put it, 'future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *sur-reality*, if one may so speak' (1969: 14). The everyday is replete with possibilities: the apparently mundane can be revealed as the marvellous; it is just a matter of changing how we experience it. Remove the clutter of convention and routine and reveal the wonders of the everyday. As Breton observed, 'the eye exists in a savage state' (quoted in Sheringham 2006: 82). The point of Surrealism was to make us look at the everyday with fresh eyes (cleanse the doors of perception). Surrealism intended to civilize the eye, to allow us to see what had been repressed in everyday life. Its aim was to get 'on the other side of reality' (Breton 1969: 162). Its poetry, painting, objects and films, all sought to transform our understanding of the surface and underlying realities of everyday life and to bring about 'human liberation' (172).

To overcome the gap between desire and reality the Surrealists deployed various strategies of defamiliarization. Breton believed that it was possible to release the creative forces of the unconscious trapped by the routine constraints of everyday life. Perhaps his most famous technique was called the 'exquisite corpse', an exercise in which a poem or drawing is collectively constructed by individuals making a contribution without knowing the contributions previously made by others. For example, I would write a line, and then you would write a line without seeing what I had written. This would continue until it was felt enough had been written. Once the writing had stopped the poem would be revealed. Poetry, like dreams and parapraxes, has the ability to reveal the workings of the unconscious. But poetry should not be just the work of poets; it must be the activity of all. A poetic transformation in our understanding of everyday life would make us all poets while removing the special status of poetry and poets.

Ultimately, Surrealism's challenge to everyday life was political. As Franklin Rosemont points out, 'Contrary to prevalent misdefinitions, Surrealism is not an

aesthetic doctrine, nor a philosophical system, nor a mere literary or artistic school. It is an unrelenting revolt against a civilization that reduces all human aspirations to market values, religious impostures, universal boredom and misery' (1978: 21). Surrealism is Marxist Freudianism. However, 'Surrealism, which … deliberately opted for the Marxist doctrine in the realm of social problems, has no intention of minimizing Freudian doctrine as it applies to the evaluation of ideas: on the contrary, Surrealism believes Freudian criticism to be the first and only one with a really solid basis' (Breton 1969: 159–60). Surrealism sought to expand our understanding of reality; to get beneath the surface of everyday life, to access its political unconscious and release its repressed political possibilities. As Rosemont explains, Surrealism struggled for 'a total revolution in all that had been known as "art": a revolution which moreover was in their eyes only a modest preface to a total revolution in everyday life' (1978: 82).

There can be little doubt that both Freud, and the Surrealists who built on his work, have enriched our understanding of the mostly repressed possibilities of everyday life. Other political possibilities of this way of understanding the everyday may still remain to be explored.

Note

1. Freud makes a similar point about dreams. The primary function of dreams is to be 'the guardians of sleep which get rid of disturbances of sleep' (Freud 1973a: 160). Dreams guard sleep by incorporating potential disturbances into the narrative of the dream. If, for example, a noise sounds during sleep, a dream will attempt to include the noise in its narrative organization. Similarly, when a sleeper experiences somatic disturbances (indigestion is the most obvious example), the dream will attempt to accommodate this in order not to disturb the dreamer's sleep. However, outside and inside stimulus of this sort is always transformed. As he explains, 'Dreams do not simply reproduce the stimulus; they work it over, they make allusions to it, they include it in some context, they replace it by something else' (125). An alarm clock, for example, may appear as the sound of church bells on a sunny Sunday morning or as the sound of the fire brigade rushing to the scene of a devastating fire. Similarly, dreams are also informed by recent experiences, 'the day's residues' (264). These may often determine much of the content of a dream, but, as Freud insists, this, as with noise and somatic disturbances, is merely the material out of which the dream is formulated and is not the same as the unconscious wish. Therefore, although we can recognize how outside stimulation may contribute something to a dream, it does not explain why or how this something is worked over. As he explains, the 'unconscious impulse is the true creator of the dream; it is what produces the psychical energy for the dream's construction' (1973b: 47).

4

MASS-OBSERVATION: THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF THE 'MASSES'

The colonial gaze

Tom Harrison, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings founded the movement known as Mass-Observation in 1937. Its aim was to study the everyday lives of ordinary people in Britain, to produce what it called 'an anthropology of ourselves' (*Mass-Observation*, 1937: 10). Although this may have been the aim, I will argue, with specific focus on its work in Bolton (*Worktown*), that what was produced was a continuation of the social concerns of middle-class observers that had first appeared in the nineteenth century. In other words, I will argue that the everyday life of this version of Mass-Observation is an everyday life in which a middle-class colonial gaze is redirected from the colonies (real or imagined) to the life of the industrial working class.

Although I am willing to recognize the contradictions and complexities in the Mass-Observation project, my concern here is to draw out a particular series of assumptions that inform its conceptualization of everyday life. I do not wish to deny that this is only one aspect of the project, but for me it is the most significant (sharing as it does various similarities with how popular culture has been conceptualized as mass culture: see discussion in Chapter 1 here). Moreover, I do not want to suggest that all the interesting work done by Mass-Observation is captured in its investigations in Bolton. However, I do want to argue that what it has to say about Bolton encapsulates something very important about its project. In order to understand my critique it is necessary to locate Mass-Observation in a much older tradition of middle-class observations of working-class everyday life.

Although Mass-Observation began in 1937, many of its concerns with the everyday lives of ordinary people first emerged in the nineteenth century – a tradition of the middle class reporting on the lives of the working class. It is a tradition driven by a conflicting sense of injustice, pity, shame, guilt, fear and condescension;

the exact mix depending on the particular moment in history and the politics of the writer involved. Before I discuss Mass-Observation I want to first discuss this earlier tradition. My purpose is to show that what was presented as new in the late 1930s belonged to a middle-class gaze that was already almost a hundred years old.

Industrial capitalism introduced many things into the world but the division of societies into two hostile classes – what Conservative Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli called 'two nations' (*Sybil*, 1845) – is one of the most fundamental. On the basis of the consequences of this division there developed a tradition of social exploration in which writers from the middle class explored the everyday lives of the working class. A founding text in this tradition is Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851). He describes his book 'As supplying information concerning a large body of persons, of whom the public had less knowledge than of the most distant tribes of the earth' (quoted in Keating 1976b: 13–14). Mayhew more or less establishes the tradition's three key features: he treats the working class as a 'race' apart; he treats them as an object of middle-class ('the public') knowledge; he assumes that they need the middle-class explorer to give them a voice. He establishes a tradition in which it is assumed that the working class cannot speak for itself or worse that if it does, it speaks with such a fearful voice it is always better to speak on its behalf. When they speak with the voice of the political organization or the demonstration or the trade union movement this is apparently not a voice recognized or translatable by the middle-class social explorer. Similarly, in his book *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890), William Booth asks, 'As there is a darkest Africa is there not a darkest England?' His answer is yes. Booth also talked about 'the existence of these colonies of heathens and savages in the heart of our capital' (19). Samuel Smith, writing in 1885, articulated very well the fear that is often at the heart of these observations. 'I am deeply convinced that the time is approaching when this seething mass of human misery will shake the social fabric, unless we grapple more earnestly with it than we have yet done … The proletariat may strangle us unless we teach it the same virtues which have elevated the other classes of society' (quoted in Stedman Jones 1984: 291). Again, this is a discourse about 'us' worrying responsibly about 'them'.

Recognition is usually made of William Booth's point that it is 'the problem of poverty in the midst of wealth' (Booth in Keating 1976b: 24), but rarely within the genre is the argument of Marx and Engels taken seriously that the problem of poverty in the midst of wealth is fundamentally a matter of antagonistic class relations. 'The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has … established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones … [I]t has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other – Bourgeoisie and Proletariat' (1998: 5–6). In other words, the everyday life of the working class is not a 'natural' everyday, it is an everyday created by capitalist industrialization and urbanization; it is, as discussed here in Chapter 2, a capitalist everyday; it is the way it is because of class struggle. Too often class struggle is seen as the subordinate against the dominant but it is also

the dominant ensuring that they remain dominant. The everyday conditions of the nineteenth-century working class are a result of class exploitation and oppression. The Industrial Revolution produced winners and losers and the tradition of middle-class social exploration is marked by writers from the winning class (whether on the political right or left) exploring the lives of those from the losing class.

By 1867, when the male urban working class had been granted the franchise, it was a little more difficult not to hear its voice. Matthew Arnold, who opposed the granting of the vote, still saw them as a 'race' apart and as a 'race' he saw them as less evolved than the middle class and aristocracy. With exquisite middle-class irony, an irony protected by class privilege, he informs his readership ('us') that

> the working class … raw and half developed … long lain half hidden amidst its poverty and squalor … now issuing from its hiding place to assert an Englishman's heaven born privilege of doing as he likes, and beginning to perplex us by marching where it likes, meeting where it likes, bawling what it likes, breaking what it likes.
>
> *(1960: 105)*

The context for Arnold's irony is the suffrage agitation of 1866–67. His employment of the phrase 'beginning to perplex us' is once again a clear indication of the class nature of his discourse and of the tradition's discourse more generally. His claim that under all 'our class divisions, there is a common basis of human nature' (ibid.) might seem at first sight to defuse his sense of class superiority. However, if we examine what he means by a common basis, we are forced to a different conclusion. If we imagine the human race existing on an evolutionary continuum with itself at one end and a common ancestor shared with the ape at the other, what he seems to be suggesting is that the aristocracy and middle class are further along the evolutionary continuum than the working class. This is shown quite clearly in his example of the common basis of our human nature. He claims, again to his readership of 'we', that

> every time that we snatch up a vehement opinion in ignorance and passion, every time that we long to crush an adversary by sheer violence, every time that we are envious, every time that we are brutal, every time that we adore mere power or success, every time that we add our voice to swell a blind clamour against some unpopular personage, every time that we trample savagely on the fallen [we have] found in our own bosom the eternal spirit of the Populace [Arnold's term for the working class].
>
> *(107)*

It is once again a discourse in which 'we' and 'us' signify only the middle class against a threatening other – the working class. I labour this point because it is a point that is usually missed. There is also, in the best traditions of the colonial gaze, a warning here about the danger to the middle-class social explorer of the risk of

FIGURE 4.1

'going native'. As Arnold explains, it takes only a little help from 'circumstances' to make this 'eternal spirit' triumph in the middle class and aristocracy.

In Peter Keating's (1976a) classic account of the tradition of middle-class social exploration he begins with James Greenwood's 'A Night in a Workhouse' (1866), but we could just as convincingly begin earlier, in a historical moment that does not seem at first obvious at all – the invention of the English Christmas in the 1840s (see Storey 2010a). The first Christmas card (1843; see Figure 4.1) and the first Christmas novel (*A Christmas Carol*, 1843) are both in part about middle-class social exploration. Each argues that those who have benefited from the Industrial Revolution should ensure the relative well being of those who have not; and unless they do, their own class privilege will be severely undermined. In the first Christmas card the middle-class family's Christmas celebrations, it is suggested, depend for their security on the poor being clothed and fed. Similarly, it is made clear to Scrooge in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* that his own prosperity depends on ensuring the limited prosperity of the poor. In both cases the middle-class consumer is strongly encouraged to adventure beyond their prosperity to the poverty that surrounds it. Moreover, the solution offered in both cases is that class distinction will remain but the relationship between the classes, it is hoped, will continue on a more secure footing. By means of charity Scrooge and the middle-class family of the first Christmas card must share their prosperity with the working class that encircles them. If they do not they and the class they represent run the risk of being destroyed. This is made very clear in Scrooge's encounter with Ignorance and Want (a sleight-of-hand displacement for exploitation and oppression).

> 'Spirit! Are they yours?' Scrooge could say no more. 'They are Man's', said the Spirit. Looking down upon them, 'This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it!' cried the Spirit, stretching out his hand towards the city.
>
> *(Dickens 1985: 108)*

Also writing in the 1840s, Marx and Engels in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) took a very different view of Scrooge and his class. '[T]he bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society, and to impose its conditions of existence upon society as an over-riding law. It is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery … What the bourgeoisie therefore produces … are its own grave-diggers' (1998: 23–4). In the Manifesto version the boy and girl are reconfigured, not as Ignorance and Want, but as the capitalist system's 'grave-diggers'. I do not think I would be alone with my suspicion that a great deal of the writing in the middle-class tradition of social exploration is a conscious or unconscious attempt to delay the funeral.

Mass-Observation

The Mass-Observation project generated thousands of reports on aspects of everyday life. A cursory inspection of the documents in the Mass-Observation Archive, University of Sussex, will discover accounts of dreams and nightmares, political attitudes, drinking habits, travel sickness, men's shoes, crying at the cinema, washing habits, capital punishment, frozen fish, women in pubs and many, many other topics that range from the seemingly important to the seemingly banal (see Jeffery 1978 and Harrison 1961). My discussion, however, will focus almost exclusively on the study of everyday life in Bolton.[1]

Mass-Observation had two centres of origin, each with a different understanding of the project. In 1936 Charles Madge (poet, journalist and film maker) and a group of other intellectuals (mostly poets and artists) living in Blackheath in London 'discussed the possibility of enlisting volunteers for the observation both of social happenings like the Abdication [of Edward VIII] and also of "everyday life", as lived by themselves and those around them' (Madge 1976: 1395). At the same time in Bolton, 'in the wilds of Lancashire', Tom Harrison was preparing to carry out an anthropological study of working-class life. He had recently moved from Malekula in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) in the Pacific back to England with the idea of doing similar anthropological work in Bolton and Lancashire more generally. Part of the preparations of the former Harrow schoolboy and self-taught anthropologist (and ornithologist) included working as a lorry driver, a shop-assistant, a mill worker, labourer, and ice cream seller.

On 2nd January 1937 Charles Madge wrote a letter to the *New Statesman and Nation* asking for volunteers to take part in a project of 'mass-observation'. Beneath the letter the magazine published a poem by Harrison. Harrison read Madge's letter

and wrote to him to suggest they collaborate on the project. On 30th January Harrison, Madge and Humphrey Jennings (painter and film maker and member of the Blackheath group) wrote a letter to the *New Statesman and Nation*. This second letter was almost a manifesto and formally announced the setting up of Mass-Observation. They asked for volunteers to help them establish a 'science of ourselves'. The letter includes a list of possible topics of investigation.

> Behaviour of people at war memorials,
> Shouts and gestures of motorists,
> The aspidistra cult,
> Anthropology of football pools,
> Bathroom behaviour,
> Beards, armpits, eyebrows,
> Anti-semitism,
> Distribution, diffusion and significance of the dirty joke,
> Funerals and undertakers,
> Female taboos about eating,
> The private lives of midwives.

Although the list reads like a surrealist poem, a curious mix of the surreal and the anthropological, it indicates already the division between the Blackheath and Bolton groups.[2] I think it is very important to recognize that Mass-Observation consisted of two distinct groups as it then prevents us from either praising or condemning the whole project on the basis of the activities of just one of these groups. In *Mass-Observation*, published in 1937 as an introduction to the project, it is very clear that there are divisions between Madge and Harrison. Whereas Harrison writes of making 'a new synthesis' from 'all existing philosophies of life', Madge is quite clear that the project should be 'an instrument for collecting facts, not a means of producing a synthetic philosophy' (Mass-Observation 1937: 47). Moreover, in the second letter to the *New Statesman and Nation* they had written: 'The artist and the scientist, each compelled by historic necessity out of their artificial exclusiveness, are at last joint forces and are turning back towards the mass from which they had detached themselves' (quoted in Varley 1987: 6). In this formulation Harrison is the scientist and Madge and Jennings are the artists. This was a view that Harrison repeated more than twenty years later. 'From the industrial north, a more objective-aimed approach; from London in the south, a literary and documentary one … We joined forces, north and south, as Mass-Observation' (1961: 15). From its beginnings, therefore, there were at least two projects. It is the second project, with its principal focus on Bolton, which will be the main emphasis of this chapter. It is from the Mass-Observation material on Bolton (*Worktown* as it was named in the project) and on people from Bolton (*Worktowners*) going to Blackpool that I will attempt to draw out a conceptualization of everyday life.

Division was also clear to the poet Kathleen Raine (an initial member of the Blackheath group and married to Madge). But she was also aware of something

that both groups had in common. 'To Charles [Madge], who seemed like a man inspired almost as a medium is inspired or possessed, the idea of M-O [Mass-Observation] was less sociology than a kind of poetry, akin to Surrealism. It was the expression of the unconscious collective life of England, literally, in writings on the walls, telling of the hidden thoughts and dreams of the inarticulate masses' (quoted in Jeffery 1978: 24). The phrase 'inarticulate masses' is very telling. It points to one thing that both groups shared, but that was especially pronounced in the Bolton group, a view of the working class as in need of middle-class help in order to be able to speak for themselves (or, more accurately, speak through middle-class commentary). Moreover, it is clear that speaking for themselves did not mean speaking to each other, which they evidently did everyday; rather it meant speaking to the middle class, especially Oxbridge, public school educated upper-middle class. As we have seen, this is classic middle-class social exploration.

There was also an important political difference between the leaders of the two groups. Harrison had once stood for Parliament as a Liberal; Madge was a socialist and member of the Communist Party. As Madge observed, 'Tom [Harrison] was more definitely and consistently unwilling to take sides politically than were I and some others of the small initial group' (1961: 277). Harrison's political neutrality, however, might not be all it seems. Harrison claims that part of his motivation for doing research in Bolton was the distance between government and media and the 'non-vocal masses'. As he explains, 'In the thirties a situation developed in which a dangerous gap had widened between the ordinary and rather non-vocal masses of Britain and a highly specialized set of organs and organisations supposedly speaking for all through Parliament'. He saw his work in Bolton as 'working towards an effort to tackle this situation' (1961: 15). To see this as 'a dangerous gap' begs the question, what is the nature of the danger? In my view it is the same danger – a perception of the dangerous masses existing beyond the ideological control of the middle class – that produced and reproduced the tradition of middle-class social exploration.

Worktown: a 'race' apart

When looking back at his Bolton experiences Harrison was clear of the role that his class background had played in the investigations: 'It is difficult to remember (now) how in those far-off days, nearly everybody who was not born into the working-class regarded them almost as a race apart' (1961: 26). Similarly, Humphrey Spender (the project's photographer in Bolton and Blackpool) described the working class of Bolton as 'total foreigners' (quoted in Jeffery 1978: 27). The fact that both Spender and Harrison treated the working class as if they were a separate race seems to suggest that the unfounded assumptions of superiority operating in colonial ethnography were adopted uncritically in their research in Bolton and Blackpool. As Rod Varley points out, 'Much of the work conducted in Bolton in the first year, under the strong personality and direction of Harrison, seemed to be bent on drawing parallels between aspects of working-class culture and the "primitive" cultures which had been the traditional subjects of anthropology' (1987:

16). Harrison can be very explicit about the kind of ethnographic project he has in mind (and very unaware of the tradition in which he writes).

> The wilds of Lancashire or the mysteries of the East End of London were as little explored as the cannibal interior of the New Hebrides, or the head-hunter hinterland of Borneo … In particular, my experience living among cannibals in the New Hebrides … taught me the many points in common between these wild looking, fuzzy-haired, black, smelly people and our own, so when I came home from that expedition I determined to apply the same methods here in Britain.
>
> *(quoted in Jeffery 1978: 20)*

But of course Harrison is absolutely wrong in his assertion that the working class had been 'little explored'. Again, I labour this point because it seems to get overlooked in critical discussions of Mass-Observation, especially when the Blackheath and Bolton groups are confusingly situated as one. But, as we have seen already, beginning in the nineteenth century there is a large body of work that fixes its critical gaze on such an exploration. Supposedly without knowing it Mass-Observation reproduce the tradition's three key features: (i) treat the working class as a 'race' apart; (ii) treat them as an object of middle-class knowledge; (iii) assume that they need the middle-class explorer to give them a voice, a voice that will need to be translated and edited for the comfortable consumption of the middle-class reader. Moreover, it is as if Mass-Observation, especially in its Bolton version, had read *the official guidebook on how the middle class should explore the everyday lives of the working class* and had then developed a severe bout of amnesia about having done so.

Harrison's use of pronouns is also very instructive. When he refers to the working class of Lancashire and the East End as 'our own', he once again makes clear that this is a middle-class man addressing other members of the middle class. Again the use of pronouns tells us a great deal about some of the underlying assumptions of the project: we and us need to find out about the inarticulate masses. Apologists for this kind of patronizing discourse can of course hide behind the complexities and contradictions of other aspects of the Mass-Observation project, but it is hard to avoid Stephen Edwards' simple and compelling conclusion that, 'As the site of expedition shifted from the New Hebrides to Bolton, scrutiny was transferred directly from the "black, smelly savages" with their fuzzy hair to the dirty working-class with their flat caps or curlers' (1984: 18).[3] Methods and attitudes were transferred together. The fact that the assumptions behind this approach are inappropriate when used in Bolton asks the question if these same assumptions are appropriate when used anywhere. So what begins as an attempt to apply colonial methods of ethnography and its underlying assumptions to Bolton ends up by bringing into question the methods, assumptions and conclusions of its original use in the colonies.

It is very clear (although not always clear to some commentators) that Harrison's comparison implies that like the savages of colonial ethnography, the working-class

inhabitants of Lancashire and the East End of London are also uncivilized. Harrison makes what appears to be a similar comparison with schoolboys at his former school Harrow (Harrison 1961: 25). But there is a significant difference of intent and consequence between the two comparisons. The second comparison is intended to suggest the humanity of the cannibals he had studied in the Pacific. As he explains, 'at the age of 22 I went to an island in the Pacific called Malekula and spent three years living among cannibals, whom I found were neither better nor worse than old Harrovians' (quoted in Highmore 2002: 79). There is here the generosity of class privilege made secure by his time at Harrow. This is because, of course, comparisons work differently in different contexts. In the first example the comparison is used to produce an image of the working class as uncivilized. In the second it is used to suggest that the schoolboys of Harrow are no more civilized than the people of Malekula in the New Hebrides. In other words, the subjects of his colonial ethnography are used by Harrison as a shifting signifier that can be mobilized to make different points in different contexts. The first comparison is empowered (although apparently unknowingly) by belonging to a long tradition of middle-class scrutiny of the working class, while the second is a rather frivolous comparison that exudes class privilege and does little more than surround Harrison with an aura of pseudo humanity. Who in his middle-class audience would seriously believe that cannibals and boys from a very expensive English public school could ever be the same? There is therefore a very clear difference between the two comparisons. To think otherwise is to be either naïve or an apologist for class privilege.

Middle-class readers would find a reassuring passivity in the Bolton working class. They are only ever presented as workers or workers on holiday; they are never members of an organized working class, engaged in party politics and trades unionism. Instead these are workers who are easily pacified by a week in Blackpool. 'The whole point of Blackpool is that it gives you liberation from normal restraints and levels, the opportunity to be luxurious and extravagant' (Harrison 1942: 157). But the liberation it gives is the freedom of the opiate daze. 'We came to the conclusion from our Worktown studies, that the week's holiday at Blackpool was the biggest "stabilizer" in Worktown life. It kept people satisfied and happy, either in memory or in anticipation, through all sorts of economic difficulties and depressions and distress' (ibid.). But Mass-Observation's account of Worktowners on holiday in Blackpool tells us more than it is the equivalent of getting stoned for a week. The investigations at Blackpool are framed by the assumption that life in Bolton is restricted and restrained and therefore once in Blackpool the Worktowners should break free and express their 'natural' selves. The area in which they expected to find this expression was in terms of sexual behaviour. This expectation was undoubtedly encouraged by the reputation Blackpool had as a place of sexual freedom, a reputation seemingly encouraged by the publicity materials used to promote the town. But encouraged or not, they do seem to have believed that in Blackpool they would witness Worktowners behaving 'naturally', as if suddenly situated in their natural environment: in effect, 'going native'. We are returned once again to the comparison between the

working class and Pacific Island cannibals. As Peter Gurney points out, 'Mass-Observation came to Blackpool with an implicit agenda, and their method left them only disconnected, grotesque snapshots that might serve to qualify their own expectations but could not explain or appreciate the nuances of working-class culture' (1997: 274).

There can be no doubt that the idea of the working class as a 'race' apart was the key guiding principle for Harrison. As Spender points out,

> I think Tom [Harrison], having worked a lot in remote parts of the world, was perhaps too anxious to find parallels in the life of this country. And so having observed ritualistic dancing, and the masks, the costumes and other art connected with it, he would constantly be on the lookout for the same sort of thing in Bolton … He had a tendency to wish things on to events in that way. *(1982: 16)*

Being constantly on the lookout for such things would undoubtedly shape what is looked for and why; it would also produce a tendency to prejudge how such things might be understood. However, as Ben Highmore quite rightly points outs, 'the taken-for-granted aspects of daily life can be questioned by treating them … *as if* they were part of a totally unfamiliar culture' (2002: 87–8). But the problem with this when applied to the Bolton version of Mass-Observation is that for the leaders of the project there was no *as if*; quite simply, they did not have to pretend that the everyday life of Bolton was a part of a totally unfamiliar culture for the very straightforward reason that it was a totally unfamiliar culture. There is absolutely no need to defamiliarize, as the whole point of the investigation is to *make familiar* what is not known. The reason why it is not known is a consequence of divisions of social class. Seeing contradictions and complexities can often blind us to the fundamental politics of the Bolton project. Thinking it is crude and simplistic to focus on class privilege can make us miss what is central to the assumptions of Mass-Observation – the need to construct the working class as an object of middle-class knowledge. We see it in what seem like the most innocent of observations. When for example, they discuss the popularity of the dance the Lambeth Walk, they are very clear why its popularity is significant: 'if we can get at the reason for the fashion, and see it in its setting, it may help us to understand the way in which the mass is tending' (Madge and Harrison 1939: 140).[4]

Quite often the condescension towards the working class is quite explicit. They can happily describe them as living their lives 'as the obedient automata of a system' (*Mass-Observation* 1937: 9). They also hope that the activities of Mass-Observation 'will counteract the tendency so universal in modern life to perform all our actions through sheer habit, with as little consciousness of our surroundings as though we were walking in our sleep' (ibid.). The pronoun 'our' may appear to be inclusive, but it is very difficult to imagine that Madge and Harrison would include themselves or their friends and helpers in a supposed population of people walking in their sleep. At times they seemed aware of the problem. 'How little we

know of our next-door neighbour and his habits. Of conditions of life and thought in another class or district our ignorance is complete. The anthropology of ourselves is still only a dream' (10). It is deeply misleading, therefore, to suggest that Mass-Observation, especially in its Bolton version, sought to 'study ourselves' (Harrison 1961: 17). The actual situation was far from this. What we had was the middle class studying the everyday lives of the working class. Harrison is very clear on this intention: 'to observe the mass and seek to have the mass observe itself: the first by field study (mainly our northern interest) of actual behaviour under normal living conditions; the second (mainly of interest to Charles Madge and his friends in London) through self-documentation and "subjective" reportage' (Harrison 1961: 17).[5] An anthropology of ourselves may sound inclusive and democratic, but such hopes fade quickly when we realize that the class and district selected is the working class of Bolton and 'our ignorance' is that of middle-class intellectuals. Although Harrison is happy to make frivolous comparisons between the schoolboys of Harrow and the people of the island of Malekula, he never once suggests that his former public school, or others like it, should and could be an object of anthropological study. Similarly, Harrison claimed that the only reason he had picked Bolton was because it was the birthplace of the founder of the Unilever Combine (William Lever, later Lord Leverhulme, who helped finance Mass-Observation in Bolton), which he said was the only part of western civilization that had influenced the inhabitants of Malekula. But if Lever had been born in Tunbridge Wells it is very unlikely that he would have followed him there. Although Bolton was by no means an entirely working-class town, there can be no doubt that this was the real reason why Harrison selected it. He described the town as 'a city of wooden clogs, grimy faces, manual workers' (quoted in Jeffery 1978: 27). For Harrison it was a typical northern industrial town and that is why he picked it. As he more straightforwardly explains 'But we have from the start considered it as Worktown, because what counts is not only its particular characteristics as a place, but all it shares in common with other principal working-class and industrial workplaces throughout Britain' (1961: 24). Tunbridge Wells has much in common with other middle-class towns, but who from Harrow would ever consider for a moment constructing it as an object of study?

Although not all who worked with Harrison were middle or upper-middle class, the vast majority was, and numbers working on the project increased dramatically 'during the Oxford and Cambridge University vacations' (Harrison 1961: 26). Moreover, as Cary Cross points out, 'Contrary to Harrison's claim, observers were not "unobserved". Not only did public school accents give them away, but obvious class privileges and values shaped how they perceived and were seen by the Worktowners. One observer was hardly unobtrusive when he arrived at Blackpool in his Bentley while Worktowners took the train' (1990: 10). Spender, for example, was very well aware of these class differences, 'the class distinction, the fact that I was somebody from another planet, intruding on another kind of life' (1982: 16). His own childhood experience of being upper-middle class is very typical: '[I] came from a privileged background of nannies and governesses. There

were always servants in the house and we were really protected from it (i.e. contact with the working class) … so immediately that set up a particular attraction towards forbidden fruit, towards the common people' (quoted in Jeffery 1978: 27). Some of these class differences are captured in his account of when a pub landlord asked him not to take photographs of the pub's customers. Spender's response was, as he later admitted, driven by class privilege and snobbery. 'My rather pompous response to the publican must have been pretty insufferable; and it's painful to read now' (Spender 1982: 16).[6] The painter Julian Trevelyan was also very conscious of class difference. 'I was aware … of the gulf that separated me from these English workers, the gulf of education, language, accent, and social behaviour' (1957: 85). Trevelyan took Harrison to meet his aunt, who lived between Bolton and Manchester. She was not impressed with her nephew's new friend. 'I can see he doesn't think much of us up here'. Trevelyan's comment on this remark is quite revealing. 'For there was a streak of arrogance about him, and he often made people feel that they were nothing more than specimens under his powerful microscope' (86). If this is how Trevelyan was made to feel, an upper-middle class man with an independent income, it must have been overwhelming for the working-class men and women of Bolton.[7]

The motivation for social exploration, as already noted, can take various forms – sense of injustice, pity, shame, guilt, fear, condescension – but it is always enabled by the fact that class position allows one class to explore the everyday lives of another class. In other words, the social exploration of the everyday lives of the working class is an expression of class privilege. The documentary mode used by middle-class social exploration tends to pass off what is constructed (i.e. the production of meaning) as if it were a simple reflection of reality. Michel Foucault's concept of discourse may help us understand the problems with the 'innocence' of this way of working. One of Foucault's primary concerns is the relationship between knowledge and power and how this relationship operates within discourses. Discourses work in three ways, they enable, they constrain, and they constitute. As Foucault explains, discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (1989: 49). Discourses produce knowledge and knowledge is always a weapon of power: 'it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together' (Foucault 2009: 318). Therefore, Mass-Observation's account of the working class does not just produce knowledge, it also produces power over an understanding of the working class. In this way, then, 'power produces knowledge … power and knowledge directly imply one another … there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations' (1979: 27). Power, therefore, should not be thought of as a negative force, something which denies, represses, negates; power is productive. As Foucault explains, 'We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it "excludes", it "represses", it "censors", it "abstracts", it "masks", it "conceals". In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth' (194). Power produces reality; through discourses it

produces the 'truths' we live by: 'Each society has its own regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth – that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true' (Foucault 2002: 131). What Foucault calls 'regimes of truth' do not have to be 'true', they have only to be thought of as 'true' and acted on as if 'true'. If ideas are believed, they establish, legitimate and authorize particular regimes of truth. For example, before it was discovered that the Earth is round, thinking the Earth was flat was to be in the regime of truth of contemporary science and theology; saying it was round could get you tortured or killed. What the Mass-Observation and the middle-class tradition of social exploration more generally establishes, then, is a regime of truth about the working class. It is a discourse to inform 'us' about 'them' and in so doing it produces and reproduces relations of power in which one class is a subject that looks and the other class is an object to be looked at.[8]

Keeping promises

Mass-Observation, and the middle-class tradition of social exploration more generally, can be criticized, and rightly so, for their use of certain organizing assumptions – the working class as (i) a 'race' apart, (ii) inarticulate, (iii) an object of middle-class knowledge – but this work, especially Mass-Observation, did bring a new kind of critical attention to popular culture and everyday life. As Madge points out, 'As it is, M-O did indeed begin to look more closely, and makes others look more closely, at what politics and religion [for example] mean in the world of "ordinary people"' (1961: 278). And as Madge continues, 'What we were looking for was a more imaginative and active kind of sociology than seemed available at the time' (278). Cultural studies, I would contend, is at its best this more imaginative and active sociology. But, if it wishes to remain academically and politically relevant, it cannot, to borrow a phrase from Madge, be or become 'just an amusing exercise in triviality' (1961: 280). But to be very clear, Mass-Observation, certainly in its Bolton version, failed to produce what it promised, 'an anthropology of ourselves' (*Mass-Observation*, 1937: 10). Its failure was a result of the critical assumptions used to frame and interpret its investigations, especially its inability to move outside the social exploration paradigm of dominant class fixing its critical gaze on subordinate class (a model in which the working class are the passive objects of the middle-class gaze). It is hoped that cultural studies can keep the promises made (and then broken) by Mass-Observation and produce inclusive and detailed accounts of everyday life.

Notes

1. A work that should present an interesting bridge between middle-class social exploration and Mass-Observation is George Orwell's account of the working class in Northern England. In 1936 Orwell spent two months living with and observing working people in Barnsley, Sheffield and Wigan. The result was the book *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). But, ultimately, it is a very disappointing book, in which Orwell is

too obsessed with their own problems to really reveal much about the problems of others.

2. I will be ignoring its important links with Surrealism (see Highmore 2002 for an excellent discussion of these connections).
3. There seems to have been a middle-class obsession with the olfactory. Orwell, for example, makes at least seventeen references to the different ways in which 'the lower classes smell' (2001: 119).
4. It was in fact the Blackheath group who carried out the research on the Lambeth Walk. It tended to use research methods quite different from those employed in Bolton. For example, the Blackheath group recruited about 400 people (voluntary and full-time) to complete its Day Surveys (one-day diaries on the 12th of every month). They were also asked to respond to occasional questions about everyday activities (known as Directives).
5. While it may be true that Mass-Observation in its stated aims, especially in terms of the research organized outside its work in Bolton and Blackpool, did 'not set out in a quest of truth or facts for their own sake, or for the sake of an intellectual minority, but aims at exposing them in simple terms to all observers' (quoted in Highmore 2002: 90), it is also true that its first book, *May 12th* (1937), sold for 12s 6d at a time when the average wage for a mill worker in Bolton was about 25s a week. At today's prices the book would cost about £240. It is not difficult to see that this is not a book many in Bolton would have been able to afford.
6. Orwell, who came from a similar background, provides an explanation for the snobbery explicit in Spender's behaviour. 'I suppose there is no place where it is cultivated in such refined and subtle forms as in an English public school … You forget your Latin and Greek within a few months of leaving school … but your snobbishness, unless you persistently root it out like the bindweed it is, sticks by you till your grave' (2001: 128).
7. The Blackheath volunteers tended to be lower-middle class, whereas those working in Bolton, with a few exceptions, tended to be upper-middle class, with Oxbridge and public school educations and often of independent means. For example, 'Many of the observers, including ourselves [Trevelyan and Ralph Parker], worked for Tom for love' (Trevelyan 1957: 97). This was of course only possible because they had independent incomes.
8. An excellent example of this is Orwell's discussion of supposed working-class attitudes to education. 'Of course I know now that there is not one working-class boy in a thousand who does not pine for the day when he will leave school. He wants to do real work, not wasting time on ridiculous rubbish like history and geography' (2001: 107). This gross simplification produces a 'knowledge' of the working class that suggests that educating them is a waste of time and money – they just want to work. It is therefore better to keep the money where it is and where history and geography are not ridiculous, in middle-class education. This may not have been Orwell's intention, but it is the logic of his discourse.

5

PHENOMENOLOGICAL SOCIOLOGY AND EVERYDAY LIFE

In this chapter I will be examining what phenomenological sociology can tell us about everyday life. In particular I will be engaging with the work of Alfred Schutz and Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. This is a tradition that refuses to take everyday life for granted. It argues that if we are to understand it we must begin with the actual phenomena of everyday life – its mundane, material realities. It insists that if we begin with pre-defined categories, such as class struggle or the unconscious, we will only *theorize* about the everyday. Instead we should try to see it without a preconceived framework of analysis; try to get at how it is humanly constructed and humanly reproduced.[1]

Key to this approach is the claim that 'all social phenomena [including everyday life] are constructions produced historically through human activity' (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 123). Moreover, 'Both in its genesis (social order is the result of past human activity) and its existence in any instant of time (social order exists only and in so far as human activity continues to produce it) it is a human product' (70). Put more succinctly, 'reality is socially constructed' (13). We can understand this by thinking about how what we think of as social reality is different in different societies and communities. What is taken for granted in one society or community (taken as 'common sense') is seen as very strange in another. Think of the many different ways around the world that human beings greet each other when they first meet. None of these greetings is natural; they might all seem natural to the people who take them for granted but all are in fact social constructions – humanly produced actions and interactions that have become embodied and embedded in social practice as to appear to be without a history. It follows from this that what is taken for granted ('the way things are') cannot be an outcome of nature and must therefore be something humanly constructed – a socially constructed reality. The social reality of people living in a religious community in Wales, for example, is very different from the social reality of people working in the banking

sector of any large European city. They will each see the world very differently and will act differently on the basis of this understanding. What one sees as normal and common sense, the other is likely to see as strange and unusual. These realities are not natural; they have to be humanly constructed. Therefore to understand everyday life we have to strip it down to its basic human constructedness and see it as 'a human product, or, more precisely, an ongoing human production' (69).

We are each born into an everyday life that existed before our birth; it is a world that was already constituted and organized as a result of the particular actions and interactions of other humans who were born before, and often a very long time before us. They also entered the everyday as a place already made by other humans. In this way, then, everyday life is always experienced by each individual as pre-structured with already existing rules and regulations, institutions and social practices. What is already in place limits and constrains each individual in his or her efforts to make a 'world' of their own. Although what we encounter limits and constrains, it does not simply determine our actions: it presents a community that also enables us to define a place for our own development. The social space we first occupy includes 'the sedimentation of all of man's previous experiences, organized in the habitual possessions of his stock of knowledge' (Schutz 1970: 73). This stock of knowledge confronts us as that which is to be taken for granted. As Schutz explains, everyday life is an 'intersubjective world which existed long before our birth, experienced and interpreted by others, our predecessors, as an organized world. Now it is given to our experience and interpretation. All interpretation of this world is based upon a stock of previous experiences of it, our own experiences and those handed down to us by our parents and teachers, which in the form of "knowledge at hand" function as a scheme of reference' (72). In other words, my actions and interactions with others in everyday life will depend on this shared 'social stock of knowledge' (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 56). However, this knowledge is always experienced from the perspective of our own biographies (social class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, etc.). Therefore, the stock of knowledge we inherit from the social and historical context into which we are born, together with our own biographical situation, act as 'a scheme of interpretation of … past and present experiences, and also determines … anticipations of things to come' (Schutz 1970: 74). And of course the biographies on offer are historically and socially variable and will depend on the nature of the social structure and its arrangements of power. This is '[b]ecause an individual is born into a historical social world, his biographical situation is, from the beginning, socially delimited and determined by social givens that find specific expression' (Schutz 1974: 243). My social class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc. will all have the potential to determine and delimit my experience of everyday life, to make some things possible and other things seem highly unlikely. The structure of everyday life is therefore both temporal and spatial: the historical moment and the social situation into which we are born conditions our experience of the everyday. For example, being born into a working-class family in the second part of the twentieth century rather than in the first part of the nineteenth makes an enormous difference to my experience of the everyday.

How we understand the world to be meaningful and how these meanings in turn regulate our actions and interactions become embodied and realized in habitualized routines. 'All human activity is subject to habitualization. Any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern, which can then be reproduced with an economy of effort and which, *ipso facto*, is apprehended by its performer *as* that pattern' (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 70–71). This should not be understood as simple conformity. A better way to understand it is in terms of learning a language in order to communicate with others. Language both constrains and enables communication: it provides us with meanings and allows us to make meaning. Habitualization works in a similar way. 'Habitualized actions, of course, retain their meaningful character for the individual although the meanings involved become embedded as routines in his general stock of knowledge, taken for granted by him and at hand for his projects into the future' (71). The inherited social stock of knowledge can take many forms, but one form tends to predominate in everyday life – what Berger and Luckmann call 'recipe knowledge'. 'Since everyday life is dominated by the pragmatic motive, recipe knowledge, that is, knowledge limited to pragmatic competence in routine performances, occupies a prominent place in the social stock of knowledge' (56). For example, I use a laptop every day. Although I know how to use it, I do not know how to repair it if it fails to work. But if it does break down I know where to take it to be mended. My knowledge of my laptop is limited to what I need to know in order for me to use it. This stock of habitualized knowledge, often contradictory and changing, becomes habitualized to the extent that we do not think of it as knowledge at all. It is simply how things are and the natural way to respond to situations. This helps produce a world that is accepted and taken for granted. I have sufficient recipe knowledge to use the laptop and also the knowledge necessary to know where to take it if it breaks. If I do not think about it, and usually I do not, this distribution or division of knowledge seems perfectly normal and natural to me. However, if I give it a moment of critical reflection I start to wonder about the historical changes and the human actions and interactions that have brought about this situation, and this division of labour and knowledge, that I now simply take for granted.

> To take the world for granted beyond question implies the deep-rooted assumption that until further notice the world will go on substantially in the same manner as it has so far; that what has proved to be valid up to now will continue to be so, and that anything we or others like us could successfully perform once can be done again in a like way and will bring about substantially like results.
>
> *(Schutz 1970: 80)*

These processes of habitualization are often institutionalized: some people will be expected to follow particular routines and particular routines will be expected of some people. Denis becomes a professional footballer, Melissa becomes an academic, while Amy becomes a soldier, and Nigel goes to prison, and as a result of

the institution they have chosen or has been chosen for them, their lives will be very different – these institutions have significant plans for them. Institutions both habitualize and structure everyday life. 'Institutions … by the very fact of their existence, control human conduct by setting up predefined patterns of conduct, which channel it in one direction as against the many other directions that would theoretically be possible' (Berger and Luckmann 1991; 72). Denis, Nigel, Melissa and Amy will learn this very quickly. Institutions seem to come with the stamp of historical validity. They bring to our everyday actions and interactions the weight of history, both enabling and constraining our freedom of movement. It often seems that forces that have their origins in the past are shaping what we are doing in the present. As children we learn a language already known by others; we go to school, like many children have done before us, and we learn about things that have been learned before. In this way, then, everyday life is always both historical and contemporary. It exists as a result of human actions and interactions in the past and the continuation of human actions and interactions in the present.

As Berger and Luckmann argue, 'Institutions are embodied in individual experience by means of roles … By playing roles, the individual participates in a social world. By internalizing these roles, the same world becomes subjectively real to him' (91). We might be a mother, a sister, a daughter, a grandmother, a doctor, a dentist, a cleaner or a carer – each of these roles makes concrete and visible the structure of everyday life. Our participation also makes the everyday subjectively real to us but, equally, the institutional roles we play produce the objective institutional reality of everyday life – it is this that makes it a human construction. When, for example, students start at university the first week (usually called something like *Induction Week*) is when they are made aware of expectations of the institution they have entered. To continue to be a student it is necessary to continually meet these expectations. Very soon the vast majority of new students will accept these expectations as normal and taken for granted and will act accordingly. But we should not therefore think of everyday life as a structure that only limits and constrains our actions. Our actions and interaction contribute to the ongoing making of everyday life. We make our social worlds and these take on an objective social reality and it is this objective social reality that in turn enables and constrains our actions and interactions. 'The world of everyday life is the scene and also the object of our actions and interactions … Thus, we work and operate not only within but upon the world' (Schutz 1970: 73). We act upon it to achieve our goals and it acts upon us. In this way, everyday life 'is something that we have to modify by our actions or that modifies our actions' (ibid.). For example, to be a father is a role I can play but in order to play it I have to modify my actions in order to conform to current social expectations of appropriate fatherhood. In other words, I have agency but my agency is enabled and constrained by a structure. But more than this, my agency makes the structure manifest and visible. To return to the previous example, a university without students would very quickly cease to be a university.

According to phenomenological sociology to fully understand everyday life we need to recognize that it exists simultaneously in 'an ongoing dialectical process of

the three moments of externalization, objectivations and internalization' (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 149). Externalization is the process by which the world is made human. It manifests itself in things such as language and institutions. In turn these become like objects to us. Objectivation is the process whereby we enter these human constructions as if they were objective structures. Language, for example, enables and constrains how I can think and communicate, but without it I can do neither. Finally, internalization is when these objective structures become subjective to us: language allows me to construct an identity I can share with others and myself. Put simply, we make the world, it becomes an objective reality, and we make our subjective existence within and through this reality. On a more personal level, externalization happens when I express myself in language; objectivation is the process of entering language to allow communication to take place; and internalization is how I come to take both externalization and objectivation for granted. These three moments happen when we situate ourselves into the institutions and social practices of the world into which we were born. According to Berger and Luckmann everyday life is constructed from 'the objectivations of subjective processes (and meanings)' (1991: 34). What they mean by this is that how we act and interact in everyday life is enabled and constrained by taken-for-granted institutions and social practices. The more we internalize the objective world outside ourselves, the more the world becomes our world – our everyday reality. If I am angry or happy there are socially accepted ways to display these feelings. These modes of display are not 'natural'; I have learned and internalized ('objectivated') them to the point where they are now 'common sense'. They are the 'language' I speak when I act in a particular way. Again, we see the three moments of externalization, objectivations and internalization. But more than this, these processes of internalization confirm my social identity as a person who does this or that. Moreover, they also confirm for me my subjective understanding of social reality. As Berger and Luckmann explain, 'Society, identity and reality are subjectively crystallized in the same process of internalization' (153).

Everyday life is both objective and subjective. As we have seen, my social identity depends on a certain amount of symmetry between objective and subjective reality. Part of this process includes the recognition of the subjective reality of others. As they become real to me, I become real to them. We recognize that in our reciprocity we share a common existence, that we define reality in ways that are recognizably similar and we share recognizably similar ways of acting and interacting. In other words, everyday life is intersubjective; it is a world I share with others. Although I know that my 'here and now' is not the same as the 'here and now' of any other, 'I know that there is an ongoing correspondence between my meanings and their meanings in this world, that we share a common sense about its reality … Common-sense knowledge is the knowledge I share with others in the normal, self-evident routines of everyday life' (37). Without this shared sense of what is self-evident and what is common sense everyday life would be very difficult. When people travel to another country and they encounter 'culture shock' what they experience is the absence of this shared sense of what is

self-evident and what is common sense. Suddenly they are confronted by what someone else thinks is self-evident and common sense. This can be a very disorientating experience, as our taken-for-granted can no longer be taken for granted.

Objectivation allows me access to the subjectivity of another person. My friend shows me he is angry by his bodily movements and facial expressions. These bodily movements and facial expressions are available for me to use to show another person I am angry. But my friend and I did not invent these ways of acting; we borrowed them from a repertoire of other bodily movements and facial expressions that objectivate subjective feelings. But these borrowings become so embodied and so socially embedded that they seem to have been there all the time. If, for example, I have an argument with my wife this can be understood as 'marriage trouble'. This understanding makes sense to myself, to others, and to my wife. In this way my quarrel with my wife has both an objective and subjective reality. As Berger and Luckmann point out, this is because 'my biographical experiences are ongoingly subsumed under general orders of meaning that are both objectively and subjectively real' (54). These objectivations are not only the common currency of everyday life; they are what make everyday life possible. As has already been suggested, 'The reality of everyday life is not only filled with objectivations; it is only possible because of them' (50). Everyday life is full of objects that embody and express the subjectivities and subjective feelings of my fellow citizens and myself. In other words, I am who I am to myself and to others through a series of objectivations and these tend to be guaranteed by various socially recognized and taken-for-granted institutional arrangements.

> Every individual is born into an objective social structure within which he encounters the significant others who are in charge of his socialization. These significant others are imposed upon him. Their definitions of his situation are posited for him as objective reality. He is thus born into not only an objective social structure but also an objective social world. The significant others who mediate this world to him modify it in the course of mediating it. They select aspects of it in accordance with their own location in the social structure, and also by virtue of their individual, biographically rooted idiosyncrasies. The social world is 'filtered' to the individual through this double selectivity.
>
> *(Berger and Luckmann 1991: 150)*

The working-class child will encounter a working-class perspective filtered through the particular perspective of his or her parents (and other significant individuals involved in their primary socialization). This may induce a sense of resentment and rebellion or contentment and resignation. As a result, the symbolic world internalized by the working-class child may be different from that of the working-class child who lives next door and will almost certainly be different from the symbolic world of the middle-class child born on the other side of town. The picture may well be

further complicated by the fact that one working-class child may share the same place in the social structure with another working-class child, while sharing a perspective on the world (derived from, say, the politics of his or her parents) with a child from a middle-class background. In this complex way our social identities are formed and reformed; we are identified by significant others and we self-identify: there is a dialectic between 'objectively assigned and subjectively appropriated identity' (152). As we develop there is 'an ongoing balancing act' (154) between our subjective reality and the reality of the objective world. Depending on our location in the social structure, this ongoing balancing act may be easy or difficult to perform. Social mobility, either up or down the social structure, can make the balancing act very difficult indeed. This is because 'The child does not internalize the world of his significant others as one of many possible worlds. He internalizes it as *the* world, the only existent and only conceivable world, the world *tout court*' (ibid.). As a consequence, the world internalized in primary socialization is so much more deeply embedded in our sense of self than any of the other worlds internalized in secondary socialization. 'Primary socialization thus accomplishes what (in hindsight, of course) may be seen as the most important confidence trick that society plays on the individual – to make appear as necessity what is in fact a bundle of contingencies, and thus to make meaningful the accident of his birth' (155). The power of this confidence trick is captured perfectly in sayings such as 'You can take the girl out of Manchester but you can't take Manchester out of the girl' or 'You can take the boy out of the working-class but you can't take the working-class out of the boy'. Our primary socialization may have a profound impact on our ability to perform the ongoing balancing act between our subjective reality and the reality of the objective world.

Secondary socialization is very different. It does not depend on emotional identification. Nor does it encourage us to see the new world as the only world. This recognition of the plurality of worlds can have a profound impact. As Berger and Luckmann explain, 'the child internalizes the world of his parents as *the* world, and not as a world appertaining to a specific institutional context. Some of the crises that occur after primary socialization are indeed caused by the recognition that the world of one's parents is *not* the only world there is, but a very specific social location, perhaps even one with a pejorative connotation' (161). For example, infancy, taken for granted as belonging to the natural and inevitable world of universal childhood, might unexpectedly seem far from natural and inevitable when an academically gifted working-class child encounters for the first time middle-class children and middle-class teachers. Suddenly the working-class child finds itself having to move between two worlds. What was once seen as natural and inevitable suddenly seems anything but; what had once been taken for granted is now open to challenge. The plurality of possible worlds suddenly introduces difficult decisions where before existed only the inevitability of social 'destiny'.

As we have seen, everyday life consists of many institutions (family, law, education, religion, etc.) with many institutional roles to play (father, criminal, student, priest, etc.). Although they have all been humanly produced we experience them

as an objective reality, with an ability to exercise control over our conduct. Our temporary existence is confronted by their historical and objective facticity: they were here before we were born and will be here after we die. According to Schutz, 'Any member born or reared within the group accepts the ready-made standardized scheme of the cultural pattern handed down to him by ancestors, teachers, and authorities as an unquestioned and unquestionable guide in all situations which normally occur within the social world' (1970: 81). We are in effect born into a symbolic world of meaning; a great answering machine that responds to all our questions: what does this mean, how do we make sense of that? 'The symbolic universe is conceived of as the matrix of *all* socially objectivated and subjectively real meanings; the entire historic society and the entire biography of the individual are seen as events taking place *within* this universe' (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 114). Everything we do and think is located within this 'matrix'. Our everyday experiences but also our fantasies and our dreams are ultimately made sense of within it. Our rebellions and challenges are always rebellions and challenges from within and against this matrix. It is the measure of all we think and do.

Although it is all encompassing and an overarching realm of meaning, and feels as natural as nature, we should not forget that everyday life is a human production. But we do forget that it is because of what Schutz calls 'the natural attitude' (1974: 4). The natural attitude shields us from ontological uncertainty and insecurity. 'In the natural attitude, I always find myself in a world which is for me taken for granted and self-evidently "real" … It is the unexamined ground of everything given in my experience, as it were, the taken-for-granted frame in which all the problems which I must overcome are placed' (ibid.). The natural attitude assumes reciprocity of perspectives; it assumes that if you were in my place you would think in ways similar to me, and I would think in similar ways to you if I were in your place. The intersubjective nature of everyday life, embodied in the natural attitude, 'also contains the implicit assumption that they, my fellow-men, experience their relations which reciprocally include me in a way that is similar, for all practical purposes, to the way in which I experience them' (5).

Everyday life is also characterized by what are called 'typification': it is patterned by reciprocal schemes of social perception in which the world is experienced in terms of types. That is to say, we at first encounter each other in terms of typical categories: man or woman, old or young, friendly or unfriendly, etc. On the basis of these typifications we begin our interactions and, because of typification, these will tend to follow a particular pattern. Therefore, our interactions are typical in a dual sense: we encounter each other as types and we interact in ways that are typical. As Schutz points out, 'Typification undoubtedly contributes to the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life. It transforms unique individual actions of unique human beings into typical functions of typical social types, originating in typical motives aimed at bringing about typical ends' (1970: 120). A brother is expected to act like a typical brother, a mother to act like a typical mother, and when the man or woman acts as these types they typify themselves and continue the process of typification. In this way typification operates both as a mode of interpretation

(typification as a way of seeing the world) and as a mode of orientation (self-typification). The reciprocity between interpretation and orientation has the effect of reinforcing the routineness of the everyday. Everyday life, therefore,

> is experienced from the outset as a typical one. Objects are experienced as trees, animals, and the like, and more specifically as oaks, firs, maples, or rattlesnakes, sparrows, dogs … What is newly experienced is already known in the sense that it recalls similar or equal things formerly perceived. But what has been grasped once in its typicality carries with it a horizon of possible experience with corresponding references to familiarity, that is, a series of typical characteristics still not actually experienced but expected to be potentially experienced. If I see a dog, that is, if we recognize an object as being an animal and more precisely as a dog, we anticipate a certain behaviour on the part of this dog, a typical (not individual) way of eating, of running, of playing, of jumping, and so on … In other words, what has been experienced in the actual perception of one object is apperceptively transferred to any similar object, perceived merely as its type.
>
> *(116–17)*

Typification goes beyond simple objects and animals, it includes social practices and social institutions. As Schutz explains,

> What the sociologist calls 'system', 'role', 'status', 'role expectation', 'situation', and 'institution', is experienced by the individual actor on the social scene in entirely different terms. To him all the factors denoted by these concepts are elements of a network of typification – typifications of human individuals, of their course-of-action patterns, of their motives and goals, or of the sociocultural products which originated in their actions.
>
> *(119)*

Like so much else in everyday life, typifications are inherited at birth.

> The knowledge of these typifications and of their appropriate use is an inseparable element of the sociocultural heritage handed down to the child … by his parents and his teachers and the parents of his parents and the teachers of his teachers; it is thus, socially derived. The sum total of these various typifications constitutes a frame of reference in terms of which not only the sociocultural, but also the physical world has to be interpreted, a frame of reference that, in spite of its inconsistencies and its inherent opaqueness, is nonetheless sufficiently integrated and transparent to be used for solving most of the practical problems at hand.
>
> *(ibid.)*

We share with each other a 'reciprocity of perspectives' (Schutz 1974: 60). In other words, we share the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life. That is, we share

an everyday way of seeing the world. Moreover, the typifications we share confirm on a daily basis our sense of belonging; our sense that all is mostly as it should be.

> All of these typifications fill the social world with historically quite specific contents, which the individual learns as possibilities, impossibilities, and taken-for-grantednesses for his course of life. The individual experiences the social world which is already given to him and objectivated … as a scale of subjective probabilities related to him, as an ordering of duties, possibilities, and goals attainable with ease or with difficulty. In other words, the social structure is open to him in the form of typical biographies.
>
> *(95)*

The symbolic universe of everyday life is divided into different zones of relevance. The first of these is 'the zone of primary relevance' (Schutz 1970: 112). As Berger and Luckmann put it, 'The reality of everyday life is organized around the "here" of my body and the "now" of my present' (1991: 36). This is the world of our immediate surroundings where we seem to have most control to change and rearrange things.[2] I am writing these words at a table in my study. I am surrounded by books, hand-written notes and ripped up pieces of paper. This is a world of which I have some control. But I am also aware of other realities that are not as close and accessible as this immediate zone. I may not have any interest in these other zones or my interest may be very indirect, but I am aware they exist; and I am aware they may have a direct or indirect impact on the immediate zone of my everyday life. I know for instance that my zone of primary relevance depends on a secondary zone where I have very little control: libraries and bookshops. A third zone which I have even less control over is the utilities of heat, light and electricity on which I depend in order to write these words. Outside my window I can hear the village in which I live. I can hear neighbours talking and children playing, and occasionally I hear a dog bark or the sound of music. What goes on out there seems at the moment to have little impact on what I am doing at my table. But the four zones of relevance I have just outlined will not necessarily stay in the hierarchy in which I have just located them. When I need to eat the village Co-op would move from the outer circle to the primary zone of relevance. If I walk to the shop I may see many of the things I had previously only heard outside my window and as a result their relevance may change. In this way our zones of relevance are constantly shifting as our interests and actions change. Moreover, the way I have presented this might suggest that zones of relevance have closed borders. In fact the opposite is true. Our zones of relevance not only shift in terms of importance, they also intermingle and merge. Without food from the village Co-op my effort to write these words would very quickly come to a halt. It is our interests that determine our zones of relevance. However, although we move between different zones, there is always what Berger and Luckmann call 'the paramount reality of everyday life' (1991: 36).

> Compared to the reality of everyday life, other realities appear as finite provinces of meaning, enclaves within the paramount reality marked by circumscribed meanings and modes of experience. The paramount reality envelops them on all sides, as it were, and consciousness always returns to the paramount reality as from an excursion.
>
> *(39)*

The paramount reality is the measure of all other realities. By locating and explaining all realities in and by the matrix of the symbolic universe, it seeks to contain the threat to the reality of everyday life, to insist that everyday reality is reality itself. No matter how strange an experience may be, if it can be explained by this paramount reality, its strangeness cannot threaten this reality and we are returned safely to the reality of everyday life.

> For example the symbolic universe determines the significance of dreams within the reality of everyday life, re-establishing in each instance the paramount status of the latter and mitigating the shock that accompanies the passage from one reality to another. The provinces of meaning that would otherwise remain unintelligible enclaves within the reality of everyday life are thus ordered in terms of a hierarchy of realities, *ipso facto* becoming intelligible and less terrifying. This integration of the realities of marginal situations within the paramount reality of everyday life is of great importance, because these situations constitute the most acute threat to the taken-for-granted, routinized existence in society.
>
> *(115–16)*

I may have nightmares or I may take hallucinogenic drugs, but these experiences are always measured against the paramount reality of the matrix of the symbolic universe. As Berger and Luckmann explain, it is the symbolic universe of meaning, the paramount reality, which secures and safeguards the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life. The symbolic universe orders our individual biographies: it guides us through the different periods of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. We know these different periods and the experiences and expectations that typify each biographical phase by reference to this paramount reality. It is the symbolic universe that guarantees our sense of identity. The paramount reality of the symbolic universe locates everyday life, and us within everyday life, in a continuum of past, present and future. But we should not think that the symbolic universe is a closed system, inhabited by everyone in exactly the same way. Socialization into this matrix varies from individual to individual. Some of us learn to live within the matrix better than others. There are always other versions of reality. If these alternative versions become widely accepted they present 'not only a theoretical threat to the symbolic universe, but a practical one to the institutional order legitimated by the symbolic universe' (124). Such challenges will usually be confronted by the repressive apparatus of the guardians of the official version of reality, because this is

what paramount reality is, it is the officially sanctioned, and if necessary coercively supported, reality of our everyday life. This again draws attention to the fact that

> Reality is socially defined. But the definitions are always *embodied*, that is, concrete individuals and groups of individuals serve as definers of reality. To understand the state of the socially constructed universe at any given time, or its change over time, one must understand the social organization that permits the definers to do their defining. Put a little crudely, it is essential to keep pushing questions about the historically available conceptualizations of reality from the abstract "What?" to the sociologically concrete "Says who?" *(134)*

The symbolic universe of another society, with its own official traditions of what is taken-for-granted, its own official version of reality, presents an even greater challenge. This would not represent a deviation from what we take for granted; it would represent a matrix of meaning that is totally different. 'The appearance of an alternative symbolic universe poses a threat because its very existence demonstrates empirically that one's own universe is less than inevitable' (126). But the threat to ontological instability and insecurity is always countered by the fact that these other potential realities are always encountered from the perspective, and from within, of our own paramount reality. My experiences of other realities (religious, aesthetic, scientific, dreams, drug-induced, etc.) are always translated into the language of my paramount reality. While these arrangements hold all alternative realities will be just that, alternatives that are defined and defused by the power of the paramount reality of my everyday life. Until these arrangements are broken, I will remain securely and safely within my society's official version of reality. It remains the measure of all possible alternatives.

Conclusions

In conclusion, then, phenomenological sociology seeks to show how everyday life is a human construct that each individual confronts at birth as a taken-for-granted realm of routine. Typifications, with their accompanying anticipations and prescriptions, which, as has been suggested, we mostly take for granted, make everyday life seem so natural. But, to repeat, the naturalness of the everyday is socially constructed. Although there seems absolutely nothing here to explain, it is all so obvious and self-evident, but the normality of everyday life is a learned normality. Each individual learns what is 'normal' and of course it is not normal at all. All the things I take for granted I have taken from the world around me. There is individuality, my own biographical situation, in how I have learned these things and how I take them for granted, but they are all socially derived. Under the influence of the natural attitude my world of practical knowledge and typifications remains in the background. It is only when something happens to disturb this that I become conscious of these things. If my typifications continue to fail me I will

revise them. But in most cases they will not. Instead I will continue to follow, without too much ontological concern, the usual everyday patterns and routines. The reality of everyday life maintains itself by being embodied in these patterns and routines and is continually reaffirmed by my interactions with others, especially significant others (family and friends), who continually confirm my subjective reality and my sense of place and identity. Our assumption of the 'natural attitude' ensures that our experience of the everyday continues to be ordinary and routine as what we experience follows predictable patterns and assumes recognizable institutional forms. But fundamental to the natural attitude is the fact that '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 doubt about its reality, I am obliged to suspend such doubt as I routinely exist in everyday life' (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 37). Habitualization, typification, externalization, objectivations and internalization, all continue to contribute to my sense of ontological certainty and security in a symbolic universe of everyday meanings and social practices I mostly take for granted. This is everyday life.

Notes

1. Schutz refers to the everyday as the life-world (*Lebenswelt*). 'The life-world, simply, is the whole sphere of everyday experiences, orientations, and actions through which individuals pursue their interests and affairs by manipulating objects, dealing with people, conceiving plans, and carrying them out' (Wagner 1970: 14–15). 'The life-world is thus a reality which we modify through our acts and which, on the other hand, modifies our actions' (Schutz 1974: 6).
2. Schutz describes this slightly differently. He argues that our everyday worlds are also characterized by certain spatial arrangement. For example, I write at a table surrounded by a world within actual reach. If I go downstairs to make a pot of tea I know I can return to my table and find my laptop and books still in place: this is to return to a world of restorable reach. If while at my table I hear a starling outside and I am curious enough to investigate whether it is returning to a nest in an out-house in the back yard I may decide to enter a world of attainable reach. If I then realize that I know very little about starlings I would also realize that ornithology is a world in which I am a foreigner.

6

SOCIOLOGIES OF AGENCY AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Everyday life has a long and complex history as an object of study in sociology. In this chapter I will critically examine only three sociological accounts: symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and actor-network-theory.[1] Each in a different way sees everyday life as structured by the actions and interactions of its inhabitants.

Symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism began in the work of the 'Chicago School', the University of Chicago's department of sociology. Fundamental to its foundation and development was the study of everyday life. Moreover, from the beginning there was a determination that such investigations must be 'naturalistic'. By naturalistic they meant the insistence that it must be studied as it exists in the everyday and not as it might exist in theoretical speculations about everyday life in lecture theatre or seminar room. This produced a number of groundbreaking studies of everyday life. Perhaps the most significant of these are Frederick Thrasher's *The Delinquent Gang* (1927), Louis Wirth's *The Ghetto* (1928), Harvey Zorbaugh's *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (1929), and Clifford Shaw's *The Jack-Roller* (1930). However, it was not until the second generation of scholars at Chicago that the term symbolic interactionism was used to name this new sociological methodology. Herbert Blumer, who first coined the term, provides a very clear definition of this sociological way of working. It is worth quoting this definition in full in order to be able to understand its conceptualization of everyday life.

> Symbolic interactionism rests in the last instance on three simple premises. The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them. Such things include everything that the human being may note in his world – physical objects, such as trees or

> chairs; other human beings, such as a mother or a store clerk; categories of human beings such as friends or enemies; institutions, such as a school or a government; guiding ideals, such as individual independence or honesty; activities of others, such as their commands or requests; and such situations as an individual encounters in his daily life. The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.
>
> *(1969: 2)*

What is clear is that symbolic interactionism sees everyday life as a world of meanings and interactions. Viewing everyday life in this way is a rejection of any perspective that understands human behaviour as being the result of conscious or unconscious, genetic or environmental, factors that determine such behaviour. These supposed determining forces can take various forms: for example, psychological stimuli, social pressures, genetic disposition, economic forces. In each instance either the force causing a social action or the resulting social action excludes human agency; the meaning of the action for the individual is either ignored or subsumed in the act itself. For example, if a young women, walking with friends in a shopping centre, suddenly starts to cry: this might be explained by what caused the crying (she has just received a text telling her that her boyfriend has found a new girlfriend) or the act of crying itself (the release of fluid from the lacrimal gland). In both cases the meaning of crying in public for the young woman and her friends is either ignored or subsumed under cause or act. Contrary to this, symbolic interactionism seeks to investigate what the act of crying means for the individual crying and the society in which she cries. So, what would happen? Her friends would interact with her on the basis of the symbolic meaning of her tears. They would 'just know' that standing in a public place with tears rolling down her face is an obvious sign that she is distressed and in need of comfort. They would not rush for a medical knowledge of lacrimation; they would interact with her on the basis of tears as a sign of sadness. In the course of the interaction they may ask her about the cause of her tears, but the important thing is to first comfort her. Of course, once the interaction deepens, the cause of her tears will itself become an object with meaning. The significant thing here for symbolic interactionism is that the interaction of friends comforting a young woman crying in public is a consequence of the meaning of her tears and not the tears themselves or their cause.

This takes us to the second premise about the source of meaning. There is a long tradition of regarding the meaning of something as intrinsic to that thing. The meaning of crying, for example, is intrinsic to the act of crying. Meaning is inherent and emanates from the thing in question. Another tradition sees meaning as a personal act of ascription. Crying means this to you and something else to me. Perhaps the most established version of this perspective is Freudianism (see Chapter 2

here). According to this tradition, meaning is always a consequence of unconscious forces, it is always a matter of identifying the associations someone brings to a particular thing. Accordingly, the meaning of crying in public is a matter of personal associations: what does crying in a public space mean in terms of an unconscious motivation? Symbolic interactionism rejects both these versions of the making of meaning. Instead it insists that meanings are always 'social products'; they are 'creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact' (5). In other words, the making of meaning is a collective activity that emerges from social interaction. Our understanding of the meaning of a situation informs how we act, in that we do not respond to the meaning of a situation as an external factor, rather how we understand it as meaningful is fundamental and inseparable from how we act. Everyday life, therefore, is not a world in which action is either a response to or an embodiment of external forces, it is a process in which interpretation and action are almost inseparable. As Blumer points out, we need to pay attention to 'the vital process of interpretation in which the individual notes and assesses what is presented to him and through which he maps out lines of overt behaviour prior to their execution' (15). It was because her friends shared an understanding of the meaning of the young woman crying in public that they knew how to act and interact.

The third premise involves meaning as a process of interpretation. Although meanings are formed during social interaction, they are not 'a mere application of established meanings but … a formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of action' (ibid.). In other words, meanings are not applied in social interaction, as if they came from somewhere else; they are a fundamental part of the interaction itself. We do not engage in action and interaction in everyday life and then introduce meaning; meanings are a constitutive part of the very fabric of social interaction. The meaning of the young woman's tears, and the meaning of the acts of comfort from her friends, is inseparable from the social interaction that occurred when she received the text as they walked through the shopping centre.

On the basis of these three premises, symbolic interactionism sees everyday life as consisting of people engaging in meaningful action. 'The action consists of the multitudinous activities that the individuals perform in their life as they encounter one another and as they deal with the succession of situations confronting them' (6). These actions, both individual and collective, are what define everyday life. As Blumer puts it, 'society exists in action and must be seen in terms of action … human society consists of people engaging in action' (6, 7). Most of this action is in fact social interaction, people interacting with one another. Again we should not see only the causes or outcomes of this interaction and miss the interaction itself. To repeat, it is the interaction that is fundamental to the workings of everyday life. According to Blumer,

> social interaction is a process that forms human conduct instead of being merely a means or a setting for the expression or release of human conduct.

> Put simply, human beings in interacting with one another have to take account of what each other is doing or is about to do; they are forced to direct their own conduct or handle their situations in terms of what they take into account.
>
> *(8)*

In other words, what others do and say enables and constrains what we do and say. If I go to work with the intention of doing A and a colleague asks me to do B, I may do B or I may explain why I have to do A first. In this way my intentions are either changed or postponed because of my interaction with my colleague. If something that has happened in my life makes me very happy and I go to lunch with a friend who is very unhappy, it would seem very inappropriate to display my happiness in front of my friend's sadness. In both examples I would take into account the actions or intended actions of others, and it is this taking into account that helps shape our social interactions. Again, in the example of the young woman crying in the shopping centre, all the interactions that took place were a consequence of taking into account the actions of others.

Social interaction can take one of two forms: non-symbolic and symbolic. The first is action of a direct kind, a reflex response that does not involve an interpretation of the action of the other. For example, a friend knocks over a bottle of wine and I automatically move to one side in order to stop the wine flowing into my lap. However, we rarely respond directly to the action of another, rather our response is usually based on our interpretation of the meaning we attach to the action. So, if my friend was drunk and it was becoming increasingly obvious that he might knock something over and I adjust my position so as to be more able to move quickly if in fact he does do this, then I am engaging in symbolic interaction; I have interpreted the situation and acted accordingly. Both forms of social interaction are to be found in everyday life. As Blumer explains,

> In their association human beings engage plentifully in non-symbolic interaction as they respond immediately and unreflectively to each other's bodily movements, expressions, and tones of voice, but their characteristic mode of interaction is on the symbolic level, as they seek to understand the meaning of each other's action.
>
> *(8–9)*

Everyday life consists of the giving and taking of meaning as we interact with others. If someone makes a gesture towards me, and because meaning is not intrinsic, I have to interpret the gesture. Part of what I have to figure out is if the gesture means the same thing for both of us. If it does we have understanding. In everyday life we do not encounter the simple playing out of meanings that pre-exist it, rather it is the giving and taking of meanings in social interaction that produce what we recognize as everyday life. The friends who responded to the young woman's tears were not simply following a pre-existing model of

interaction, they were interpreting the situation and then acting not just as friends but in a way that produces and reproduces friendship. In other words, their actions were formative. As Blumer explains,

> Human society or group consists of people in association. Such association exists necessarily in the form of people acting toward one another and thus engaging in social interaction. Such interaction in human society is characteristically and predominantly on the symbolic level; as individuals acting individually, collectively, or as agents of some organization encounter one another they are necessarily required to take account of the actions of one another as they form their own action. They do this by a dual process of indicating to others how to act and of interpreting the indications made by others … By virtue of symbolic interaction, human group life is necessarily a formative process and not a mere arena for the expression of pre-existing factors.
>
> *(10)*

According to Blumer, everyday life is constructed out of the many 'lines of action' (20) that are a consequence of people interacting with each other and with the objects that surround them. For symbolic interactionism we are social in a quite particular way. We are social in our interactions with others but also in our interactions with ourselves. Our capacity for self-reflection (seeing oneself as an 'object') allows us to be in dialogue with ourselves and to engage in inner discussions ('self-indications') in order to organize and carry out our social interactions. But in spite of all the talk of action and interaction, Blumer also identifies repetition and stability.

> The preponderant portion of social action in a human society, particularly in a settled society, exists in the form of recurrent patterns of joint action. In most situations in which people act toward one another they have in advance a firm understanding of how to act and of how other people will act. They share common and pre-established meanings of what is expected in the action of the participants, and accordingly each participant is able to guide his own behaviour by such meanings. Instances of repetitive and pre-established forms of joint action are so frequent and common that it is easy to understand why scholars have viewed them as the essence or natural form of human group life.
>
> *(18)*

But the apparent repetition of pre-established meanings gives a very misleading picture of the reality of everyday life. With its focus on the supposed passive following of rules it totally fails to see the action and interaction that sustains everyday life and makes it visible. As Blumer explains, 'It is the social process in group life that creates and upholds the rules, not the rules that create and uphold group life'

(19). So what is this social process? Well, first of all it is not a self-governing network or system in which humans are simply passive participants. If it is a network or a system, it 'does not function automatically because of some inner dynamics or system requirements; it functions because people at different points do something, and what they do is a result of how they define the situation in which they are called to act' (ibid.).

The world of the everyday is composed of objects. These objects are the product of symbolic interaction. An object can be anything that can be referenced in some way. There are three types of objects: physical, social, and abstract. Physical objects include tables, flowers, and buses. A mother, a friend or a teacher count as social objects. Political positions or religious doctrines, or ideas of equality or romantic love are regarded as abstract objects. 'The nature of an object – of any and every object – consists of the meaning that it has for the person for whom it is an object. This meaning sets the way in which he sees the object, the way in which he is prepared to act toward it, and the way in which he is ready to talk about it' (11). Objects may have different meanings for different people. A horse may have a different meaning for a jockey, a trainer, a schoolgirl, a farmer or an artist. 'The meaning of objects for a person arises fundamentally out of the way they are defined to him by others with whom he interacts' (ibid.). Significant others would include parents, teachers, friends, media, and governments. In the mutual interactions of everyday life a certain consensus of meaning is achieved. 'Out of a process of mutual indications common objects emerge – objects that have the same meaning for a given set of people and are seen in the same manner' (ibid.). The tears cried in the shopping centre were clearly a shared object for the young woman and her friends. It is an example of the consensus of meaning that makes everyday life seem so taken for granted. But it also remains true that everyday life can consist of different 'worlds' in which objects have particular meanings. Youth subcultures would be an obvious example of a different 'world' of meaning. If we are to understand these different worlds we have to identify their objects and the meanings they are made to carry. Moreover, the meaning of an object is always a social creation, it is formed and it arises out of acts of definition and interpretation that take place in social interaction. According to Blumer, 'social interaction is a formative process in its own right … people in interaction are not merely giving expression to such determining factors in forming their respective lines of action but are directing, checking, bending, and transforming their lines of action in the light of what they encounter in the actions of others' (53). On the basis of previous interactions we develop a common understanding of how to act in a particular situation. Everyday life, therefore, does not surround a person with pre-existing objects that then enable and constrain his or her activity; rather objects are constructed as meaningful in ongoing social interaction.

> The meaning of anything and everything has to be formed, learned, and transmitted through a process of indication – a process that is necessarily a social process. Human group life on the level of symbolic interaction is a vast

> process in which people are forming, sustaining, and transforming the objects of their world as they come to give meaning to objects. Objects have no fixed status except as their meaning is sustained through indications and definitions that people make of their objects. Nothing is more apparent than that objects in all categories can undergo change in their meaning … In short, from the standpoint of symbolic interactionism human group life is a process in which objects are being created, affirmed, transformed, and cast aside. The life and action of people necessarily change in line with the changes taking place in their world of objects.
>
> *(12)*

Everyday life, according to symbolic interactionism,

> is a process of activity in which participants are developing lines of action in the multitudinous situations they encounter. They are caught up in a vast process of interaction in which they have to fit their developing actions to one another. This process of interaction consists in making indications to others of what to do and in interpreting the indications as made by others. They live in worlds of objects and are guided in their orientation and action by the meaning of these objects. Their objects, including objects of themselves, are formed, sustained, weakened, and transformed in their action with one another.
>
> *(20–21)*

The everyday, therefore, is constructed from the social interactions that generate the meanings that sustain its taken-for-grantedness. The friends in the shopping centre, with their actions and interactions, created and sustained a little part of what we think of as everyday life.

Ethnomethodology

According to Harold Garfinkel, everyday life is 'an ongoing accomplishment of the concerted activities of daily life, with the ordinary, artful ways of that accomplishment being by members known, used, and taken for granted' (1967: vii). Moreover, 'In the actual occasions of interaction that accomplishment is for members omnipresent, unproblematic, and commonplace' (9). Everyday life has 'an accomplished sense, an accomplished facticity, an accomplished objectivity, an accomplished familiarity, an accomplished accountability' (10). But the making of everyday life, its accomplishment, is not something that its makers are ever fully conscious of doing. It is done with little fuss: 'for the member the organizational hows of these accomplishments are unproblematic, are known vaguely, and are known only in the doing which is done skillfully, reliably, uniformly, with enormous standardization and as an unaccountable matter' (ibid.). In other words, to reiterate what we have seen in other accounts of everyday life, it is taken for granted. The friends in

the shopping centre simply took for granted that what they were doing was the absolutely normal thing to do.

Everyday life consists of taken-for-granted meanings and expectations that produce routine patterns of social life. So much of this consists of unstated assumptions that constitute the common sense of social action and interaction. If everyday life is, as Garfinkel maintains, 'a contingent accomplishment of socially organized common practices' (33), the point of analysis is to answer 'the general question of how any such common sense world is possible' (36). The task of ethnomethodology is to make 'the commonplace scenes visible', to make evident the 'background expectancies' that act as 'a scheme of interpretation' (ibid.). Put simply, to make the unnoticed become noticed. Why did the friends in the shopping centre think it was normal to act as they did? Ethnomethodology seeks to account for this practical accomplishment, to dismantle the accomplishment in order to show that it is an accomplishment and to reveal how and why it works. Or, as Garfinkel himself expresses it, 'I use the term "ethnomethodology" to refer to the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life' (11).

What particularly interests ethnomethodology, as its name implies, are the methods people employ in their daily activities. These activities produce everyday life – 'an endless, ongoing, contingent accomplishment' (1) – and make it visible to sociological analysis. Everyday life does not produce human activities; it is human activities that produce everyday life. Without these activities the everyday would not exist. In other words, Garfinkel is not concerned with the social structure of the everyday but with the structuring activities that make the structure visible. But he goes further than this: without these activities there would be no structure. The social structure of everyday life is something that has to be assembled and reassembled by the social activities of its members. The response of the friends to the young woman crying did not happen *in* everyday life, it was part of what we recognize *as* everyday life.

Ethnomethodology starts from the assumption that we all take for granted the background expectancies that make everyday life seem so natural and routine. If, for example, you think of everyday life as working like a conversation between two close friends, in order to really understand what they are saying we have to pay attention to the gaps and absences that are structuring what is being said – the things that are so obvious as to not need articulating. But for us to really understand what is being said we have to find a way to articulate these gaps and absences. Ethnomethodology uses various strategies to try to articulate these background expectancies. For example, it seeks to disrupt the normal routines of everyday life in order to understand it as something assembled by human actions. Garfinkel argues that 'to produce disorganized interaction should tell us something about how the structures of everyday activities are ordinarily and routinely produced and maintained' (38). We have to try to make visible 'What kinds of expectancies make up a "seen but unnoticed" background of common understandings' (44). To do this ethnomethodology proposes a particular strategy: 'For these background

expectancies to come into view one must either be a stranger to the "life as usual" character of everyday scenes, or become estranged from them' (37). It therefore seeks to breach the background expectancies in order to reveal how their structuring role normally goes unnoticed. Garfinkel, for example, asked undergraduate students to view the activities taking place in their homes as if they were newly arrived boarders. In other words, without the background expectancies that normally help make social interaction understandable. The students' accounts described what they saw as if they did not know the family's history or current circumstances or usual motives and character. What was revealed is that the everyday is full of talk and action that is incomplete. It is by paying attention to these gaps that the structure of the everyday is revealed in the 'common sense' that exists to enable the incomplete to be completed and for everyday life to make enough sense to be taken for granted. If one of the friends in the shopping centre, rather than responding sympathetically to the young woman crying had said instead, I do not understand why you are paying attention to these tears, the whole taken-for-grantedness of the situation might have suddenly required explanation and in explanation might have abruptly revealed something of the human constructedness of their interactions. If this had happened, everyday life for a brief moment might have seemed less ordinary and routine.

Actor-network-theory

According to Bruno Latour, actor-network-theory is 'simply another way of being faithful to the insights of ethnomethodology: actors know what they do and we have to learn from them not only what they do, but how and why they do it' (1999: 19). In other words, the everyday is always realized in practice. It appears, for example, in routines and conversations. Like ethnomethodology, actor-network-theory argues that the social should not be thought of as a given, a material domain that can be used to explain human action and interaction; rather it should be seen as something that is assembled, and continually reassembled, by the actions and interactions of humans and non-humans. It should not be understood as a special location or space, but as 'a very peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling' (Latour 2007: 7). What is true for the social is obviously also true for everyday life. But, like some of the other perspectives discussed in this book, actor-network-theory does not have a theory of everyday life. However, the interesting things it has to say about the social point to what such a theory might look like. What follows is my attempt to present everyday life in actor-network-theory. In doing this I will often blur the distinction between the social and the everyday.

Latour draws a distinction between ostensive and performative definitions of the social. To see the social as performative rather than ostensive produces a very different concept of everyday life. In an ostensive conceptualization, everyday life can be pointed to, it exists whether or not anyone does anything, whereas in a performative definition, the everyday only exists in its performance; if it stops being performed, it ceases to exist. Analysis of the social, and for that matter, of the

everyday, has to examine it in all its 'ever-changing and provisional shapes' (87). As Latour further explains by analogy, 'If a dancer stops dancing, the dance is finished' (37). If we envisage the social in this way, as 'not a place, a thing, a domain, or a kind of stuff but a provisional movement of new associations' (238), it follows that it cannot be the arena for the staging of social forces, alienation or parapraxes, say, as these are part of the very substance from which the social is constructed. As Latour puts it, 'society is the consequence of associations and not their cause' (ibid.). Therefore 'it doesn't designate a domain of reality … It is an association between entities which are in no way recognizable as being social in the ordinary manner, *excep*t during that brief moment when they are reshuffled together' (64–5). For example, the text, the tears, the tissues, the hugging and the words of consolation and then of anger at the boyfriend are not something staged in everyday life, they are all part of its very fabric.

It should not come as any great surprise, therefore, to discover that actor-network-theory is opposed to what it calls the sociology of the social. That is, sociology that regards the social as its stable object of study. As Latour explains, 'the social is something that circulates in a certain way, and not a world beyond to be accessed by the disinterested gaze' (127). Actor-network-theory accuses other sociologists of using the term social to designate two quite different things: 'one of them is the local, face-to-face, naked, unequipped, and dynamic interactions; and the other is a sort of specific force that is supposed to explain why those same temporary face-to-face interactions could become far-reaching and durable' (65). It could be argued that the concept of the everyday is often used in a similar way: first to point to the face-to-face actions and interactions of people as they go about their routine daily activities; while at the same time indicating a specific force that enables and constrains such actions and interactions. To see the social in this way and to then use it to explain social phenomena is to believe that 'the social could explain the social [or, the everyday could explain the everyday]' (3). In other words, if the social is assembled from human actions and interactions, it cannot be used to explain these actions and interactions. You cannot have a social explanation of economic activity or language use because it is from such activity and use that the social is assembled. Therefore, to trace the associations of everyday life we should 'follow the actors themselves' (179). Walking, for example, may be an everyday activity but it is the walking itself and not the walking as enabled and constrained by the everyday that should be our focus of study. Walking is not contextualized by the everyday; it is one of the associations that make the everyday fleetingly visible. As Latour points out, '"social" is not some glue that could fix everything … it is what is glued together by many other types of connectors' (5). These other connectors are, for example, activities like economics and language use. They cannot be given a social explanation, because they are part of the assemblage we call the social. Therefore, 'social does not designate a thing among other things … but a type of connection between things that are not themselves social' (ibid.). Rather than impose a social explanation on human action and interaction, based on a stable idea of the social, we should try to follow the actors

who perform actions that together assemble and reassemble the social. We should not, therefore, decide in advance of empirical research what the everyday consists of; rather we should ascertain this from our observations and analysis of what actually happens in everyday life. It is the performance of everyday life that should be our object of study and not everyday life as a place where performances are performed. Without such performances, everyday life would cease to exist. From the perspective of actor-network-theory everyday life consists of the many performances that make it visible for analysis.[2]

The social, and by implication the everyday, is not just people acting and interacting, it is people acting and interacting with objects and objects interacting with each other. Moreover, many of our interactions with other people are mediated through objects of different kinds (see Chapter 9 here). Whether or not we use a bus or a car to travel to work, wear a suit or casual clothes to meetings, sleep on holiday in a tent or a hotel, these different objects make a difference to the realization of our actions. And because they make a difference actor-network-theory regards them as 'actors, or more precisely, participants' (71) in our actions. Therefore, when we are trying to explain everyday life we have to recognize the actions and interactions of both human and non-human actors. In other words, the social is reassembled with the use of objects. 'If action is limited a priori to what "intentional", "meaningful" humans do, it is hard to see how a hammer, a basket, a door closer, a cat, a rug, a mug, a list, or a tag could act' (ibid.). Against the idea of the non-acting object Latour argues that 'any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor … Thus, the questions to ask about any agent are simply the following: Does it make a difference in the course of some other agent's action or not?' (ibid.). If one of the friends had offered her favourite silk handkerchief instead of a tissue it would have made a difference to the action.

The interaction between actors always takes place in networks. Moreover, we have to see actors as networked to each other or we will fail to understand the social. In other words, to understand one thing you have to see it in relation to other things; see it as part of a network. Such networks, as we have noted, will often include both humans and non-humans. However, such networks are always performed networks; there is nothing necessarily natural about the network in which a thing is situated; it might also find itself in other networks at other times. Furthermore, it is how something performs or is made to perform within a given network that determines its situated and therefore temporary meaning and significance. For example, if an art gallery exhibited a collection of photographs of a local community, these would temporarily exist in relation to each other, the gallery space, and the local area. Although taken by different photographers for different purposes (a wedding, a sporting event, a mining disaster, an industrial strike) the gallery would situate them all in a network in which these differences of subject and purpose would be diminished, as they would all be, at least temporarily, of significance because of what they tell the gallery audience about the local area. Once removed from the gallery, each photograph would return to other networks. The favourite silk handkerchief is in one network when handed to the

young woman crying, but was in another when it was given to the friend by her grandmother, and will be in yet another when returned, washed and ironed.

Objects can be both mediators and intermediaries. Latour insists that we recognize the difference between these two possibilities. Intermediaries convey meaning unchanged, mediators, on the other hand, 'transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning … they are supposed to carry' (39). Most media technologies are first encountered as mediators: that is, our inability to use them properly becomes a meaning in itself as they become actors in our drama of technological inadequacy. However, once we have mastered the technology they settle down as intermediaries. If the technology breaks down it has the potential to become a mediator again; once more an actor in the theatre of our everyday existence. When, for example, I give a lecture the PowerPoint and the microphone I use mediate between the students and myself in the lecture theatre: both technologies are fundamental to the experience of our interaction. In other words, the interaction between us involves certain technologies and these technologies do not just work as intermediaries, they act as mediators – it makes a difference that my words are on PowerPoint and not just spoken. Similarly, the favourite silk handkerchief is potentially an intermediary like the tissues offered by the other friends. But because the young woman knows it is her friend's favourite handkerchief, it becomes a mediator in that it conveys an additional meaning of special friendship.

According to Latour, a network is 'a string of actions where each participant is treated as a full-blown mediator' (128). In a network all the actors act: there is movement not between intermediaries but between mediators. 'As soon as actors are treated not as intermediaries but as mediators, they render the movement of the social visible' (ibid.). In a network there is not the transport of causality between intermediaries but a series of connections in which actors make other actors act. The remote control does not cause me to become a couch potato, it permits me to become one. There is a relationship between my behaviour and what the infrared signal allows, but it is not a relationship of simple cause and effect. It is an actor in a drama of laziness. Moreover, quite simply an actor that does not act is not an actor.

If we extend this to thinking about everyday life it draws our attention to difficulties with this concept. As we have seen, everyday life is itself often seen as a substance, a kind of domain in which certain routines, for example, take place. But perhaps we would be better to see it as something fluid that can only be seen in the fleeting moments of its associations, recognizing that these associations always involve both humans and non-humans. To explain everyday life, therefore, we should not begin by thinking we know what it is. Instead it must be assembled as an object of study from the evidence of its existence. Furthermore, we will not understand the involvement of objects if we insist on drawing a clear distinction between material and social action and interaction. According to Latour,

> any human course of action might weave together in a matter of minutes, for instance, a shouted order to lay a brick, the chemical connection of cement with water, the force of a pulley unto a rope with a movement of the hand,

> the strike of a match to light a cigarette offered by a co-worker, etc. Here, the apparently reasonable division between material and social becomes just what is obfuscating any enquiry on how a collective action is possible.
>
> *(74)*

The weaving together of both material and social, that is, human-to-human, object-to-object, and human-to-object actions and interactions, is what assembles what traditional sociologists call society, and by implication what I have been calling everyday life.

A common way to think of everyday life is as a relationship between structure and agency: everyday life is a structure that enables and constrains everyday human action and interaction. One of the things actor-network-theory does is complicate this relationship. From the perspective of actor-network-theory the implications for a concept of everyday life are quite clear. We cannot assume the everyday as an arena for the actions and interactions of everyday life. Such a tautology would confuse cause and effect, as it is the actions and interactions of everyday life ('effect') that produce what we think of as the enabling and constraining structure of the everyday ('cause'). But is this really true? We could make a counter argument in which we insist that the everyday always already exists as a historical/temporal structure of rules and expectations that every new everyday action and interaction must encounter and accommodate. The relationship is not one of cause and effect but historical and dialectical. What is presented as cause and what is presented as effect cannot simply be reversed; they have to be seen as existing together in a dialectical and historical relationship. In other words, everyday life is a structure that enables and constrains agency while at the same time being a structure that is continually reproduced by the agency of new actions and interaction. To argue that the structure of the everyday enables and constrains the agency of the everyday is to forget that the structure itself consists of the very agency it is claimed it enables and constrains. Therefore, although it is true that when the dancer stops dancing the dance is finished, it is also true that without a concept of dance, the dancer would never start dancing (or, at the very least, we would not know she was dancing). Put another way, actors make theatre, but theatre also makes actors. The relationship is historical and dialectical. 'We make history, but not in circumstances chosen by ourselves.'[3] In other words, historical circumstances always precede new acts of history making and because these already exist they enable and constrain the new acts. This is not a relationship of cause and effect, but a relationship in which structure (made up of acts of agency) enables and constrains new forms of agency, while at the same time being reproduced by such actions and interactions.

Conclusions

What each of these sociological traditions brings to a conceptualization of everyday life is the valuable insistence that while recognizing its taken-for-grantedness, we

who try to study it should not also take it for granted. In other words, we should always look beyond what appears to exist to how it exists and in so doing we should fully recognize its human constructedness. We must not allow the structure of everyday life to blind us to the human and non-human agency that makes it possible and continues to make it possible.

Notes

1. Two other sociological traditions, sociological phenomenology and dramaturgical theory are discussed in Chapters 5 and 8 respectively.
2. This is a *theory* of everyday life. Therefore, this does not mean we can simply move to actions and interactions and then say these constitute the everyday. We have to first theoretically explain how and why this is everyday life.
3. The full quotation is as follows: 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past' (Marx 1977: 10).

7

CONSUMPTION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

In this chapter we will consider the idea that consumption is now fundamental to any understanding of everyday life. After some general points about the consumer society, the chapter will focus on the work of Thorstein Veblen, Georg Simmel, Pierre Bourdieu, Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, Michel de Certeau, and end with a discussion of commodity activism and neoliberalism.

It is not unusual to read that we live in a consumer society in which everyday life is increasingly defined by practices of consumption. Henri Lefebvre, for example, takes a very pessimistic view of what this has produced. He maintains that everyday life is a 'bureaucratic society of controlled consumption' (2002b: 68). Such a description of the everyday, while recognizing the power of capitalism to manipulate desire, seems to leave little space for human agency. It also seems to suggest that consumption has one meaning – bureaucratic control – and this meaning now defines the everyday. But to be fair to Lefebvre, in his account the bureaucratically controlled structure of consumption never quite eliminates human agency. This is true in part because he does not mean consumption as such (the buying of goods, etc.), but what he calls 'the persuasive ideology of consumption' (78) under which people are 'programmed' to consume; however, what they consume is a matter of choice. As he explains, 'The publicity that was intended to promote consumption is the first of consumer goods' (105). This ideology has a dual purpose: it promotes specific objects and it promotes a particular way of life. It is the second purpose that has the most profound impact on everyday life. Through it 'we are told how to live better, how to dress fashionably, how to decorate your house, in short how to exist; you are totally and thoroughly programmed' (107). Therefore, although the bureaucratically controlled structure of consumption may never quite eliminate human agency, it seems to remain the case, according to Lefebvre, that we are 'totally and thoroughly programmed' (ibid.). We shall return to some of these ideas, presented in a very different argument, in the final section

of this chapter. But before that, the rest of the chapter will discuss ways of thinking about consumption in everyday life that go beyond envisioning it as a form of bureaucratic control. What these different theories of consumption have in common is that each situates practices of consumption as fundamental to the everyday. If everyday life is to be defined by consumption, these different theories suggest the varied forms this might take.

Consuming conspicuously

Around the turn of the nineteenth century, two sociologists, Thorstein Veblen writing in 1899 in the United States and Georg Simmel writing in 1903 and 1904 in Germany, published work that discussed new everyday patterns of urban middle-class consumption. Veblen argues that what he calls the leisure class (the middle class who had become very rich as a result of the Industrial Revolution), as part of its strategy to secure and display its new social position, seeks to present what it has acquired through success in business as if it were something natural to itself. 'Conspicuous consumption' is the chosen means to communicate this fact to other social classes. Veblen argues against the view that this is little more than harmless and irrelevant display. The social display of conspicuous consumption is the very pageant of power; from its prestige grows authority. Moreover, he insists that 'the leisure-class scheme of life … extends its coercive influence' throughout society as a whole (1994: 83–4). 'The leisure class stands at the head of the social structure in point of reputability; and its manner of life and its standards of worth therefore afford the norm of reputability for the community' (84). In this way the example of the leisure class acts to direct social energies away from productive work and into wasteful displays of conspicuous consumption.

He offers the example of the ways in which the canons of conspicuous consumption exercise a distorting influence over ideals of feminine beauty. The delicate and the diminutive, for example, are promoted in order to display to the world that the women of the leisure class are incapable of productive work. In this way, women are reduced to symbols of 'vicarious consumption'. Woman is little more than a servant, whose task it is to exhibit in a public display her master's economic power. According to Veblen, 'She is useless and expensive, and she is consequently valuable as evidence of pecuniary strength' (149). Women learn to conform to this standard, and men learn to read women's conformity as the very epitome of beauty. Modes of male dress are not exempt from the dictates of the leisure-class canons of decency and good taste. Male apparel must demonstrate the ability to consume without economic restraint. It must also indicate that the wearer is not engaged in productive work. As Veblen explains, 'Elegant dress serves its purpose of elegance not only in that it is expensive, but also because it is the insignia of leisure. It not only shows that the wearer is able to consume a relatively large value, but it argues at the same time that he consumes without producing' (171).

In an essay called 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (first published in 1903), the German sociologist Georg Simmel identified a similar mode of behaviour in the

new distinctive urban culture of Berlin at the turn of the century. Confronted by the perceived anonymity of city life, the new urban middle class used particular patterns of consumption to maintain and to display a sense of individuality. As he observed, 'The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces' (1964: 409). Faced with 'the difficulty of asserting his own personality within the dimensions of metropolitan life' (420), individuals are 'tempted to adopt the most tendentious peculiarities … extravagances of mannerism, caprice, and precariousness' (421). Simmel argues that the 'meaning' of such behaviour lies not in its particular content but 'in its form of "being different", of standing out in a striking manner and thereby attracting attention' (ibid.).

Simmel further pursued and elaborated these ideas in an essay on fashion (originally published in 1904). In this essay he argues that modern urban societies are marked by an increased tension between 'two antagonistic principles', which, he claims, have governed the historical development of the human race – the principles of 'generalization' and 'specialization' (1957: 542). Simmel sees these principles as manifest in two types of individual, the 'imitative' and the 'teleological'. As he explains, 'The imitator is the passive individual, who believes in social similarity and adapts himself to existing elements; the teleological individual, on the other hand, is ever experimenting, always restlessly striving, and he relies on his own personal conviction' (543). Fashion, driven as it is by a continuous social cycle of imitation and differentiation, is for Simmel an excellent example of these principles in social operation. Moreover, it is a process that depends for its success on the active involvement of both types of individuals, imitative (who follow fashions and thus satisfy their need to adapt) and teleological (who instigate them and thus satisfy their need to innovate). In more general terms, the way fashion as a social practice is said to work is that subordinate groups seek to improve their social status by imitating the dress codes and forms of behaviour of their immediate superordinate group; the superordinate group is then forced to seek new fashions in order to maintain its social difference. As Simmel explains it, 'the fashions of the upper stratum of society are never identical with those of the lower; in fact, they are abandoned by the former as soon as the latter prepares to appropriate them' (ibid.). In this way, he argues, 'Fashion … is a product of class distinction' (544). It is of course always more than the product; it also has a role to play as producer, in that by a strategy of inclusion and exclusion, fashion helps reproduce social power and privilege by marking and maintaining the social differences and distinctions upon which it in part depends. As Simmel points out, 'fashion … signifies union with those in the same class, the uniformity of a circle characterized by it, and … the exclusion of all other groups' (ibid.). It is not the content of fashion that matters, but the social differences it makes visible and helps maintain.

> Just as soon as the lower classes begin to copy their style, thereby crossing the line of demarcation the upper classes have drawn and destroying the

> uniformity of their coherence, the upper classes turn away from this style and adopt a new one, which in turn differentiates them from the masses.
>
> *(545)*

When considering the relevance of the work of Veblen and Simmel for a critical understanding of consumption as it is now practised in everyday life in the twenty-first century we have to fully recognize the historical location of their work and the historical problems it was seeking to address. This raises the question, are their critical insights still relevant for an understanding of contemporary practices of consumption in everyday life? The answer is a qualified yes. In general terms, the practices and motivations they identified, if anything, seem more widespread now than ever before, and this, paradoxically, is the problem. Put simply, people from all social classes seem to now use consumption conspicuously to mark their difference from and similarity to other consumers. Equally, Simmel's general argument about fashion is no longer only applicable to the rich. But there is a problem with simply thinking we can transfer their arguments to the contemporary everyday. Perhaps the most significant is their assumption that modern urban societies have consensual hierarchies of taste, mirroring consensual hierarchies of social class. In other words, those at the bottom or in the middle, it is assumed strive to be like those at the top. This is a very linear model of consumption, which excludes the possibility that classes, other than those at the top, might well choose to compete to be different, or that fashions could originate from both bottom and middle. Both simply assume that those at the bottom or those in the middle will always seek to emulate those at the top of the class structure. But beyond this, and even more crucially, it is necessary to broaden the scope of who might be involved in practices of conspicuous consumption and of imitation and differentiation. Such activity is no longer limited to social classes. It can also be used to mark differences of, for example, gender, ethnicity, generation and sexuality.

In stark contrast to the positions outlined by Veblen and Simmel, Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood reject the view that 'emulation, envy, and striving to be better than the Joneses are the intentions which fuel consumption' (1996: xxi). Instead of imitation and exclusion, they see everyday consumption as a form of expression more concerned with 'making visible and stable the categories of culture' (38). According to Douglas and Isherwood, because goods are expressive they can be used as a symbolic means to communicate with others. As they contend, 'goods are part of a live information system' (xiv). Although 'Goods are neutral, their uses are social; they can be used as fences or bridges' (xv). As they explain, 'As far as keeping a person alive is concerned, food and drink are needed for physical services; but as far as social life is concerned, they are needed for mustering solidarity, attracting support, requiting kindnesses, and this goes for the poor as well as for the rich' (xxi). The symbolic value of objects in the 'information system' is not inherent in the objects themselves. Value is something 'conferred by human judgments' (xxii). To understand the value of one object, it is necessary to locate it in the information system as a whole. Similarly, goods do not communicate by

themselves, they communicate 'like flags' (xxiv), and thus require the active agency of human subjects. But as they insist, 'consumption goods are most definitely not mere messages; they constitute the very system itself. Take them out of human intercourse and you have dismantled the whole thing' (49). In this way, 'Consumption is the very arena in which culture is fought over and licked into shape' (37). As they observe,

> The housewife with her shopping basket arrives home: some things in it she reserves for her household; some for the father, some for the children; others are destined for the special delectation of guests. Whom she invites into her house, what parts of the house she makes available to outsiders, how often, what she offers them for music, food, drink, and conversation, these choices express and generate culture in its general sense.
>
> *(ibid.)*

Rather than seeing the consumption of goods as 'primarily needed for subsistence [economic theory] plus competitive display [Veblen and Simmel]', they argue that the consumption of goods has a 'double role in providing subsistence and in drawing lines of social relationships' (39). As a mode of communication, 'the essential function of consumption is its capacity to make sense' (40); and thus to 'make and maintain social relationships' (39). Moreover, we must leave behind the 'false distinction' between goods that minister to physical needs (eating and drinking, for example), and those that tender to our more aesthetic inclinations (reading poetry, watching television, for example), because, as they insist, 'all goods carry meaning' (49). Furthermore, 'any choice between goods is the result of, and contributes to, culture' (52). For example, if I invite friends for dinner the food and drink I serve is not randomly chosen, it is selected because, hopefully, it is good to eat and drink, but also because it communicates something about the evening I have planned. I might invite the same friends to a dinner to celebrate a birthday or I might invite them to watch Manchester United win the Champions League, but at each meal I will serve food and drink that seems appropriate for the occasion. In other words, at each meal the meaning of the event is partly constructed as meaningful by the food and drink chosen to communicate these different meanings.

Therefore, to fully appreciate consumption as a mode of communication, we must think of it as a language: 'Forget that commodities are good for eating, clothing, and shelter; forget their usefulness and try instead the idea that commodities are good for thinking; treat them as a nonverbal medium for the human creative faculty' (40–41). The practice of consumption is a 'joint production, with fellow consumers, of a universe of values. Consumption uses goods to make firm and visible a particular set of judgments in the fluid processes of classifying persons and events' (41). In this way, consumption is a 'ritual activity' (45) in which people consume to communicate with other consumers, and the shifting accumulations of these acts of consumption constitute the making of culture. What underpins this system and ultimately gives it meaning, what consumption is in the end really

communicating, is an underlying cognitive order. As they explain, 'the clue to finding real partitioning among goods must be to trace some underlying partitioning in society' (68).

In an argument that recalls the work of Veblen and Simmel, but is a great deal more sophisticated than both, Pierre Bourdieu demonstrates how particular patterns of consumption are used for purposes of making, marking and maintaining social distinction. Whereas Douglas and Isherwood see consumption as the neutral underpinning of 'some underlying partitioning in society', Bourdieu maintains that it is a significant area of struggle between and within social classes. Bourdieu's model of consumption, although sharing Douglas and Isherwood's view of consumption as communication, insists that consumption is not a polite conversation about an underlying cognitive order, but a heated debate about difference and distinction. He argues that what people consume does not simply reflect distinctions and differences embedded elsewhere, that consumption makes visible, as Douglas and Isherwood suggest, but that consumption is the means by which difference and distinction are produced, maintained and reproduced. In other words, consumption does not reflect the social order; it helps legitimize it. Like Veblen, he seeks to demonstrate how what social groups consume is part of a strategy for hierarchizing social space. However, whereas Veblen was concerned almost exclusively with the leisure class, Bourdieu's analysis ranges across everyday life as a whole. He argues that differences in consumption are always an important aspect in the struggle between dominant and subordinate classes.[1] He shows how arbitrary tastes and arbitrary ways of living are continually transmuted into legitimate taste and the only legitimate way of life. The 'illusion of "natural distinction" is ultimately based on the power of the dominant to impose, by their very existence, a definition of excellence which [is] nothing other than their own way of existing' (1984: 255). In other words, dominant classes seek to impose their own tastes as if these were in fact universal tastes.

Bourdieu's interest is in the processes by which patterns of consumption help to secure and legitimate forms of power and domination that are ultimately rooted in economic inequality. In other words, he argues that although class rule is ultimately economic, the form it takes is cultural; and that patterns of consumption are used to secure social distinction, the making, marking and maintaining of social difference. The source of social difference and social power is thus symbolically shifted from the economic field to the field of consumption, making social power appear to be the result of a specific cultural disposition. In this way, the production and reproduction of cultural space helps produce and reproduce social space, social power and class difference. Bourdieu's purpose, therefore, is not to prove the self-evident, that different classes have different patterns of consumption, but to show how consumption (from high art to food on the table) forms a distinct pattern of social distinction, and to identify and interrogate the processes by which the making and maintaining of these distinctions secures and legitimates forms of power and control rooted ultimately in economic inequalities. He is interested not so much in the actual differences, but in how these differences are used by

dominant classes as a means of social reproduction. His project is to situate consumption in the world of everyday experience. Only by producing a 'barbarous reintegration of aesthetic consumption into the world of ordinary consumption (against which it endlessly defines itself)' (100) will we fully understand the social and political role of consumption. As he maintains, 'one cannot fully understand cultural practices unless "culture", in the restricted, normative sense of ordinary usage, is brought back into "culture" in the anthropological sense, and the elaborated taste for the most refined objects is reconnected with the elementary taste for the flavours of food' (1). Bourdieu insists that taste is always more than an aesthetic category. As he points out, 'taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier' (6). We are classified by our classifications and classify others by theirs. In this way, he would argue that similar things are happening when I 'value' a holiday destination or a particular mode of dress, as are happening when I 'value' a poem by John Clare or a song by Bob Dylan or an opera by Giacomo Puccini. Such evaluations are never a simple matter of individual taste, consumption operates both to identify and to mark social distinction and to sustain social difference. While such strategies of classification do not in themselves produce social inequalities, the making, marking and maintaining of them functions to legitimate such inequalities. In this way, taste is a profoundly ideological discourse; it functions as a marker of 'class' (using the term in the double sense to mean both socio-economic category and a particular level of quality). He argues that consumption is, ultimately, 'predisposed … to fulfil a social function of legitimating social difference' (7).

The consumption of art is for Bourdieu the model for all forms of consumption. At the pinnacle of the hierarchy of taste is the 'pure' aesthetic gaze – a historical invention – with its emphasis on aesthetic distance, and on form over function. Aesthetic distance is in effect the denial of function: it insists on the 'how' and not the 'what'. It is analogous to the difference between judging a meal good because it was economically priced and filling, and judging a meal good on the basis of how it was served, where it was served, etc. The 'pure' aesthetic gaze emerges with the emergence of the cultural field (in which texts and practices are divided into culture and mass culture). One in effect guarantees the other. Bourdieu sees the art museum as the institutionalization of the aesthetic gaze and the cultural field. Once inside the museum art loses all prior functions (except that of being art) and becomes pure form: 'Though originally subordinated to quite different or even incompatible functions (crucifix and fetish, Pieta and still life), these juxtaposed works tacitly demand attention to form rather than function, technique rather than theme' (30). For example, an advertisement for soup displayed in an art gallery becomes an example of the aesthetic, whereas the same advertisement in a magazine is an example of the commercial. The effect of the distinction is to produce 'a sort of ontological promotion akin to a transubstantiation' (6). It is the institutionalization of such distinctions that produces what he calls the 'ideology of natural taste', the view that genuine 'appreciation' can only be attained by an instinctively gifted minority armed against the mediocrity of the masses. Ortega y Gasset makes the point with precision: 'art helps the "best" to know and recognise one another in

the greyness of the multitude and to learn their mission, which is to be few in number and to have to fight against the multitude' (quoted in Bourdieu 1984: 31; see also Storey 2003).

As Bourdieu points out, 'it is not easy to describe the "pure" gaze without also describing the naive gaze which it defines itself against' (32). The naive gaze is of course the gaze of the popular aesthetic:

> The affirmation of continuity between art and life, which implies the subordination of form to function … a refusal of the refusal which is the starting point of the high aesthetic, i.e., the clear cut separation of ordinary dispositions from the specially aesthetic disposition.
>
> *(32)*

The relation between the pure and the popular aesthetic is needless to say not one of equality, but a relation of dominant and dominated. The popular aesthetic, in its stress on function over form, is necessarily contingent and pluralistic, contrary, and in deference to the absolute insistence of the supposed transcendent universality of the pure aesthetic. Bourdieu sees the two aesthetics as articulating the two separate but related realms of necessity and freedom. Without the required cultural capital[2] to decipher the 'code' of art, people are made socially vulnerable to the condescension of those who do have cultural capital. What is social is presented as innate, and, in turn, used to justify what is social. Like other ideological strategies, 'The ideology of natural taste owes its plausibility and its efficacy to the fact that … it naturalises real differences, converting differences in the mode of acquisition of culture into differences of nature' (68). Aesthetic relations thus mimic and help reproduce social relations of power. As Bourdieu observes,

> Aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent … The most intolerable thing for those who regard themselves as the possessors of legitimate culture is the sacrilegious reuniting of tastes which taste dictates shall be separated. This means that the games of artists and aesthetes and their struggles for the monopoly of artistic legitimacy are less innocent than they seem. At stake in every struggle over art there is also the imposition of an art of living, that is, the transmutation of an arbitrary way of living into the legitimate way of life which casts every other way of living into arbitrariness.
>
> *(57)*

Bourdieu's work on consumption is underpinned by his view of education. Rather than being a means to lessen inequality, it functions to legitimate it. He argues that the education system fulfils a quite specific social and political function: that is, to legitimate social inequalities which exist prior to its operations. It achieves this by transforming social differences into academic differences, and presenting these differences as if they were 'grounded in nature' (387). The cultural tastes of dominant classes are given institutional form, and then, with deft ideological sleight of hand,

their taste for this institutionalized culture (i.e. their own) is held up as evidence of their cultural, and, ultimately, their social, superiority. In this way, social distinction is generated by learned patterns of consumption that are internalized as 'natural' cultural preferences and interpreted and mobilized as evidence of 'natural' cultural competences, which are, ultimately, used to justify forms of class domination. To fully understand this we need to understand how Bourdieu distinguishes between three types of capital – economic, social and cultural. In capitalist societies economic capital in the form of money, property, etc. is able to buy access to cultural and social capital. Hierarchies openly based on the accumulation of economic capital are vulnerable to challenge. Cultural and social capital is able to conceal and legitimate economic domination by reproducing it in the form of cultural and social hierarchies.[3] One of the great strengths of Bourdieu's work on consumption is that, together with the introduction of invaluable concepts such as cultural capital and social distinction, it makes visible everyday political practices that are in the very fabric of everyday life but are rarely seen as political at all.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the French cultural theorist Michel de Certeau is concerned with what he calls the 'ways of operating' of ordinary consumers as they move across the everyday landscape of production. 'Everyday life', he claims, 'invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others' (1984: xii). As he explains,

> The purpose of this work is to make explicit the systems of operational combination (*les combinatoires d'operations*) which also compose a 'culture', and to bring to light the models of action characteristic of users whose status as dominated element in society (a status that does not mean that they are either passive or docile) is concealed by the euphemistic term 'consumers'.
>
> *(xi–xii)*

He seeks to deconstruct the term 'consumer', to reveal the activity that lies within the act of consumption or what he prefers to call 'secondary production'. To do this we have to be willing to recognize 'the difference or similarity between … production … and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization' (xiii). Traditionally the critical gaze has fallen on production, seeing consumption as its predictable shadow.[4] De Certeau seeks to challenge the idea that consumption is entirely knowable through an analysis of production. Consumption, he argues, 'is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its ways of using the products imposed by a dominant economic order' (xii–xiii). In order to explain what he means he offers the example of the ways in which the indigenous population of what is now South America, 'subverted from within' (xiii) the Spanish colonizers' imposed culture:

> Submissive, and even consenting to their subjection, the Indians nevertheless often made of the rituals, representations, and laws imposed on them

> something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind; they subverted them not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept.
>
> *(ibid.)*

In this way, 'their use of the dominant social order deflected its power, which they lacked the means to challenge'; and, as de Certeau observes, 'they escaped it without leaving it. The strength of their difference lay in procedures of "consumption"' (ibid.). Another example of the same process of subversion from within can be seen in the experience of the Africans who were enslaved and transported to the USA to work in the cotton plantations. As part of the process of instilling submission, the slaves were taught Christianity. As in de Certeau's example of Indians resisting Spanish culture, the slaves consumed and used the new religion as a means to think the possibilities of their own freedom. In other words, a religion that should have reconciled them to their position as slaves was used in such a way as to enable them not only to think outside the brutal confines of slavery, but also to think through the challenges and confrontations of the Civil Rights movement and beyond.

For de Certeau, the terrain of the everyday is a site of continual conflict (silent and almost invisible) between the 'strategies' of imposition (the power of production) and the 'tactics' of use (consumption or 'secondary production'). The difference between the two is that 'strategies are able to produce … and impose … whereas tactics can only use, manipulate' (30). What interests de Certeau is the 'multitude of "tactics" articulated in the details of everyday life' (xiv); what he also calls 'poetic ways of "making do"' (xv). Moreover, 'The tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices' (xvii).

> Many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.) are tactical in character. And so are, more generally, many 'ways of operating': victories of the 'weak' over the 'strong' (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order, etc.), clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, 'hunter's cunning', manoeuvres.
>
> *(xix)*

It is not difficult to see how so much of everyday life consists of 'secondary production' as consumers make meaning and culture from objects and practices that they did not produce themselves.

Neoliberalism and commodity activism

Although it first emerged in the late 1970s, it was not until the 1990s that capitalism in its neoliberal mode became globally dominant. Therefore, all the previous

accounts discussed in this chapter were written before its full impact on practices of consumption and everyday life. As David Harvey explains,

> Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.
>
> *(2007: 2)*

But neoliberalism is more than just an economic theory, it presents itself as 'an ethic … capable of acting as a guide to all human action, and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs' (Paul Treanor; quoted in Harvey 2007: 3). Little wonder then that the coming to dominance of neoliberalism included it reaching beyond economic relations and into everyday life more generally. One of the more insidious contributions it has made to consumption practices in everyday life is the introduction of what Sarah Banet-Weiser and Roopali Mukherjee call 'commodity activism' (2012: 1). What the term is meant to suggest are the many ways in which political activism is increasingly entangled with commerce and the branding strategies of multinational corporations. That is, protest has become something that can be articulated by large companies in search of brand loyalty and increased profits.

It would be easy to see commodity activism as the workings of capitalist hypocrisy and manipulation, as people are duped into thinking that buying goods is the same as political engagement. But Banet-Weiser and Mukherjee refuse this easy move. They 'critically challenge the idea that hard-and-fast certainties separate capitalist power and popular resistance' (3). Instead they are interested in the complexities and contradictions of these developments, pointing to the fact that consumption has a long history as a form of political practice. This has taken the form of consumer boycotts as happened during the apartheid regime in South Africa. It has also been used in a positive way, to urge people to buy something in support of a political cause. For example, in Manchester, the city where I was born, there is a 'gay village'. It is a collection of businesses, pubs and shops and is to a large extent organized around practices of consumption. I can remember when it consisted of one pub, *The Union*; now it is large enough, and well beyond its origins around Canal Street, to be a significant part of the tourist map of the city. There can be no doubt that it would not exist but for the commodity activism of the gay liberation movement.

Corporate philanthropy has a less celebrated history. It has existed since the Industrial Revolution. Sometimes it seemed well intentioned, but mostly it was a means to control the everyday lives of workers in order to generate even more profits. Whereas in the nineteenth century it was used as a means to influence production, a great deal of what now passes for corporate philanthropy is

ultimately about organizing consumption and building brand loyalty. In both instances, the ultimate motivation is to maximize profits. In 2006, as part of the *Dove Campaign for Real Beauty*, Dove Soap, a subsidiary of Unilever,[5] commissioned a video called 'Evolution' in which an 'ordinary' woman is transformed into a 'beautiful' model by means of elaborate make-up and very sophisticated computer technology. The point of the video is to show how unreal are the images of women we see in magazines. The video concludes with the words, 'No wonder our perception of beauty is distorted. Take part in the Dove Real Beauty Workshops for Girls'. On the accompanying website it is claimed that the *Dove Campaign for Real Beauty* is 'a global effort that is intended to serve as a starting point for societal change and act as a catalyst for widening the definition and discussion of beauty'. Dove's second video, 'Onslaught', shows a fast succession of unrealistic and distorted images of femininity and ends with the words, 'Talk to your daughter before the beauty industry does'.[6] In a way, all that Dove is doing is what companies like it have always done. It is seeking to make profit from insecurity. In the past the insecurity it promoted was the necessity to conform to normative standards of beauty, whereas now it is how to resist the appeal of these normative standards. In both cases the answer is simple: buy Dove products.

While, as we have noted, there is a history of political consumption, this is surely something else: it is the reduction of politics to consumption; a reduction of politics to the idea that it is buying this rather than that brand that really makes a difference. Social activism is replaced by commodity activism: there is no need to protest or campaign, all that is required is for you to buy stuff and the multinational corporations will do the rest. Protest is thus incorporated as a means to profits. Also, given that the funding for Dove's campaign comes from operating in the very industry being criticized, we could simply dismiss this as hypocrisy. But Banet-Weiser insists that it is more complex than this. As she explains, 'I try to resist overemphasizing either the incorporation of individual subjectivities by neoliberal capitalism or the autonomy of the consumer-citizen with this economy, but rather to see this dynamic as a kind of "compromise" between creative production and capitalist practices' (2012: 52). I also share her reluctance to see it as either one or the other. Dove's motivation is to build its brand and expand its customer base, but for the young women, for example, who take part in the *Dove Campaign for Real Beauty* this is not their motivation, for them it is about building self-esteem. Can we just dismiss their motivation or simply subsume it under Dove's search for profits? The simple answer is no: we have to also recognize that in both Dove campaigns there is the possibility of a participatory politics being produced: in one a challenge to the beauty industry's circulation of unattainable standards of beauty and thus the possibility of raising the self-esteem of young women and in the other the potential mobilization of mothers against the appeals of the beauty industry. But we also have to recognize that in both cases it is a politics that is channelled through and framed by consumption. For me this is a classic example of the working of hegemony in which there is a 'compromise equilibrium' (see Chapter 10 here) between incorporation and resistance. But, as is usually the case, it is a

compromise equilibrium in which the forces of incorporation are tipping the scales. But using hegemony to understand the complexities and contradictions avoids simple models of top-down power in which the human agency of the consumer all but vanishes. However, it is also a model that does not lose sight of the enormous and often crushing power of neoliberal capitalism. I have discussed similar contradictions in my analysis of the music of the counterculture and its opposition to America's war in Vietnam (Storey 2010a). As I pointed out there, the music both mobilized opposition to the war (and buying this music and paying to hear it performed was part of this opposition), while at the same time the profits from the music could be used to support the war. Keith Richards, of The Rolling Stones, was made very aware of this contradiction.

> We found out, and it wasn't for years that we did, that all the bread [money] we made for Decca was going into making black boxes that go into American air force bombers to bomb fucking North Vietnam. They took the bread we made for them and put it into the radar section of their business. When we found that out, it blew our minds. That was it. Goddamn, you find out you've help kill God knows how many thousands of people without even knowing it.
>
> *(quoted in Storey 2010a: 28–9)*

But such contradictions do not make the counterculture a counter culture, but they do draw attention to the complexities and contradictions of the relationship between politics and consumption.

Conclusion

It is difficult to imagine everyday life without thinking of practices and patterns of consumption. But it is also hard to imagine thinking critically about everyday life without the work of Veblen, Simmel, Douglas and Isherwood, Bourdieu, and de Certeau, and especially without having at our disposal critical concepts such as conspicuous consumption, cultural capital, social distinction and secondary production. If, as seems likely in the near future at least, the everyday becomes more and more under the influence of neoliberal capitalism, it seems certain that commodity activism will also become a valuable concept, even more than it is already, to use to understand the possibilities of incorporation and resistance being played out in consumption practices in everyday life.

Notes

1. The class relations in what Bourdieu calls the cultural field are structured around two divisions: on the one hand, between the dominant classes and the subordinate classes, and on the other, within the dominant classes between those with high economic capital as opposed to high cultural capital, and those with high cultural capital as opposed to high economic capital.

2. Cultural capital is a social currency based on knowledge, familiarity and the ability to feel at ease with the texts and practices of 'legitimate' culture.
3. Although increased access to higher education would seem to be a move towards greater equality, the fact that it is always matched by a parallel inflation in qualifications demanded for particular types of employment works to undermine this possibility. Whereas in the past a school qualification would have secured a position in a particular type of employment, a university degree is now a requirement. Therefore although more people now go to university in the UK than ever before, the qualifications they leave with are worth much less in the employment market place than, say, 20 years ago when fewer people had degrees. In this way, the education system helps reproduce and legitimate a class hierarchy of social difference and social distinction.
4. Given, until quite recently, the traditional endemic fear of the popular amongst academics and intellectuals, it is not surprising that production (and the making of meaning therein) has been valued over consumption (and the making of meaning in use): it can be explained simply by the fact that the few produce (and control the circulation of meaning) and the many consume.
5. Unilever is the company who gave Harrison financial support to conduct Mass-Observation research in Bolton.
6. The almost sinister irony here is that this is the beauty industry telling a mother to talk to her daughter before they do. If you do not protect her from us you have only yourself to blame. But there is no need to worry, we really are on your side and we have the products to prove it.

8

THE THEATRICALITY OF EVERYDAY LIFE: FROM PERFORMANCE TO PERFORMATIVITY

In this chapter I will critically explore two ways of thinking about the everyday in terms of a model of theatricality. 'All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players'. This line from William Shakespeare's *As You Like It* is almost a summary of Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach to the everyday.[1] In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, originally published in 1959, Goffman presents everyday life as characterized by competing attempts at impression management: a stage on which we all perform in a drama to impress and be impressed, sometimes individually and sometimes in cooperation with others. Whereas Goffman sees our actions and interactions as a form of acting in which a 'natural' self performs various parts, Judith Butler's theory of performativity points to a very different understanding of our theatricality. Although she does not offer a theory of the everyday, I will use her concept of performativity as a means to extend Goffman's ideas about the presentation of self in everyday life.

Performance

The aim of Goffman's dramaturgical approach is to tease out the various techniques used in an ongoing drama of the presentation of self in everyday life. As we shall see, performances are intended to give a particular definition of a situation whose ultimate purpose is achieving impression management. As we interact with others we seek to define the meaning of these interactions (define the situation) in order to control the impression we make. Defining the situation and impression management are the engine of our actions and interactions in everyday life. As Goffman puts it, each individual is 'a performer, a harried fabricator of impressions involved in the all-too-human task of staging a performance' (1990: 244). Goffman distinguishes between two modalities of impression management: 'expressions given and expressions given off' (16). Another way of saying this is that we make

impressions on others through both direct and indirect forms of communication. Direct forms of communication might include what we say, while indirect could include how we say it. Both are open to manipulation: we can lie and we can change how we speak. Most people, for example, have a 'telephone voice' they use when they want to make a 'good impression'. Similarly, when we meet someone new, someone we want to impress, we may modify our accent or select our vocabulary more carefully. Going for a job interview is an obvious example of the two modalities of impression management: the interviewee tries very hard to make the best impression, while the interviewers try to get behind the presentation in an attempt to get to the 'real' person. In other words, by asking the right questions it is hoped to be able to cut through the performance to the real performer.

The key factor in all social action and interaction in everyday life 'is the maintenance of a single definition of the situation, this definition having to be expressed, and this expression sustained in the face of a multitude of potential disruptions' (246). All our efforts at impression management are to this end. By constructing our performances in particular ways we hope to control the definition of the situation in which we act. In doing this we hope to gain control over the impressions that others have of us. 'This control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the other comes to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan' (15). In order to control the definition of the situation it is necessary to control the flow of information. Again, a job interview is a classic example of seeking to maintain a single definition of the situation. The interviewee will do everything possible to stage a performance that points to only one conclusion: *I am the right person for this job*.

Much of our communication has a 'promissory character' (Goffman 1990: 14). People draw inferences from it in the faith that what they are seeing and hearing is an accurate representation of what it appears to be. Such communication is not of course one-way. For our impression management to be successful our communications have to receive an appropriate response. In order to achieve this we have to try to control how our 'audience' will respond. For example, it would have a very detrimental impact on impression management if an interviewee suddenly offered the information, towards the end of what seemed like a very successful interview, that she liked to drink a lot when socializing with friends and that this sometimes made her mornings rather hazy. Goffman calls such an announcement 'destructive information' (141). Quite clearly it would have a very destabilizing impact on the definition of the situation (her suitability as an employee) and would be most likely incompatible with the impression management necessary to secure the job.

Although, in the interests of impression management, we will seek to define the situation, our respondents may also wish to do something similar. This may then produce a setting in which various definitions of the situation are in play. In such circumstances it will usually be the case that 'the definitions of the situation projected

by the several different participants are sufficiently attuned to one another, so that open contradiction will not occur' (Goffman 1990: 20). This does not happen because everyone is in perfect harmony but because there is a social expectation, driven by notions of politeness, that the participants will tend to suppress what they really think in order to maintain a certain 'veneer of consensus' (21). This 'working consensus' establishes 'a single over-all definition of the situation' (ibid.). For example, it is not uncommon at an academic conference to find yourself in a conversation with a group of people at the conference dinner in which it becomes very clear to all that certain topics are best not discussed. In such a situation a veneer of consensus is established, but it is only a veneer because everyone knows, because of papers already presented or books or articles already published, that the consensus will most likely disintegrate in the sessions in the morning, but for now, in the interest of social etiquette, it holds. As this example illustrates, a performance often requires other performers to cooperate in the staging of a particular scene. When a professor, for example, gives a lecture, students are an essential part of the 'performance team'; it is their dramaturgical cooperation that helps to realize the performance as a performance. Without their participation there would not really be a performance and their participation is crucial to sustaining an appropriate definition of the situation – this is an academic lecture in which the lecturer speaks and the students take notes. Similarly, it does not matter how much food and drink is purchased and what preparations are made, if no one turns up to the Christmas party, it is not a Christmas party – guests are a fundamental part of the definition of the situation.

Each performance aims at a dramatic realization of the impression to be managed. Such impressions are often idealized. Put simply, we usually seek to make a good impression. But this does not mean that we are simply on our best behaviour; rather it means that we act in a way that is regarded as socially appropriate. In doing this we articulate and realize the officially acknowledged values of our society. For Goffman each performance is like a celebration of the values of a society, but, more than this, it is also the articulation of the reality of the society, a concrete manifestation of what it takes for granted. In this way, when we perform as a father, a husband, a brother, or a professor, we make manifest the reality of the society in which we live. Everyday life, therefore, exists in these and other social performances. Without such performances the visibility of the everyday would slowly drain away. How we dress at weddings, funerals, and interviews, for example, are not just examples of individual performances, they are the articulation of what our society thinks is appropriate.

As we have seen, Goffman argues that we continually perform for each other and that the primary purpose of these performances is to define the situation in order to influence the impression we make. Each performance consists of a number of features. The first of these is what he calls front.

> It will be convenient to label as 'front' that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the

> situation for those who observe the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance.
>
> *(32)*

Front always implies 'audience segregation' (57). What Goffman means by this is that our presentation of self varies depending on the nature of the social situation we are in and to whom we are presenting. The professor acts differently with his students and his colleagues; and different again with his family and friends. If he plays five-a-side football he may no longer be recognized as a professor. Something similar might happen if she accompanies family and friends on a Hen Night. Front is always connected to a 'setting'. Settings tend to be locations that allow a performance to be at its most intense. For example, although I am a professor outside my university, it is when at university that I am at my most professorial. It is here that I will be addressed as professor and expected (at least by students) to act like a professor. If I am addressed in a formal manner outside university, it is almost certain that I will be called Mr. If I am playing five-a-side football there will be no expectation that I tackle or pass like a professor.

A performance in a setting is often supported by what Goffman calls 'sign-equipment' (33). When I attend an academic conference I will usually be asked to wear a badge displaying my name, title and affiliation. This is part of the sign-equipment for my performance in this particular setting. If later, when I go to the pub, I forget to remove the badge, it will seem totally inappropriate in the new setting. It will no longer work as intended and may become a source of amusement for bar staff and other customers. The kind of sign-equipment Goffman is mostly referring to is more commonly thought of as status symbols. If I present myself as a traveller rather than a tourist, I am not just talking about how I take my holidays and where I go, I am suggesting something about the kind of person I think I am. In this presentation of my identity 'traveller' operates as supporting evidence – as sign-equipment – in my staging of impression management. Similarly, if I announce I prefer drinking beer to lager, accompanying my meal with Pinot Grigio rather than Chardonnay, buying groceries at Marks and Spencer instead of at Aldi, I am not just declaring a series of preferences, I am using these preferences as sign-equipment to help stage my presentation of self. Goffman gives the example of female students in US colleges in the late 1950s.

> American college girls … play down their intelligence, skills, and determinativeness when in the presence of datable boys … These performers are reported to allow their boyfriends to explain things to them tediously that they already know; they conceal proficiency in mathematics from their less able consorts; they lose ping-pong games just before the ending … Through all of this the natural superiority of the male is demonstrated, and the weaker role of the female affirmed.
>
> *(48)*

As Goffman's irony makes clear, it is not that the natural superiority of the male is demonstrated, rather the front performed by the female students has the effect of making what is a performance seem like a natural outcome. The fact that the male college students cannot, or will not, see what is happening as a *performance* says as much about them as does the fact that the female students think such a performance is necessary.

In addition to these aspects of front, there is also 'personal front' (34). This consists of appearance and manner. In other words, we all tend to dress and act appropriate to the context we find ourselves in. What we wear and do when we go to the pub to watch football is not necessarily appropriate when attending a funeral. In order to seem professorial, one is expected to dress and act in an appropriate way. What is seen as appropriate is historically and culturally variable, but is expected to be consistent with the setting. So, acting like a professor now and in the past or when in a new or more traditional university, will be very different. It is also very likely that female college students playing dumb would have also thought it necessary to include a particular dress code as part of their performance.

Although the examples given so far might suggest otherwise, front is rarely something freely chosen, but usually a series of practices and expectations. As Goffman puts it, 'fronts tend to be selected, not created' (1990: 38). When, for example, someone becomes a schoolteacher, they learn to act, at least in front of students, in a particular way. Each new person entering the profession will find that whether or not they are recognized and taken seriously by students will largely depend on their ability to act like a schoolteacher. In other words, being a schoolteacher is an established social role one learns to play and not an individual creation that one can simply make up using whatever one fancies as sign-equipment. As Goffman explains, 'When an actor takes on an established social role, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it' (37). This will not entirely determine your performance, but it will constrain it in particular and recognizable ways.

Front is often a key aspect in struggles over social status and upward social mobility.

> Commonly we find that upward mobility involves the presentation of proper performances and that efforts to move upward and efforts to keep from moving downward are expressed in terms of sacrifices made for the maintenance of front. Once the proper sign-equipment has been obtained and familiarity gained in the management of it, then this equipment can be used to embellish and illumine one's daily performances with a favourable social style.
>
> *(45–6)*

The examples I gave of a declared preference for beer rather than lager, Pinot Grigio over Chardonnay, and grocery shopping at Marks and Spencer instead of

Aldi, might all feature as key sign-equipment in the entanglement of front in efforts to advance social status and achieve upward social mobility. Other obvious examples might include changes of dress code and the social events that might be attended. Goffman, however, gives the example of a struggle over the meaning of administering anaesthesia in American hospitals.

> In some hospitals anaesthesia is still administered by nurses behind the front that nurses are allowed to have in hospitals regardless of the tasks they perform – a front involving ceremonial subordination to doctors and a relatively low rate of pay. In order to establish anaesthesiology as a speciality for graduate medical doctors, interested practitioners have had to advocate strongly the idea that administering anaesthesia is a sufficiently complex and vital task to justify giving to those who perform it the ceremonial and financial reward given to doctors.
>
> *(38)*

In the sense that someone still had to do it, administering anaesthesia did not change. But what did change was the meaning of administering anaesthesia and, consequently, the status afforded to someone doing it. Given its new meaning and new status, it was now seen as an inappropriate task for a nurse to carry out. In other words, as sign-equipment, administering anaesthesia was no longer regarded, by those with the power to decide, as an appropriate aspect of the front of being a nurse; instead it became a 'natural' part of what it is to perform as a medical doctor. In other words, the sign-equipment remained the same but its meaning and use changed quite dramatically.

The front region of a performance is always connected to a back region. Goffman divides the two in this way: 'front regions where a particular performance is or may be in progress, and back regions where action occurs that is related to the performance but inconsistent with the appearance fostered by the performance' (135). Most performances of the self involve a front region where a performance is presented and a back region where the performance is prepared. Access to these regions, especially the backstage area, is controlled. The success of a performance may depend on a strict separation of these regions. For example, when playing professional football, the changing room is a backstage area and the playing field is a front region. What goes on in the backstage area is in part preparation for the performance in the front region. Moreover, the success of the latter may depend on keeping secret what takes place in the former. If a professor gives a lecture this is delivered in the front region. The lecture theatre, with its various sign-equipment provides the setting for the performance. But the preparation for this performance will have taken place in the back region or backstage (i.e. in the professor's office or study). It is here that key parts of the performance are constructed and it is here that some of the necessary sign-equipment is stored. It is also here that lecture notes are written and printed and rewritten and printed again, worked on until the lecture is ready for delivery. In the interests of impression management all of this

preparation remains hidden from the front region, thus, hopefully, creating the impression of an eloquent and effortless discourse on a particular topic; a confirmation not of hard work but of the easy intelligence one expects when a professor speaks.

When I was a student I once worked in a very expensive restaurant. My job was washing up in the kitchen. It was quite striking the difference between front and backstage. Rich guests, eating wonderful food, served with great deference by ultra-polite serving staff, usually filled the front region. The backstage area, where the food was prepared and cutlery and crockery was cleaned, was quite different. Here staff laughed and joked about the rich guests and about the occasional problems with the food. In the front region the food appeared as if by magic, in the backstage area everything was done to make this magic possible. I remained in the back region washing up, but the waiting staff tried to move effortlessly between these two regions: they would relax in the kitchen and then stiffen as they left with food and drink to serve. And of course the language in these two regions was quite different. Backstage it was informal, chatty, jokey, often profane and sexual, while in the front region of the restaurant it was always formal, ultra-polite, and deferential. The impression management and the sustaining of the definition of the situation depended on these two regions remaining separate from each other. If a guest decided to enter the kitchen it would initially cause a certain amount of panic and result in the usual actions and interactions suddenly being performed in a very different way.[2] Front and back regions, although seemingly bounded, are not necessarily geographically fixed or even stable. When a guest entered the kitchen of the restaurant where I worked, it changed temporarily from a back to a front region and staff performed accordingly. Think also about what happens when on a train someone nearby answers a mobile phone. The conversation for the speaker is a front region event, while for those nearby, those on the 'outside' of the conversation, but who can hear at least one side of the conversation very clearly, it is formally a back region. Therefore, although many people in the train carriage can hear at least part of the conversation, these people are not expected to listen. Instead the people all around the conversation are expected to engage in 'tactful inattention' (223).

Goffman's presentation of the self in everyday life raises interesting questions about the nature of the self that performs. He makes a distinction between 'our all-too-human selves and our socialized selves' (63). This clearly indicates that for him there are two selves: the self that is and the self that acts. Another way to understand this is to think that each of us consists of a natural self (that is singular) and an acting self (that is plural). Even his title, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, seems to suggest a distinction between a self that presents and is singular and a self that is presented and therefore plural. The supposed natural self motivates each performance of the self, but in each performance the natural self is not visibly there; it is an acting self that occupies the stage. His example of 'a young American middle-class girl playing dumb for the benefit of her boyfriend' (81) provides further evidence of the idea of a distinction between a natural and a performed self. He quotes the student making the following complaint: 'At times I resent him!

Why isn't he my superior in all ways in which a man should excel so that I could be my natural self? What am I doing here with him, anyhow? Slumming?' (229). Her struggle between accepting ideas of male superiority and her own experience of the behaviour of men is interesting, but what is more interesting for our purposes is her belief in a natural self. In other words, her belief that behind her performance of playing dumb is a natural self orchestrating the presentation. In his discussion of the complexities of her performance, he draws these conclusions.

> To be a given kind of person, then, is not merely to possess the required attributes, but also to sustain the standards of conduct and appearance that one's social grouping attaches thereto. The unthinking ease with which performers consistently carry off such stand-maintaining routines does not deny that a performance has occurred, merely that the participants have been aware of it.
>
> *(81)*

There is clearly a distinction being made here between a natural self ('a given kind of person') and a performed self ('standards of conduct and appearance').

> A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation – this self – is a *product* of the scene that comes off, and not the *cause* of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited.
>
> *(244–5)*

Again, he is clearly making a distinction between the self that is performed ('a performed character') and a natural self ('an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die'). Therefore, while it is true that he thinks our identities are multiple, a repertoire of identities that can be mobilized as we change from role to role and from audience to audience, underneath each dramaturgical act is a natural self motivating and organizing each presentation by drawing on a social repertoire of identities appropriate to the staging of each particular performance, in each particular situation and thus seeking to fix the definition of the situation in a drama of impression management. With this in view I will now conclude this chapter with a discussion of Judith Butler 's theory of performativity. As we shall see, in Butler's argument any distinction between natural and performed self is collapsed.

Performativity

Butler begins from Simone de Beauvoir's observation that 'one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one' (de Beauvoir 1984: 12). Although de Beauvoir's

argument has the advantage of seeing gender as something made in culture and not something fixed by nature, the problem with this model of sex and gender, according to Butler, is that it assumes that male and female biology is outside culture. Against this, she argues that biology is itself always already culturally gendered as 'male' and 'female' and, as such, already guarantees particular versions of the feminine and the masculine. In other words, the distinction between sex and gender is not a distinction between nature and culture; it is between two versions of the cultural. Therefore, as she contends 'one is not born a woman, one becomes one; but further, one is not born female, one becomes female' (1999: 33).

Butler's argument is that gender is not the expression of biological sex, it is performatively constructed in culture and, moreover, what is constructed in culture also constructs biology as male or female. So, whereas de Beauvoir maintains that biological identity sets the limits of gender identity, Butler argues that gender identity produces biological identity. To fully comprehend this, and to appreciate its implications for an understanding of identity formation in everyday life, we need to understand performativity. Butler's concept of performativity should not be confused with the idea of performance understood as a form of play-acting in which a more fundamental identity (a 'natural self') remains intact behind the theatricality of the identity on display. As she explains it, 'there is no identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (ibid.). For Butler, then, what seems like the expression of biology is in fact what produces the apparent authority of the biological. In other words, the more I behave like a 'man', the more this seems to confirm the determining role of my 'male' biology.

Butler's theory of performativity is a development of JL Austin's theory of performative language ('speech acts'). Austin divides language into two types, constative and performative. Constative language is descriptive language. The sky is blue is an example of a constative statement. Performative language, on the other hand, does not merely describe what already exists; it brings something into being. 'I now pronounce you husband and wife' is an obvious example; it does not describe something, it brings it into existence; that is, when the words are spoken by an appropriate person, they transform two single people into a married couple. As Austin explains, 'the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action' (1962: 6). Butler argues that gender works in much the same way as performative language. At the moment of birth, in answer to the question 'What is it?', the answer is always 'It's a boy' or 'It's a girl'. The use of the noun boy or girl transforms the pre-human 'it' into a gendered subject. In this, the first of many performative acts, the body of the child is made culturally intelligible. The pronouncement, 'It's a girl' or 'It's a boy', comes with rules and regulations that pre-exist the child, which the child is expected to follow and obey: 'little boys do this, little girls don't do that', etc. In other words, what seems like an announcement of recognition is in fact a moment of constitution: the 'it' is made a subject (male or female) and thus begins a continuous process of subjectification in which the 'it' is required to conform to culturally intelligible (i.e. socially acceptable) norms of male

or femaleness – in this way, the subject is subjected. So naming me a boy does not reveal my gender identity, it produces it – a production that maps out key aspects of my social 'destiny'.

However, for 'it's a girl' or 'it's a boy' to make sense it has to conform to a structure of cultural intelligibility that already exists (that is, we have to already know what it means to say 'it's a girl' or 'it's a boy'). But more than this, the structure of intelligibility demands that such a pronouncement be made: it is an act of conformity to a world that has already agreed to divide humans into male and female on the grounds of biological difference. Each time this happens, the pronouncement is citing previous pronouncements and it is the fact that it is citing these previous pronouncements that gives it its authority and validity. This part of Butler's argument draws on Jacques Derrida's extension of Austin's theory of performative language. As Derrida asks, 'Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a "coded" or iterable utterance, in other words, if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as conforming with an iterable model?' (1982: 18). In other words, the power of each pronouncement, why it makes sense, why it has authority and validity, and requires conformity, is the weight of previous citations. Moreover, this first citation is the beginning of a continuous process of further citations, as the 'it' is required to conform to the social norms of its assigned gender identity. Our gender identity, therefore, is 'not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment' (Butler 1993: 232). A variety of discourses, including those from parents, fashion, educational institutions, the media, will all combine to ensure our conformity to the reiteration and citation of gender norms.[3] In this way, the performance of gender creates the illusion of an already existing gendered self (guaranteed by biology). Sarah Chinn provides an excellent summary of the process.

> The naturalizing effects of gender means that gender feels natural – even the understanding that it is performative, that our subjectivities themselves are constructed through its performance, does not make it feel any the less intrinsic. Our identities depend upon successful performance of our genders, and there is an entire cultural arsenal of books, films, television, advertisements, parental injunctions and peer surveillance to make sure those performances are (ideally) unconscious and successful.
>
> *(1997: 306–7)*

If, as Butler maintains, 'gender reality is created through sustained social performances' (1999: 180) it is acting like a man or a woman that produces gender identities. There is not a self that presents in everyday life; there is not, as is the case in Goffman's argument, a 'natural self' that performs other identities – a distinction between being and doing. Rather being ('natural self') and doing ('presentation of self') are the same: it is *doing* masculine things that make a man masculine; men do not *have* masculinity, they *do* masculinity/masculinities.

Butler chooses 'drag' as a model for explanation not, as some critics seem to think, because she thinks it is 'an example of [the] subversion [of gender]' (xxii), but because 'it dramatize[s] the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established' (xxviii). Drag exposes the assumed and apparent unity and fictional coherence of the normative heterosexual performance of gender. As she explains, 'In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency' (175). To be in drag is not to copy an original and natural gender identity, it is to 'imitate the myth of originality itself' (176). As she explains,

> If gender attributes … are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal. The distinction between expression and performativeness is crucial. If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality.
>
> *(180)*

Butler gives the example of Aretha Franklin singing, 'you make me feel like a natural woman':

> she seems at first to suggest that some natural potential of her biological sex is actualized by her participation in the cultural position of 'woman' as object of heterosexual recognition. Something in her 'sex' is thus expressed by her 'gender' which is then fully known and consecrated within the heterosexual scene. There is no breakage, no discontinuity between 'sex' as biological facticity and essence, or between gender and sexuality. Although Aretha appears to be all too glad to have her naturalness confirmed, she also seems fully and paradoxically mindful that that confirmation is never guaranteed, that the effect of naturalness is only achieved as a consequence of that moment of heterosexual recognition. After all, Aretha sings, you make me feel like a natural woman, suggesting that this is a kind of metaphorical substitution, an act of imposture, a kind of sublime and momentary participation in an ontological illusion produced by the mundane operation of heterosexual drag.
>
> *(2009: 235)*[4]

If, to repeat, 'gender reality is created through sustained social performances' (Butler 1999: 180), perhaps one of the principal theatres for its creation is the presentation of self in everyday life. As we have already discussed, by the presentation of self, Goffman means the many ways in which we treat everyday life as a stage on which to perform multiple versions of our 'natural self'; how we seek by our performances to control and guide the impressions we make on others. According to Goffman, 'we can profitably study performances that are quite false in order to learn about ones that are quite honest' (73). From the perspective of performativity it is not a matter of distinguishing between false and honest performances, rather we should recognize that all performances performatively produce the self. Therefore, whereas Goffman sees this as a natural self that performs a variety of selves appropriate to different situations, for Butler what is really happening is the performative construction of who we are. As Butler insists, gender performativity is not a voluntary practice; it is a continual process of almost disciplinary reiteration: 'gender performativity cannot be theorized apart from the forcible and reiterative practice of regulatory sexual regimes … and in no way presupposes a choosing subject' (1993: 15). If we think about this in terms of Goffman's example of the female college students it should make us less willing to accept their understanding and Goffman's theorization of their understanding of the situation.

As Goffman knows all too well, front is rarely freely chosen: a better description of the students' performance would be that they were in effect playing roles; they were not expressing themselves for a particular purpose, they were playing roles with a long history of being performed. If we now reconsider Goffman's example of the female college students acting dumb in order to attract dateable men, how they perform the presentation of self no longer seems like the voluntary act of freely choosing subjects. In other words, these performances are performative. The more the male and female students act in this way, the more this way of acting becomes normative, the more this becomes the way that male and female college students are expected to act. But more than this, are not these students citing and reiterating ways of acting that already exist in the canons of intimacy between heterosexual men and women? Moreover, by acting in this way, are they not helping to reproduce the canon for future citation and reiteration? Following Butler, the answer to both questions is yes. So, when Goffman says with irony 'Through all of this the natural superiority of the male is demonstrated, and the weaker role of the female affirmed' (1990: 48) he is in fact drawing attention not to a presentation of self in everyday life but to one of the many ways, through citation and iteration, that the self is performatively produced and reproduced. Put simply, the female college students were performing a 'regulatory fiction' (Butler 1999: 180).

Conclusions

To conclude this chapter, we can say that one is not born into everyday life with an identity that then performs the self in different ways. Everyday life is what

produces who we are. Our identities consist of the accumulation of what is outside, in everyday life, in the belief that it is an expression of what is inside, an articulation of our human nature. As a result, human subjects only become recognizable as human subjects through conformity with recognizable standards of cultural intelligibility. As Butler puts it, in a discussion of gender identity that is also applicable to everyday identities more generally, '"naturalness" [is] constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that create the effect of the natural, the original, and the inevitable' (xxvii–xxix). The performance of everyday identity creates the illusion of a prior substantiality – a natural self – and suggests that the presentation of self in everyday life is merely an expression of an already existing identity. But this illusion should not blind us to the fact that it is the presentation of self that authorizes the existence of the natural self and not the other way round. Or, to put it another way, the natural self is as much a performance as any of the other presentations of self in everyday life. When the college student talks to Goffman about her natural self, this is just as much an act of impression management as any of the other performances she mentions. For some reason Goffman does not seem to recognize this and instead he takes what she says at face value. However, as Butler makes clear, our identity is not the expression of a natural self with which we were born, it is performatively constructed in processes of iteration and citation, which gradually produce and reinforce our sense of identity and our sense of belonging in everyday life.

> Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability [and citation], a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability [and citation] implies that 'performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated [and cited] under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not determining it fully in advance.
>
> *(1993: 95)*

In other words, the everyday is not a stage on which a natural self freely performs in a play of multiple identities; it is a series of theatrical scripts that, through iteration and citation, produce performatively the drama of who we are and where we belong in the situated intelligibility of everyday life.

Notes

1. 'All the world is not, of course a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify' (Goffman 1990: 78). It is not that everyday life consists of actors who become audiences and audiences who become actors, rather, although our actions are constructed and scripted from repertoires we learn, we do not do this in the practised

and self-conscious way a man about to play Hamlet does. 'In short, we all act better than we know how' (80).

2. There is also a third region that is neither part of the front nor back. He calls this 'the outside' (Goffman 1990: 135). So, if the kitchen is the backstage and the restaurant is the front region, the area beyond the car park is the outside.
3. Although becoming a father is a biological event, it is also in a very fundamental sense a cultural matter of citation and iteration. That is, a man becomes a father by acting like a father. If he is told he is a bad father it is because he is not doing a good job at acting like a father. The solution to the problem is to act more like a father. In other words, he must cite and iterate the socially accepted qualities of a father.
4. '(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman' was written by Gerry Goffin, Carole King, and Jerry Wexler. Carole King's recording of the song is on her album *Tapestry*. Aretha Franklin's version is on her *Greatest Hits* album.

9

THE MEDIATIZED EVERYDAY

Mediatization is a concept developed and used to analyse and describe the increasingly media-saturated world of the twenty-first century. In this chapter I will first explain the concept and then use it to critically explore the everyday experience of being in love and how this has become more and more entangled with the use of media.[1]

Mediatization

There can be little doubt that media (both discourses and technologies) have in recent years become a very visible feature of everyday life. It is not difficult to see that the world around us has become more and more filled with media. Mediatization is, first of all, a term used to describe these changes – captured in the phrase *the everyday has become increasingly mediatized*. For example, it is now impossible to walk down the high street of any town or city and not see people using mobile phones to talk, text or take photographs. Similarly, it is hard to imagine a conversation that did not include talk about what is on television or radio or what is showing at the cinema. But mediatization is more than a description of a new phase in the relationship between media and the everyday; it is an attempt to explain this new relationship; an attempt to critically understand the increasing presence and influence of media in everyday life.

Traditionally, the relationship between media and the everyday has been understood in two quite distinct ways. The first is what has come to be known as the 'media effects' model. Put simply, this sees the media's power in terms of what it does to people. This might be in terms of the politics of news coverage, the morality of Hollywood films or the persuasive power of advertising. According to this understanding, media cause groups or individuals to change their behaviour: they vote in a new way, their sexual attitudes are modified or they buy different

products. In each example, media and the people they influence are seen as separate from one another. That is, people act and interact in everyday life and the media influence these acts and interactions; the key point for mediatization being that media and the practices of everyday life are independent of each other. The second understanding, sometimes misleadingly called the 'active audience' model, is focused on consumer activity and points to what people do with media as they use it in their actions and interactions in everyday life. In other words, instead of media making us do things, according to this model the interesting question is what we do with media. Within cultural studies Michel de Certeau's work on 'secondary production' (discussed in Chapter 7 here) has been a major theoretical influence on this way of understanding the role of media. Again, as in the model of media effects, the media and its consumers are seen as separate from one another. That is, people act and interact in everyday life and in the course of this they use media; again, the key point for mediatization being that in this second model media and the practices of everyday life are independent of each other.

Without denying the significance and importance of these two ways of understanding, mediatization suggests a very different kind of relationship between media and everyday life. When media is understood as either producing effects or being used in social action and interaction, it is, as already indicated, always seen as independent of our consumption of it; that is, it is either an outside variable that influences our behaviour or it is a technology we introduce from outside with which we do things. For example, I watch an advert on television and I immediately go out and buy the product advertised. In another scenario my wife and I watch the same advert together and we use it to remember what we did a couple of years ago in Turkey. In this scenario, rather than a mechanism to prompt me to buy something, it becomes the basis for us to remember our holidays. Mediatization suggests that media are more fundamental to our actions and interactions than these approaches, and the two scenarios I have outlined, seem to suggest. According to mediatization media are increasingly part of the very fabric of everyday life; it is almost unthinkable without media. But this does not mean that media determines or controls everyday life – this is not or should not be another version of technological determinism. Rather what is being suggested is that media are now fundamental to how *we live* the everyday.

Mediatization, therefore, represents a new stage in the relationship between media and everyday life. Put simply, media are no longer independent of those they influence or of those who make use of them. Instead, under conditions of mediatization media are now increasingly entangled in almost all aspects of everyday life, not, to repeat the crucial point, as an independent factor but as an integral part of how the everyday is increasingly lived. That is, everyday life is no longer simply a place that media influence or where media are used, it is where the acts and interactions of people are now almost unthinkable without media. For example, media have entered the ways of working of many institutions: texting and email are now standard tools of business communication. At the same time media have assumed a greater role as a public arena for news and debate: to such an

extent that if it is not in the media it cannot really be news. This should not be confused with mediation, that is, the use of media to communicate. Although mediatization clearly includes the use of media to communicate, it goes beyond this in that it identifies not just use but how use is changing what is communicated. Text and email are not just a means to communicate; they have changed how we communicate. This does not mean that the media do not produce effects or that people do not use the media in particular ways, but it does mean that media are now in a different relationship with people and have a different place and position in everyday life.

For example, party politics increasingly operate through media and are more and more shaped by their logic. By media logic I do not intend the claim that media operate with a single logic underpinning all their operations, rather I mean that different media in different contexts are increasingly able to shape how non-media institutions act and interact in ways that seem to follow particular media logics. But there is no media logic if by this term we mean the media all operate as one – a Media Industry. However, there is media logic if we think of the different media working in different contexts and helping to shape action and interaction in very particular ways. After all, interaction between media and human agents is crucial – media cannot do it on their own. It is not that media simply influence party politics, as in the media effects model, nor that party politics involves the active use of media, as in the active audience model, rather it is that media are now a fundamental part of party politics – as a result of the interweaving between the two it is now almost impossible to do party politics without media. There can be no doubt that party politics now organizes itself to fit the rhythms of media and that almost all significant political debate is shaped by media. In these ways, media can no longer be seen as outside politics producing media effects or being used in particular ways to mediate politics, it is now fundamental to the very practice of politics. So much so that it is hard to imagine party politics without media. The development in the USA in the 1980s of the 'sound bite', the short phrase or sentence produced explicitly for use on television, and intended to capture the essence of a larger, more complex statement or policy, is an obvious early example of the entanglement of media and party politics.[2] The party leader debates that take place before elections in the UK and USA are another example. These debates are not an example of media effects nor of politicians simply using the media, they are a clear example of the increasing mediatization of party politics – a type of politics that would not exist but for the existence of the media.

Media Love

To really understand how mediatization has impacted on everyday life is not really a theoretical question, it is more an empirical one, that is, hypothetical speculation must always be supported by grounded research. With this in mind the rest of the chapter will discuss the mediatization of romantic love. The empirical evidence I will draw on to present this case comes from a project called Media Love.[3] The

aim of the project was to understand the relationship between media and being in love. To be clear, by media love I do not mean social practices dictated by the media nor do I mean romantic love as represented in the media. Rather my focus is on how people use media as part of the architecture and choreography of a romantic relationship and how media is becoming all the time more fundamental to such relationships. Again, to be clear, the mediatization of romantic love should not be confused with its mediation. It is not just that we increasingly communicate romantically via media (we have been doing this in ever greater numbers since at least the late eighteenth century), rather, it is that media is now transforming our romantic communication. In other words, as both source and medium of romance, media has an increasingly transformative effect on romantic relations.

When we fall in love we connect to the other person in multiple ways. Many of these connections involve media. We go to the cinema together or we watch television, listen to music or play a computer game; we increasingly have photographs in common; we compare (consciously and unconsciously) our relationship with those we know in literature, film, radio and television; and when we are not together we use various media technologies to close down the space between us. This use of media allows our connection to intensify, and it is this intensification that in part allows others and ourselves to recognize that we are in love. Although I call this Media Love, I certainly do not think that media have successfully colonized contemporary practices of romantic love. Many aspects of a romantic relationship do not involve a direct connection with media. Nonetheless, the research shows that contemporary romantic practice has become entangled in, and almost unthinkable without, media. There can be little doubt that people increasingly, and actively, use media as an indispensable part of the production and reproduction of a romantic relationship.

The aim of the research was to explore media-entangled practices of romantic love. I sought to do this without reverting either to media determinism or to the view that romantic love is a simple fact of nature, which people articulate in various ways in moments of emotional and sexual intimacy. Stepping between these two temptations I tried to show how people use media to actively make romantic love. I share with actor-network-theory, what it shares with ethnomethodology (see discussion in Chapter 6 here), the view that our everyday social worlds, including practices of romantic love, are not a given, they have to be assembled and reassembled. Therefore, I treat media and its uses as existing in networks that materially produce romantic love. Moreover, the use of media is not a supplement to contemporary practices of romantic love; it is increasingly fundamental and foundational to the construction and maintenance of such relationships. As Latour might say, media are intimate actors in these relationships.

The relationship between romantic love and what is sometimes called mass media is historically speaking quite new. Although it is not difficult to find examples of stories of romantic love throughout recorded history, poetry, drama and mythology being the obvious places to find these, it is really only at the end of the eighteenth century, and expanding rapidly throughout the nineteenth and

twentieth, that romantic love becomes in the West an increasingly visible part of a shared public culture and a widely accepted means to emotional happiness and sexual fulfilment. As historian Edward Shorter points out, 'The romantic revolution … began late in the eighteenth century, sweeping across vast reaches of class and territory in the nineteenth to become, in the twentieth, the unassailable norm of courtship behaviour' (1977: 152).

The widespread development of this 'unassailable norm', as something socially visible and widely accepted, and as the main social practice of sexual and emotional intimacy in everyday life, coincided with the development of romantic media. As the historian Lawrence Stone observes, 'after 1780 romantic love and the romantic novel grew together' (1977: 190). The sociologist Anthony Giddens makes much the same point, 'The rise of romantic love more or less coincided with the emergence of the [romantic] novel' (1992: 40). This was also a view shared by contemporary commentators, 'Of all the arrows which Cupid has shot at youthful hearts, [the romantic novel] is the keenest. There is no resisting it. It is literary opium that lulls every sense into delicious rapture' (*The Universal Magazine*, 1772; quoted in Stone 1977: 190). Moreover, as François de la Rochefoucauld claimed, writing a little earlier, 'There are some people who would never have fallen in love if they had not heard there was such a thing' (quoted in Stone 1977: 191). This may have been intended as a mocking jibe at those supposedly too stupid to be able to think for themselves, or to be unable to act without first being told how to act, but I do not think that what he identifies implies self-deception; rather I take it as an unknowing recognition of the fact that we actively learn to do many of the things we simply assume to be natural. But the real problem with presenting this particular narrative of the relationship between media and romantic love is that it can often imply a one-way flow of influence from media to romantic practice. This is almost certainly what *The Universal Magazine* had in mind when it used the term 'literary opium'. Working from this assumption, the only valid reason to research the relationship between media and romantic love is to explore 'media effects' or to identify a particular 'media logic'. I totally reject this reduction. Instead my critical focus is on what people do with media, rather than what media make them do. This does not mean a denial of media influence, but a recognition that influence is not an inevitable consequence of supposed passivity, but a complex process that almost always involves agency and use. But to reiterate, I am trying to suggest something more than mediation of romantic relationships; I am thinking of media as a mediator, as an actor in the romantic relationship (for the distinction between mediators and intermediaries see the discussion of actor-network-theory in Chapter 6 here).

What is clear from the findings of the Media Love project is that people do not passively consume media and then translate this unproblematically and straightforwardly into social practices of romantic love. Instead the project continually encountered a dialogue between media and the active consumption practices of people in love. In Storey and McDonald (2013) I argue that the best way to understand the romantic power of media is to conceptualize it as working like a

language; a 'language' we have to work with in order to communicate our romantic feelings to others and to ourselves. To be clear, I do not mean media literally provide the language of romantic love, although at times they may in fact do this; rather I am suggesting that the discourses media produce work *like* a language in that they enable and constrain social practices of romantic love. To be in love, therefore, is to locate oneself in a mediatized network of meanings and practices (often contradictory) produced and/or circulated by media which establish a system of romantic 'common sense' or what might be called, to borrow from Michel Foucault, a romantic 'regime of truth' (Foucault 2002). And because media discourses of romantic love operate like a language we need to recognize that the performance of a language and language as a system are quite different: the language spoken does not dictate the act of speaking; the speaker actively selects from the resources the language makes available. In this way, then, although media discourses of romantic love both enable and constrain agency, they certainly do not dictate romantic practice as would be assumed by the 'media effects' model. It is like speaking any language, we are situated in a mediatized structure that both enables and constrains our ability to understand and to communicate and, as with language competence generally, there are different levels of media-derived romantic literacy. Umberto Eco's much-quoted definition of the postmodern attitude I think points to this. 'I think of the post-modern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her "I love you madly", because he knows that she knows (and she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland' (1985: 17). This may or may not identify a postmodern attitude, but for me it certainly identifies people with high levels of media-derived romantic literacy. Media, therefore, do not directly shape romantic practice, rather they provide the language from which romantic practice is articulated – a mediatized structure that both enables and constrains romantic agency. But, and this is a very important but, we have to stay within the romantic 'regime of truth' in order to remain romantically intelligible to others and to ourselves. As a result romantic practice (even in all its contradictory variety) only becomes recognizable as romantic practice through conformity with media-derived standards of romantic intelligibility (to deviate from these standards may cause 'translation' problems). This does not mean that our experiences of being in love are some kind of pre-scripted 'false consciousness' in which our emotional reactions are simple media creations. What the interviewees[4] made clear is that media do not have the effect of dictating romantic practice. Instead they offer a language; and like any language, it allows people to use it to articulate the meaning of their own experiences of romantic love. Part of the form this agency takes is in the way media discourses are both recognized and negotiated with (see Storey and McDonald 2013).

Listening romantically to music is a good example of the active use of media. As expected many of the interviewees talked about how particular songs had played a significant role in their romantic experiences. Although many of the interviewees identified music as something to relax with or as background to a romantic setting,

most suggested that music was almost always used to reactivate a romantic memory; it had an archival function in that it allowed them to return affectively to a romantic situation in the past. Interviewee 6 gave a typical response. 'It's not something that particularly enhances it for me as in when I'm falling in love or if I am in love. I don't think the music is something I think about at the time. For me it has always been afterwards.' Interviewee 4 made a similar point. 'It was playing when I first got together with somebody in a relationship and I always remember that song.' Interviewee 2 talked of how it 'reminded me … I'm not going to regret it, it does remind me'. Interviewee 1 remarked that 'every time I hear that song it always reminds me of that incident'. He also explained about how other songs always made him think of her. It was very clear that these songs had a powerful affective charge in their ability to enable him to rearticulate the past. 'I think of her straightaway … Sometimes it can be a bit sad. You know like, I think it depends on what mood you're in, cos sometimes when I hear that song I think, oh, yeah that was a really good night, we had a really good time. Then other times I think, oh, I'm never gonna be with her.' Interviewee 6 used music in much the same way.

> I think with music and the emotion of love, I think sometimes when you have been in love and you hear music, you do especially if you're on your own, you relate things that are in that music to yourself … Lately, over the last four or five weeks, since I decided to distance myself from the girl I was telling you about I was in a bit of a situation. I would say I was probably in a bit of a vulnerable state of mind and I was listening to music. Sometimes, if it was on and I would find it was actually making me more kind of sad and making me think of that person more.

What is clear is that each interviewee uses music in different ways to remember. But what is also the case is that their use of music is fundamental to the act of remembering – music and memory are entangled together to such an extent that I wonder if these memories would really exist without the music. There is a song by Eric Church in which he sings 'Funny how a melody sounds like a memory'.[5] It is this transformation of melody into memory – the mediatization of romantic memory – to which each of the interviewees is drawing attention.

The two most important technologies identified by the interviewees when being or falling in love were texting and Facebook. Texting was the media technology mentioned the most. Interviewee 9 gave a typical response: 'I'd say 90% of the communication is by text and then I'd say mobile phone for like a quick ten min phone call here and there.' Sometimes the romantic relationship itself seemed to be held together by the act of texting.

> We just got on really well and we saw each other about three or four times I think over about six weeks … [A]nd then we were texting a lot. A lot of it was based on texts and sending messages to each other and the fact that we

> only saw each other four times out of those six weeks I suppose was kind of irrelevant in the sense because we were texting a lot.
>
> *(Interviewee 6)*

Many interviewees were very clear that texting had the effect of accelerating the development of their romantic relationship. 'I think it speeds things up more than anything, because now with phones [for texting] you can constantly be in contact' (Interviewee 10). Interviewee 9 made much the same point. 'I think I'm closer to her because you get to know someone quicker cos you're texting them and like we do text quite a bit. And like in the early stages of us getting together *that's kind of like how we got to know each other* and like we were texting quite a bit and so I think it does help you get to know them a bit closer' (my italics). Again, this is not simple mediation; it is mediatization. Often it was the extent of texting that produced this quickening effect. 'Constantly, it wouldn't stop, it was ridiculous, our phones would be silent if we were together. But if we weren't together then they would be constantly going off. Even if we'd only been together that hour and I'd just come into uni for an hour he'd be texting me making sure I was OK, even though I'd be going back to his after … It was constant. The only reason we would stop is if I was in a lecture or he was in an exam at college' (Interviewee 8). In these examples, particularly the last one, texting is not simply a means to communicate romantic feelings, it is a fundamental part of the actual fabric of the relationship.

Part of the speeding up was in terms of sexual intimacy. 'I think you can be a bit more risky, a bit more rude, a bit more cheeky' (Interviewee 1). 'I think it's easier for people to let themselves get more intimate than what it previously would've been' (Interviewee 10). 'Yeah, I think especially when you're getting to know them, it's easier to be a bit more brash than say if you just met them on the street out of the blue. I don't think you'd be like, huh [he makes a noise suggesting sexual excitement]' (Interviewee 9). Interviewee 8 pointed out how, in this context, texting could provide a screen to hide behind; a mechanism to enable things to be said that, if necessary, could be disavowed. 'Yeah, you've got more confidence to message each other haven't you. Rather than face to face … I think in a message you can hide behind the words a bit: oh, I didn't mean to send you that … I was drunk. If you say something stupid, my friend sent it. You've got a million excuses to not mean what you wanted to say.' It is very clear that for Interviewee 8 the ability to be able to deny or disown an intended meaning ('a million excuses to not mean what you wanted to say') is very liberating. Interviewee 6 also found texting gave him a similar kind of freedom.

> I try to act the same in texts as I would do in person, but then I think that you do find yourself talking on text, or in fact on Facebook chat, you find yourself saying things that you probably truly wouldn't say in person … [W]hen you're looking somebody in the eye, I think it's sometimes difficult to actually say what you want to say.
>
> *(Interviewee 6)*

According to Interviewee 13, texting 'helped us seduce each other … It allowed us to express ourselves and say those things which made us feel the urge and need for the other person even more … It was precisely through text messages … that very "romantic" and breath-taking things were said between us.' Interviewee 11 gave an example that went well beyond the speeding up of sexual intimacy. In her case texting was in fact a form of sexual intimacy.

> My last relationship … began with a (tipsy) text message after not having seen each other in five years, and then largely developed by texting, email and Skype (without video) before we were able to see each other [at the time they were living in different countries]. So in that case, the falling in love part really happened without any face-to-face interaction.

When they eventually met, their technologically enabled sex life continued into their face-to-face relationship, but in ways she found slightly estranging. As she explained,

> I also felt that this [their previous text life] influenced how the relationship then actually worked. I remember, for instance, coming to [she names where her boyfriend lived] after months of not having seen each other, and what alienated me was that he immediately verbalised [as in a text] what he wanted to do when I had barely entered the house. Somehow, having just kissed me passionately and then went on to do what he was talking about would have been different [and by implication far more satisfying].

Sometimes the speeding up caused by texting can have other negative effects. As Interviewee 10 explained, 'But with texting it happens in fast motion, um, um, really fast, because I had a relationship with someone where we went out for a month and I really liked them, but from texting each other it just went down hill from there.' She identified the major reason for this negative effect: 'I think cos it's always in contact quite a lot … there's not really a lot to say when you've met up afterwards.' In other words, in her experience, constant texting can reveal too much too soon or it can simply feel like a prison house of too much knowledge. Interviewee 2 complained that constant texting denied him space. 'I wanted space and she wouldn't give it to me, so I just left my phone at home every now and then.' It later became clear in the interview that leaving his phone at home meant telling her he had left it at home.

Texting can create other difficulties in a romantic relationship. Interviewee 14, who described her younger self as a 'love detective', always on the lookout for evidence of attraction, had a very different experience of the possible problems associated with texting, one that nevertheless indicates how important it is as a measure of romantic attachment and seriousness. 'I had the misfortune to fall in love with a very unenthusiastic texter … which meant that a low response rate to text was interpreted as evidence of a lack of interest.' It seems that too much or too

little texting can undermine the foundations of a romantic relationship, a relationship that texting itself had helped to establish.

Text messaging also has the potential to create and maintain a quite detailed record of the romantic relationship. It can work like an electronic diary, but, unlike a conventional diary, one in which are stored comments from both sides of the relationship. As Interviewee 6 explains,

> I think looking back, cos that's one thing you will do with text messages, cos your mobile phone will store a lot of messages … I think when you have a situation like this [he is referring to the end of a romantic relationship] one of the things you find yourself doing, which is probably more harmful than helpful, is looking back on everything you have said, and I did that and it was actually quite interesting. I don't think it was harmful for me because it was more interesting to see what had happened … It was interesting to try and find out why this individual had made me act differently and had made me feel differently, and how come it upset me and made me generally unhappy when things weren't working.

Many of the interviewees included Facebook when talking about texting. They tended to use it in similar ways and, like texting, thought of it in relation to romantic relationships in both positive and negative terms. Interviewee 3, whose boyfriend was overseas, talked about 'romantic times when we used to instant message each other on Facebook'. When asked what they talked about, she replied, 'The boring things, like what I had done during the day and stuff … I think it's really important to have that sort of contact when someone is away for that long.' It is clear that Facebook allowed them to maintain their romantic relationship in circumstances that put the relationship under great strain. So it was not just a means to communication (mediation), it was a fundamental part of their mediatized relationship. Like Interviewee 3, Interviewee 7 explained that much of the conversation she has with her boyfriend on Facebook is often quite mundane. In addition to this, they would also do other things while they chatted. 'I will be doing essays and that when I'm talking to him and I'll say, oh, I'm not in the mood to do this essay and he says, yes, but if you just get it done it's out of the way. If he's had a really bad day at work, I'll say, oh, it'll be fine, it's just another day at work. If I'm watching TV, I'll tell him about it and he'll tell me about the game he's playing and things like that.' Clearly, Facebook allows them to talk and develop their relationship in a way that would normally only be possible in a situation of co-presence. Again, this is not mediation; it is mediatization. Interviewee 11 used Skype in ways similar to how Interviewees 3 and 7 used Facebook.

> [We would] Skype very often all day when we are both at home. We then usually go about our own business most of the time but feel that the other is

> there … We both work … but I have the iPad next to me and can glance at him every once in a while; or we leave it on when we go to sleep, and I might sleep already but he is still reading, or we have breaks together or in the end spend the evening together as if we had a proper date.

She then added:

> I think that especially in times like these, when everyone is expected to be flexible and mobile in career terms, these media make a huge difference in how close you can feel to each other in spite of the distance, and it can enable at least a variety of everyday life together.

Like texting, Facebook also has the potential to undermine what it has helped to develop and establish. As Interviewee 3 explained, 'you can see on Facebook their ex and their ex emailing them cos they still got a house together that they can't get rid of. I think that makes that relationship a bit more complicated.' She described another complication when she discovered photographs of her boyfriend's ex-girlfriend in his Facebook album. As she pointed out, 'she wasn't wearing that much clothes and obviously they upset me'. It became clear that it wasn't just that these photographs existed, but that they existed in a public space available for friends and family to see: 'if it was printed photos, I kind of understand that he would have photos of his ex around cos they were together quite a while'. So the photographs themselves were not the problem, it was their public location that really caused her to feel disappointed and upset. 'I also felt a little humiliated, cos it's on Facebook so everyone can see that he has still got pictures of his ex, which kind of reflects on me.' Interviewee 5 was also aware of the problem of photographs, and information more generally, being available on Facebook.

> If there is any pictures of me with like ex-girlfriends or girls I used to see, when I break up with them I remove them, cos the last thing you want to do when you're looking at someone's Facebook and saying, oh, that's what their ex looks like … [I]f she meets a lad, he's gonna be like, wow, look at all these things, her and the ex-boyfriend … and that's gonna put him under pressure … and he's like shit, he bought her this hotel [a couple of nights in a hotel], they went to London for the weekend. I'm broke, what do I do? If there was no social network and then that lad would know nothing about me, he wouldn't be able to click on profile to see where I'm from or what I do or whatever. He would probably forget about my name after a week.

Without Facebook the situation identified by Interviewees 3 and 5 would not be possible. Again, the technology does not just mediate the relationship, it is part of its mediatized structure.

Interviewee 5 pointed to the ways texting and Facebook are changing the practical possibilities of romance. 'Thirty years ago when my Dad met Mum, he said when he met her the next day he would phone her. See if you done that now the

girl might go, here, I don't remember you. By texts or Facebook, they don't have to reply and if they don't reply you know they are not interested.' Interviewee 6 gave another example of how Facebook is changing romantic practice. 'If you see somebody on a night out and you get talking to them they would probably find it less personally invading to be asked if they could be your friend on Facebook than to ask for their number.' But this simple switch from one technology to another may not be as benign as it sounds; it can lead to what he calls 'Facebook stalking'.

> If I know nothing about her I go on their Facebook and I can find out every single thing about her; I can look through her pictures and see what her ex-boyfriend looked like, what her friends are like, what she likes … Like, 'I like a man who holds my hand in the dark', say. You can tell everything they like and that's really scary because when you go on the first date you know everything about them and you're asking them questions that you already know [the answers]. You're asking them what do you study and it's written on the top of her Facebook.

As a consequence a first date may seem 'traditional', but it could be prepared for and structured by information that would have been unthinkable to lovers in the past; that is, inconceivable to lovers before the mediatization of everyday life.

Conclusions

The concern of the Media Love project was with what people do with media, which may in some cases be nothing at all. So I did not begin with media and then examine their use; rather, I began with accounts of everyday experiences of romantic love and then attempted to tease out how these were enabled and constrained by media use. During the interviews there was no attempt made to define romantic love or how we might define what counts as media. In each interview it was the interviewee who decided what these terms describe and delimit. The focus of the project, therefore, was not on the media of romantic love, but on how people use media to make romantic love, to make it socially manifest in practice. Therefore, while it is true that texting and Facebook enable a new kind of romantic communication and constrain the form this communication may take, they do not determine that we communicate nor what we communicate, this is always a matter of agency and use. However, what is also clear is that the two traditional models I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, media effects and active audience, cannot adequately explain the relationship between media and social practices of romantic love in everyday life. Instead, what the interviews show is a more intense, complex and contradictory relationship, one I think that is best captured by the concept of mediatization.[6] What is also certain is that more empirical research needs to be done. This may not be a very resounding way to conclude our discussion of mediatization, romantic love and everyday life, but it is

the only way to conclude unless of course we are willing to be satisfied with incomplete answers or with theoretical speculations untroubled by empirical investigation. But one thing we can be fairly confident about, everyday life is becoming increasingly mediatized and that the concept of mediatization helps us to better understand this development.

Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of mediatization see Hepp (2013) and Hjarvard (2013).
2. One of the earliest, and perhaps most famous, sound bites comes from a speech made by President Ronald Reagan in Berlin in June 1987. Referring to the Berlin Wall, the speech includes the phrase, 'Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall'. Although part of a longer speech, it seems clear that this was intended to be extracted for media use.
3. *Media Love* has so far passed through three stages. The first stage, which I do not draw on here, involved comparative work with Dr. Zhang Xiaohui of the Communication University of China. A second stage, which I do draw on here, was structured around thirty-eight discursive questionnaires and ten face-to-face semi-structured interviews. This stage was completed with the help of my colleague Katy McDonald. The third stage, which I also draw on here, consisted of four discursive questionnaires and four semi-structured interviews recorded using Skype. I would like to thank Katy and Xiaohui for their valuable contribution to the project. I have already presented preliminary research findings in Hong Kong (with Xiaohui), London, Freiburg, Bremen (with Katy), Boston (with Katy), Vienna, York, and Murcia. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who made comments on the project and its future direction. I would also like to thank all those who have taken part in the project.
4. Media Love interviewees

   Interviewee 1: male, British, straight, aged 19.
   Interviewee 2: male, British, straight, aged 19.
   Interviewee 3: female, British, straight, aged 25.
   Interviewee 4: male, British, gay, aged 19.
   Interviewee 5: male, British, straight, aged 23.
   Interviewee 6: male, British, straight, aged 21.
   Interviewee 7: female, British, straight, aged 19.
   Interviewee 8: female, British, straight, aged 19.
   Interviewee 9: male, British, straight, aged 19.
   Interviewee 10: female, British, straight, aged 19.
   Interviewee 11: female, German, bisexual, aged 36.
   Interviewee 12: female, Austrian, straight, aged 30.
   Interviewee 13: female, Spanish, straight, aged 33.
   Interviewee 14: female, Irish, straight, aged 34.
5. The song is called 'Springsteen' and is available on *Chief* and *Caught in the Act*. The second album is a live recording in which he talks about the events that inspired the song. Part of what he says seems to capture what the Interviewees 2, 4, and 6 experienced: 'I had a melody connect itself with a memory'.
6. Although the mediatized space is occupied and made use of as determined by its users, there is another level of activity, the capitalist search for surplus value, and this does not disappear – there are always times, for example, when our 'media relationships' depend on the purchase of something from the markets opened up in and/or by media.

10

EVERYDAY LIFE IN CULTURAL STUDIES: NOTES TOWARDS A DEFINITION

When I first planned this book, I had expected that after completing the first nine chapters, especially the work discussed in Chapters 2 to 9, I would be in a position to outline a concept of everyday life in cultural studies. I had not expected that as I began to write this final chapter, I would not have such a concept ready to present. Instead I have discovered that what I said in Chapter 1 about current presentations of everyday life in cultural studies could apply equally well to almost every attempt to write about it. Beyond saying that it involves human agency and taken-for-granted habits and routines, there is very little that would count as a foundational definition of everyday life. As with popular culture, it seems that the best we can say is that it is a multi-accentual sign, an empty category that can be filled in different ways, producing different meanings with different effects of power.

In this sense the book is a failure. But, as Bob Dylan says, 'there is no success like failure'. The success that this particular failure brings is that it points to the enormous difficulties in trying to define something that is so taken for granted, not just in terms of how it is lived, but, more importantly for the purposes of this book, how it is critically (or not critically) understood. However, Dylan also says, 'failure is no success at all'.[1] With this in mind, I will spend most of the rest of the chapter in an attempt to successfully outline notes towards a cultural studies definition of everyday life. In order to do this, I will first draw on the work of Raymond Williams, the person I regard as not just the founding father of cultural studies, but also its most important thinker. I will then supplement his account of culture as a realized signifying system with work on space and place from cultural geography and elsewhere. But before I directly address the question of everyday life, I will begin by outlining my own understanding of cultural studies, especially its politics and its status as a discipline. Doing this first, I think, will then make clear the limits of my definition of everyday life in cultural studies.

Disciplining cultural studies

One of the things that attracted me to cultural studies, and encouraged me to become a postgraduate student at the *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* (CCCS) at Birmingham University, was what I perceived as its attempt to make popular culture and the everyday theoretically accessible to anyone who wanted to take an interest. In other words, it was the discipline's 'democratic' academic credentials that attracted me. I fully recognized that there was a politics to its research and publications, but I also understood that they were not a substitute for the politics I was involved with outside academic life.[2] However, during my time at the CCCS, I learned that cultural studies was regarded by some as 'politics by other means' (Hall 1990: 12).[3] As Stuart Hall explains, 'there is no doubt in my mind that we [at the CCCS] were trying to find an institutional practice in cultural studies that might produce an organic intellectual' (1992: 281).[4] This is a claim that has gradually been modified in recognition of the academic conditions of cultural studies. But, it is also a claim that has echoed down the years, and one that has ever since waxed and waned in volume. It can be heard in many publications and conference papers. For example, in a widely known essay, 'The Need for Cultural Studies', Henry A. Giroux et al. make the collective call for cultural studies to become 'a counter-disciplinary praxis' (1995: 648), claiming that 'one of the central goals of cultural studies [is] the creation of … resisting intellectuals' (653). Their aim is to produce 'cultural studies … as an oppositional public sphere' (654). 'Only a counter-disciplinary praxis developed by intellectuals who resist disciplinary formation is likely to produce emancipatory social practice' (ibid.). To achieve this requires going outside institutions of education to construct 'various sorts of collectives, variously membered – study groups, counter-disciplinary research groups, even societies and institutes' (656). For me this is mostly the task of a political party and not the work of an academic discipline. But this does not mean that cultural studies should not try its best to take education beyond its traditional spaces of operation. Expanding the sites of education is crucial to a truly democratic society, but we cannot see this as something only cultural studies should do. If knowledge really is power, all knowledge is power; therefore, we cannot restrict the expansion of education to only work in cultural studies.

Now it is one thing to claim that the academic analysis of the relations between the making of meaning(s) and power – to think culture politically – is a political project; it is another matter entirely to claim that such intellectual work is the expression of something like a political movement. Although it is seductive, we must learn to resist its, ultimately, empty appeal.[5] What is needed, as Hall points out, is 'a practice [an academic practice] which understands the need for intellectual modesty' (1992: 286). Cultural studies is not a political movement. It has to mature and recognize itself as above all a theoretical, research and pedagogic practice. We must face the fact that cultural studies is potentially no more political than, say, literary studies, sociology or history. Its politics are those of the academy and of intellectual life as it is lived outside institutions of education. There is of course a

politics of pedagogy. How and what we teach is always to some extent a question of politics. Most who teach cultural studies would probably agree with bell hooks' point that cultural studies, 'in its acknowledgment that education is not politically neutral', must work for pedagogical strategies which enable 'students to … unite knowledge learned in classrooms with life outside' (1994: 4). In my own cultural studies teaching, for example, I hope I teach students not how to think about the world in a particular way – I am not recruiting for a political party – but that I encourage them (and they me) to think critically and to engage critically with the world outside our programme of study. In other words, my hope is that I teach critical thinking; thinking that is just as likely to challenge my own thinking, as I hope it will challenge the thinking of others. Moreover, I have no doubt that many people in other academic disciplines are doing exactly the same thing with the same hopes in mind.

Sometimes cultural studies is presented not as a political movement but as a project. This is how Lawrence Grossberg describes it. Although he is careful not to argue that cultural studies has some unique claim on the political, he does nevertheless make it sound like a political movement: 'Cultural studies matters because it is about the future, and about some of the work it will take, in the present, to shape the future' (2010: xii). But without political organization it seems very unlikely that any academic discipline, even if it calls itself politics by other means, is going to shape the future. It is an academic discipline and its politics are those of an academic discipline. It is from the academy that it derives its power. But Grossberg undermines this source of power when he says 'given my sense of cultural studies as something that you make up as you go, as a project that reshapes itself in and attempts to respond to new conjunctures as problem-spaces, it was difficult to imagine how one could actually produce an introduction to cultural studies' (xiii). It is very difficult to see how such a 'project', depending, as it does, on what can be made up as we go, and therefore cannot be explained in an introduction, can have any hope of shaping anything, let alone the future. If it cannot be introduced, it follows that it cannot be taught. What does this say of those who are now teaching such programmes or have written introductions to cultural studies? They are cultural dupes who clearly do not know what they are doing? How do we produce students as the academics of the future if all we can offer is what privileged intellectuals make up as they go?[6] We have to get beyond the idea that it is so special – so politically special – that it cannot be defined – a politics so pure it allows the intellectual to transcend both the claims of the academy and the need for an organized politics. Cultural studies may have a unique politics but it is not uniquely political. It is one thing to argue that academics can produce political knowledge, it is quite another to see this as the special domain of cultural studies. Nor should politics by other means be used as an arrest warrant for the little boy in the crowd who refuses to see institutionalization and disciplinarity as the emperor's new clothes.

There may be a temptation to live in the 'as if' of what Hall describes as 'the possibility that there could be, sometime, a movement which would be larger than

the movement of petit-bourgeois intellectuals' (1992: 288). But this is a temptation that must be grounded in the 'as is' of teaching and research in institutions of education. Despite his hopes for the production of organic intellectuals at the CCCS, Hall also remembers having to insist upon the status of its intellectual work: '[W]hat we do within the Centre are ideas, individually and as groupings, informed groupings, which you can take back [to a range of political constituencies]. But that's a different thing from saying the Centre organizationally is going to lead this or that project – it was not a political party' (1995: 667). The extent to which such intellectual work is political is always contingent, as is the case with intellectual work from other academic disciplines, on its context of operation.

Much of the recent resistance to disciplinarity stems from a political romance of cultural studies. The 'institutionalization' of cultural studies, especially in America, is seen as 'a moment of profound danger' (Hall 1992: 285). Giroux et al., for example, argue that cultural studies must remain undisciplined, claiming that, 'Disciplinary study requires constant attention to those few questions that constitute its current specialized concern. These questions are inevitably far removed from the genuine controversies in a given culture' (1995: 650). Such a claim does not square with the working practices of radical intellectuals in, say, sociology, history or literary studies. Even if it did, there is nothing in the logic of disciplinarity that would dictate that this should be the case with cultural studies. Too often accounts of the interdisciplinarity of cultural studies have depended for their coherence on unconvincing claims that all other academic areas of work are hopelessly disciplined and monolithic. Any global investigation of the humanities and social sciences would encounter disciplines marked by shifting objects of study, theoretical and methodological plurality, and radical intellectuals. It is simply arrogant to think that cultural studies is different in this respect from, say, sociology, history or literary studies.[7]

Clear thinking about the disciplinary future of cultural studies is not helped by arguments that assume an opposition between cultural studies as a heroic resisting practice and cultural studies as institutionally incorporated. Such narratives depend on the assumption that cultural studies was formed and has existed outside the sustenance of an institutional space and a pedagogic practice. In other words, it depends on a view of cultural studies as a political movement with a significant existence outside institutions of education. It is only this kind of narrative that can seriously suggest that cultural studies has ever been in danger of being co-opted. What can these narratives of co-option possibly mean – the expansion of more programmes in cultural studies? Keeping it small and on the margins will keep it heroic and resisting?

Against this political romance we have to recognize that cultural studies has always been first and foremost a pedagogic project and academic practice; and educational institutions have always been its primary context of operation. Not only was institutionalization inevitable (how else could it exist?) and to be cautiously welcomed, it was always the case. For these reasons 'the institutionalization

of cultural studies' is a deeply misleading phrase, implying that there was once upon a time a pure political moment of cultural studies, prior to its emergence in academic life. But this is simply not true: cultural studies was from its very beginnings an academic practice in an institutional space. This does not mean that its birth was not induced by social and political forces outside the university. But there has never existed a pure political cultural studies, freewheeling outside the conditions of an educational space. It is a myth which derives sustenance from Hall's claim that 'cultural studies was not conceptualised as an academic discipline at all'; the Birmingham Centre was nothing more than a convenient refuge; a 'locus to which we retreated when that conversation in the open world could no longer be continued: it was politics by other means' (1990: 12). Such a position seems to require that we see Richard Hoggart, the CCCS's founder and first director, as either advocate of cultural studies as politics by other means or as political dupe. Neither position is really convincing. As Colin Sparks points out, 'Hoggart … was not, and never had been, a Marxist [Marxism, by implication, being what cultural studies supposedly was before institutionalization]. His only relation to Marxism was one of dismissal' (1996: 72). The cost of seeing cultural studies as existing in strategic political retreat in Birmingham in the early 1960s (with its political origins in adult education and the New Left) is that all subsequent developments must be seen as being on the low road to political co-optation. This is cultural studies as radical subculture – from moment of resistance to moment of incorporation.

On the one hand it seems fairly ridiculous to still worry about institutionalization when there are research centres, academic journals, international conferences, publishers' lists, professional associations, university programmes and departments, that all carry the name cultural studies. However, on the other hand, it is worse than ridiculous when this limited institutional success is now no longer secure as cultural studies increasingly struggles to attract research funding, its recruitment of students is faltering, programmes are closing, and it is still regularly attacked in the media and by academics outside the discipline. In such circumstances institutionalization is not a threat; it is a lifeline.

To repeat the point I made earlier, it is one thing to claim that the academic analysis of the relations between culture and power – to think culture politically – is a political project; it is another matter entirely to claim that such intellectual work is the expression of something like a political movement. There can be little doubt that some people expect too much of cultural studies. But it is not the programme of a political movement; it is not politics by other means; it is a theoretical practice and a research and pedagogic project. Saying cultural studies is potentially no more political than any other area of academic work is another way of saying that all academic work has the potential to be political in the sense that it has the possibility to become part of the conversation (rarely polite) that articulates knowledge and political struggle. It can and does produce political knowledge, but so do, for example, history and sociology, but these do not claim to be political movements. It produces knowledge and knowledge is always a means to do politics. That is, all attempts to explain the humanly constructed world are political. They

will always come into confrontation with other explanations. Knowledge always maps the human world in this way rather than that. We can deny this by hiding behind the facts of the matter. But all facts need explanation, even to recognize them as facts, and in their explaining they have the potential to become political. Put simply, like all academic disciplines, cultural studies is political, but it has to recognize where this begins and ends.

Cultural studies and the social space of everyday life

It is Raymond Williams' work on culture that provides cultural studies with the possibility of a useable conception of everyday life. In order to explain this I will outline the shift in his thinking about culture, from seeing it as a network of shared meanings, to seeing it as consisting of both shared and contested meanings. The latter position, I will argue, is a result of the introduction in the 1970s of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony into his thinking on culture. It is the coming together of Williams' concept of culture and Gramsci's concept of hegemony that not only situates realized signification and power as the central object of study in cultural studies, but also lays the groundwork for a definition of the social space of everyday life.

Writing in 1961, he proposed what he called the social definition of culture, in which culture is defined as

> a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture … the characteristic forms through which members of the society communicate.
>
> *(2009: 32)*

This definition is crucial to the development of cultural studies as an disciplinary project for three reasons. First, Williams' definition 'democratically' broadens the then dominant Leavisite definition of culture (see Storey 2009), producing a more inclusive definition, in which instead of culture being defined as a body of only 'elite' texts and practices, ballet, opera, the novel, poetry, for example, it is redefined to include as culture television, cinema, pop music, sport, for example. Second, culture as a particular way of life further broadens the definition of culture. So, for example, rather than culture being television as text, culture is embodied in the particular way of life that is involved in, say, the production, circulation, and consumption of television. These two aspects of Williams' definition are usually noted and the discussion ends there. However, there is a third element in Williams' definition, one I think that is far more important for the intellectual formation of cultural studies than the other two: this is the connection he makes between culture and signification. The importance of a particular way of life is that it 'expresses certain meanings and values'. Furthermore, cultural analysis from the perspective of

this definition of culture 'is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit in a particular way of life'. In other words, in Williams' social definition, cultures are networks of meanings that are embodied, performed and made concrete in particular ways of life.

In *Culture* he further clarifies his position and redefines culture as 'a realised signifying system' (1981: 12), arguing that it is fundamental to the shaping and holding together of all ways of life.[8] This is not to reduce everything to culture as a realized signifying system, but it is to insist that culture defined in this way should be seen 'as essentially involved in all forms of social activity' (13). As he further explains, 'the social organisation of culture, as a realised signifying system, is embedded in a whole range of activities, relations and institutions, of which some are manifestly "cultural"' (209). While there is more to everyday life than signifying systems, it is nevertheless the case that 'it would … be wrong to suppose that we can ever usefully discuss a social system without including, as a central part of its practice, its signifying systems, on which, as a system, it fundamentally depends' (207). In other words, signification is fundamental to all human activities. Nevertheless, while culture as a realized signifying system is 'deeply present' (209) in all social activities, it remains the case that 'other quite different human needs and actions are substantially and irreducibly present' (ibid.). Moreover, in certain human activities signification becomes dissolved into what he calls 'other needs and actions' (ibid.). To dissolve can mean two quite different things: to disappear or to become liquid and form part of a solution. For example, if a parliament is dissolved it ceases to exist. However, when we dissolve sugar in tea, the sugar does not disappear; rather it becomes an invisible but fundamental part of the drink. It is the second meaning of dissolve that best captures Williams' intention. Nevertheless, the ambiguity of the term has allowed some critics to suggest that signification is absent from certain human activities. This is a claim made by Terry Eagleton, for example, 'But if car-making falls outside this definition, so does sport, which like any human practice involves signification, but hardly in the same cultural category as Homeric epic and graffiti' (2000: 34). Social activities do not have to signify in the same way to fall within Williams' definition of culture. Industrial manufacture and the works of Homer are not the same, do not signify in the same way, but they do both depend on signification. It may be true that car-making and sport do not signify in ways equivalent to, say, a sonnet by Shakespeare or a song by Joni Mitchell, but signification is still a fundamental part of both sport and the making of cars. We acknowledge as much when we use phrases like the culture of sport or the culture of the work place. In other words, signification exists in all aspects of human activity. Sometimes, it is the most important aspect of the activity, at other times it is overshadowed by more functional aspects. But it is never totally absent; culture always marks a human presence in the world. In my view, the logic of Williams' position is this: signification saturates the social, but at times it simply becomes less visible in certain human activities. Poetry is more obviously about signification in a way that, say, plumbing appears not to be. But we know that without signification plumbing would not be possible (there is a culture of

plumbing). Moreover, we also know that plumbing, as a human activity, has a variable history of signifying different things: civilization, modernity, Westernization, class difference, to name but a few examples.[9]

Culture, therefore, as defined by Williams, is not something restricted to the arts or to different forms of intellectual production, it is an aspect of all human activities. For example, if I pass a name card to someone in China, the polite way to do it is with two hands. If I pass it with one hand I may cause offence. This is clearly a matter of culture. However, the culture is not just in the gesture, it is in the meaning of the gesture. In other words, there is not anything essentially polite about using two hands; using two hands has been made to signify politeness. Signification has become embodied in a material practice, which can, in turn, produce material effects. Similarly, as Marx observes, 'one man is king only because other men stand in the relation of subjects to him. They, on the contrary, imagine that they are subjects because he is king' (1965: 57). This relationship works because they share a culture in which such relations are meaningful. Outside such a culture, this relationship would have no meaning. Being a king, therefore, is not a gift of nature (or of a god), but something constructed in culture; it is culture and not nature or a god that gives these relations meaning: makes them signify, and, moreover, by signifying in a particular way they materially organize social practice. Therefore, as Williams insists, 'Signification, the social creation of meanings … is … a practical material activity' (1977: 34). It is a social practice that requires human agency and human interaction. It is not something abstract; it is always something embedded in human action and interaction. To share a culture, therefore, according to this preliminary definition, is to interpret the world, make it meaningful and experience it as meaningful in recognizably similar ways. So-called 'culture shock' happens when we encounter radically different networks of meaning; that is, when our 'natural' or 'common sense' is confronted by someone else's 'natural' or 'common sense'.

So far I have focused on culture as a system of shared meanings. This is more or less how culture tends to be presented in Williams' early work. Although I started with a quotation from *The Long Revolution* (1961), the idea of culture as a realized signifying system is in fact first suggested in his essay 'Culture is Ordinary' (1958). The formulation is quite similar to that found in *The Long Revolution*, 'A culture is common meanings, the product of a whole people' (1989: 8). Ten years after 'Culture is Ordinary', in 'The Idea of a Common Culture' (1968), he is even more explicit about the ordinariness of the making of meanings, 'culture is ordinary … there is not a special class, or group of men, who are involved in the creation of meanings and values, either in a general sense or in specific art and belief' (1989: 34). When Williams said that 'culture is ordinary', he was drawing attention to the fact that meaning-making is not the privileged activity of the few, but something in which we are all involved. However, this does not of course mean that we are all involved in it in the same way; meaning-making, like all other social activities, is always entangled in relations of power. While we may all be involved in the making of meanings, it is also the case that some meanings and the people who

make them have more power than other people and other meanings. Having said this, Williams' early work is not totally unaware that power features in the embodying and social embedding of meanings. For example, in 'The Idea of a Common Culture' (1968) he observes,

> If it is at all true that the creation of meanings is an activity which engages all men, then one is bound to be shocked by any society which, in its most explicit culture, either suppresses the meanings and values of whole groups, or which fails to extend to these groups the possibility of articulating and communicating those meanings.
>
> *(1989: 35)*

In fact it would be very unfair to Williams to suggest that even in this early work he is simply unaware of power. The essay 'Communications and Community' (1961) makes this absolutely clear:

> For in fact all of us, as individuals, grow up within a society, within the rules of a society, and these rules cut very deep, and include certain ways of seeing the world, certain ways of talking about the world. All the time people are being born into a society, shown what to see, shown how to talk about it.
>
> *(1989: 21–2)*

What is the case, however, is that he had not yet found a fully adequate way of articulating the relations between signification and power. In *The Long Revolution*, for example, he is still able to claim that culture is 'the sharing of common meanings … [in] which meanings that are valued by the community are shared and made active' (1965: 55). To put it very simply, most meanings are not of our own making, they are generated by dominant groups and dominant institutions. Moreover, these meanings tend to operate in the interests of dominant groups and dominant institutions. It is not until 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory' (1980; originally 1973), *Marxism and Literature* (1977) and *Culture* (1981) that Williams really insists that signifying systems consist of both shared and contested meanings. As he consistently argues from 1973 onwards, cultures are where we share and contest meanings of ourselves, of each other and of the social worlds in which we live. For instance, to return to an example given earlier, people may recognize the meaning of the relations of kingship but reject and struggle against these relations. Such rejections and acts of struggle are part of the processes Gramsci calls hegemony. After the introduction of hegemony into Williams' work in the 1970s, culture as a realized signifying system is always understood as consisting of both shared and contested meanings. Moreover, it is when Williams embraces Gramsci's concept of hegemony that he locates culture and power as the object of study in cultural studies.

Gramsci uses hegemony to describe processes of power in which a dominant group does not merely rule by force but leads by consent: it exerts 'intellectual and

moral leadership' (2009: 75). Hegemony involves a specific kind of consensus, a consensus in which a social group presents its own particular interests as the general interests of the society as a whole; it turns the particular into the general. Hegemony works by the transformation of potential antagonism into simple difference. This works in part through the circulation of signification that reinforces dominance and subordination by seeking to fix the meaning of social relations. As Williams explains,

> It [hegemony] is a lived system of meanings and values – constitutive and constituting – which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people … It is … in the strongest sense a 'culture' [understood as a realized signifying system], but a culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes.
>
> *(1977: 110)*

If we substitute the word culture for hegemony we are very close to Williams' social definition of culture. The difference being that the definition now includes relations of dominance and subordination.

Hegemony involves the attempt to saturate the social with meanings that support the prevailing structures of power. In a hegemonic situation subordinate groups appear to actively support and subscribe to values, ideals, objectives, etc., which incorporate them into the prevailing structures of power: relations of dominance and subordination. However, hegemony, as Williams observes, 'does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged' (112). Therefore, although hegemony is characterized by high levels of consensus, it is never without conflict; that is, there is always resistance. However, hegemony seeks to arrest the proliferation of meanings; it seeks to reduce signification to meanings that can be controlled. For it to remain successful conflict and resistance must always be channelled and contained – re-articulated in the interests of the dominant.

There are two conclusions we can draw from Williams' concept of culture as a realized signifying system, and both, I want to suggest, point to a theory of everyday life. First, although the world exists in all its enabling and constraining materiality outside culture, it is only in culture that the world can be made to mean. In other words, signification has a 'performative effect' (Austin 1962; Butler 1993, 1999, and Chapter 8 here); it helps construct the realities it appears only to describe. As Gramsci points out,

> It is obvious that East and West are arbitrary and conventional (historical) constructions, since every spot on the earth is simultaneously East and West. Japan is probably the Far East not only for the European but also for the American from California and even for the Japanese himself, who, through

> English political culture might call Egypt the Near East … Yet these references are real, they correspond to real facts, they allow one to travel by land and by sea and to arrive at the predetermined destination.
>
> *(2007: 176)*

Moreover, as Gramsci continues, 'East and West … never cease to be "objectively real" even though when analysed they turn out to be nothing more than a "historical" or "conventional construct"' (175). In other words, East and West are historical constructions, directly connected to the imperial power of the West. However, they are also forms of signification that have been realized and embedded in social practice. Cultural constructs they may be, but they do designate real geographic locations and guide real human movement and organize real political perceptions of the world. As Gramsci's example makes clear, meanings inform and organize social action. To argue that culture is best understood as a realized signifying system is not, therefore, a denial that the material world exists in all its constraining and enabling reality outside signification. As Williams makes very clear, 'the natural world exists whether anyone signifies it or not' (1979: 67). But what is also absolutely the case is that the material (or the natural) world exists for us – and only ever exists for us – layered and articulated in signification. And how it is made to signify helps organize our relations with it. He had been aware of this since as early as 1961:

> it is impossible for us to assume that there is any reality experienced by man into which man's own observations and interpretations do not enter … Yet equally, the facts of perception in no way lead us to a late form of idealism; they do not require us to suppose that there is no kind of reality outside the human mind; they point rather to the insistence that all human experience is an interpretation of the non-human reality … We have to think … of human experience as both objective and subjective, in one inseparable process … We create our human world.
>
> *(1965: 36, 54)*

The second conclusion we can draw from seeing culture as a realized signifying system concerns the potential for struggle over meaning. Given that different meanings can be ascribed to the same 'sign' (that is, anything that can be made to signify) meaning-making is always a potential site of struggle. The making of meaning is always confronted by what Valentin Volosinov identifies as the 'multi-accentuality' of the sign. Rather than being inscribed with a single meaning, a sign can be articulated with different 'accents'; that is, it can be made to mean different things in different contexts, with different effects of power. The sign, therefore, is always a potential site of 'differently oriented social interests' (1973: 23), and is often in practice 'an arena of … struggle' (ibid.). Those with power seek 'to make the sign uni-accentual' (ibid.): they seek to make what is multi-accentual appear as if it could only ever be uni-accentual. In other words, a 'sign' is not the issuing

source of meaning but a site where the articulation of meaning (variable meanings) can be produced as it is re-articulated in specific contexts. We continually acknowledge the multi-accentuality of the sign when we describe an interpretation as, for example, a feminist reading, a queer reading, a post-colonial reading, a post-Marxist reading. In such instances, we implicitly acknowledge that the text in question has been made to mean from the critical perspective of a particular reading practice. This is not simply an issue of semantic difference, a simple question of interpreting the world differently. The different ways of making something signify are not an innocent game of semantics, they are a significant part of a power struggle over what might be regarded as 'normal' or 'correct' – an example of the politics of signification. It is about who can claim the power and authority to define social reality to make the world (and the things in it) mean in particular ways and with particular effects of power. Therefore, rather than engage in a fruitless quest for the true or essential meaning of something, cultural studies should fix its critical gaze on how particular meanings acquire their authority and legitimacy. This makes culture and power the primary object of study in cultural studies. As Hall explains,

> Meanings [i.e. cultures] … regulate and organise our conduct and practices – they help to set the rules, norms and conventions by which social life is ordered and governed. They are …, therefore, what those who wish to govern and regulate the conduct and ideas of others seek to structure and shape.
>
> *(1997: 4)*

Meanings have a 'material' existence in that they help organize practice and they establish norms of behaviour. My example of the passing of name cards in China is an example of signification organizing practice. Moreover, as Hall indicates, those with power often seek to regulate the impact of meanings on practice. In other words, dominant modes of making the world meaningful are a fundamental aspect of the processes of hegemony. As Hall makes clear, 'The signification of events is part of what has to be struggled over, for it is the means by which collective social understandings are created – and thus the means by which consent for particular outcomes can be effectively mobilized' (2009: 123).

On the basis of Williams' redefinition of culture, cultural studies has gradually come to define culture as the production, circulation, and consumption of meanings that become embodied and embedded in social practice. To paraphrase what Williams (1989: 22–3) said about communication systems in 'Communications and Community' (1961), we cannot think of culture as a realized signifying system as something which happens after reality has occurred, because it is through culture, as a realized signifying system, that the reality of ourselves, the reality of our everyday lives, is constituted and contested – and always entangled in relations of culture and power.[10] Williams' definition of culture as a particular way of life, understood as a realized signifying system, lays the foundations for a cultural studies

theory of everyday life. But if we are to build on these foundations, it is necessary, I think, to add recent work on space and place to what is already constructed.

One thing that is certain about everyday life, we experience it in and through space. As Lefebvre points out, 'Human beings … are in space; they cannot absent themselves from it, nor do they allow themselves to be excluded from it' (1991a: 132). But humans transform space; they make it into something where they feel at 'home'. There are different ways to understand the result of this transformation: for example, it becomes a place (Cresswell 2004), a space (Massey 2005), a social space (Lefebvre 1991a) or a practised place (de Certeau 1984). In each case the transformation is the manifestation of the fact that a space has been inhabited and made meaningful by human actions and interactions. Therefore, in a way it does not really matter how we describe the transformation that produces everyday life – space into place, place into practised place, or space into social space – because the fundamental underlying process is the same: one is transformed by human practice into something that is humanly habitable and meaningful.[11] However, for clarity and consistency, and in order to avoid the often-reactionary connotations of place, as a fixed and bounded location that answers to the supposed universals of the 'human condition', I will conceptualize the transformation as space into social space.[12] But, to repeat, whether we call it a space or a place, what is clear is that it is a social construction; it is humanly made (both in its materiality and its meanings) and its production and reproduction are always entangled in relations of power.[13]

The materiality of space becomes social space in a process phenomenological sociology calls externalization (see Chapter 5 here): human meanings are embodied, embedded and realized in human practice and institutions, and this process remains a fundamental part of the continuous making and remaking of everyday life. But social space is not something that everyday life fills; it is something that the actions and interactions of the everyday brings into being. In other words, it is not a 'passive receptacle'; it is a series of relationships between people (and not a container for these relationships). Lefebvre explains it like this: 'space is neither a mere "frame", after the fashion of the frame of a painting, nor a form or container of a virtually neutral kind, designed simply to receive whatever is poured into it. Space is social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure' (1991a: 93–4). In other words, social space and the actions and interactions of everyday life are inseparably bound together; one is always implicated with the other; to separate them would be like dividing my friend Ania from her skeleton and then expecting her to continue to dance. It is impossible to imagine one without the other. Therefore, from now on, to avoid confusion, I will refer to this inseparability as the social space of everyday life.

To see everyday life as a social space rather than just a space is to invest its materiality with particular meanings. This mix of meanings and materiality structures everyday life and it is social practice that binds these together. When we think our occupation of a space will be a little more than temporary we transform it into a social space; we will arrange things and add things that make ourselves feel

more at home. When, for example, we move into a new house or apartment one of the first things we do is change it in ways that make us feel more at home. The changes might be simple things like putting up pictures or they may be more complex like decorating and rebuilding. However, whether big or small, these are examples of the making of social space – the changes we make turn the space into a social space, somewhere we feel at home, somewhere we can identify with and can express our sense of self. Although it is very unlikely to be a space without already existing meanings, we try to make it meaningful in ways that make sense to us, to establish what cultural geographers call *a sense of place* (Massey 1994, 2005; Cresswell 2004). That is, we transform its meanings and materiality into *our* social space. In a similar way everyday life is both subjective and objective; it consists of transformed and transforming meanings and materiality. Where I live there are houses, shops, pubs, roads, allotments, fields, a wood, and open land where a coal mine once existed. But the everyday life of the village is more than these material objects, it is the actions and interactions of those who live here, and the meanings we give to these objects and to the actions and interactions of our fellow villagers. When I tell people where I live they usually mention the woods, but they talk much more about the contemporary reputation of the village and sometimes they talk about its history ('There is still a Marx Terrace and a Lenin Terrace?').

We may understand the social space of everyday life in particular ways, make it meaningful and experience it as meaningful in this way or that, but the social space we call everyday life will have already been made meaningful by powerful forces over which we have little control. In effect, we are making and consuming meanings that have already been defined for us. This does not mean that our own meaning-making is totally determined by powerful others, but it does mean that it is enabled and constrained by meanings already mapped onto the social space of everyday life. This recognition returns us to Williams' concept of culture as a realized signifying system. The meanings we make are entangled with the meanings of the signifying system as a whole and this system is inscribed with power. The social space of everyday life is like a language; it enables and constrains the actions and interactions of daily life. But it does not totally determine these actions and interactions: just like any language allows us to lie or to tell the truth, compose a novel or write a text, social space opens up contradictory possibilities. The spatial realities of public and private are a case in point. We know that it is only acceptable to do certain things in certain spaces. In this way social space is enabling and constraining our actions and interactions – we live these spatial arrangements, their suggestions and prohibitions.

We have also to be careful not to freeze the social space of everyday life; to see it as a fixed and bounded location; we should not think of it as self-enclosed, existing in isolation, as it always exists in relation to other social spaces of everyday life, its boundaries are always porous and sometimes difficult to determine. Contrary to some versions of place, we should think of the social space of everyday life as a mobile and relational space. As Doreen Massey argues, space is a 'product of social relations' (2005: 118); it is 'always under construction'; it is 'always in the process

of being made. It is never finished; never closed'; it exists 'as a simultaneity of stories-so-far' (9). Thinking of the social space of everyday life in this way allows us to see it as existing in a continuous process of making and remaking, and always unfinished, always ongoing, always in a state of becoming. We have to resist the temptation to see it as rooted amidst the routes of space. Although we can say that this town or village or city does begin and end somewhere and that within this space different people establish the social space of everyday life in different ways, we should not think of these as sealed retreats from everything supposedly outside them. Nor is the social space of everyday life an immobile space, a closed surface on which we act and interact. As Massey points out, 'If space is the sphere of multiplicity, the product of social relations, and those relations are real material practices, and always ongoing, then space can never be closed, there will always be loose ends, always relations with the beyond' (95). Therefore, we have to see the social space of everyday life as 'a meeting-up of histories' (4); 'a multiplicity of trajectories' (5).

Although the social spaces of everyday life seem distinct, here and not there, they are always connected to other places. Now it may be true that in the past life in, say, an English village might have appeared particularly 'local', but in the age of globalization the interaction and interconnectedness of the 'local' and the 'global' make this now seem like an impossibility. But even in the pre-modern world it seems unlikely that village life was as isolated as conservative nostalgia would like us to believe. But globalization has certainly changed the extent and complexity of these relations. The social spaces of everyday life are perhaps more open than in the past and the interconnections with other places are more complex and far reaching.[14] Connections and interactions can take various forms. I live in a former mining village, seemingly isolated from other social spaces, but the cars we drive, the things we consume, our biographical origins, all stretch our relations beyond the village to the global world outside. For example, my car is Japanese, but made in the city in which I work, what I consume is both 'local' and 'global', I have relatives in other English towns and cities and in China and the USA, I have recently travelled to Greece, Portugal, Spain, Germany, China, and Poland, I have friends in many other countries, including Austria, Australia, China, Germany, New Zealand, Poland, Spain and the USA, the music to which I listen, the television programmes and films that I watch, are from different parts of the world. My local Co-op serves mostly 'local' people, but what it sells is both 'local' and 'global'.

As we have seen everyday life is a consequence of social practice but it is always social practice (the doing of everyday life) in the structure of a realized signifying system that pre-exists it and that enables and constrains the many ways in which we live everyday life. Therefore, while it is true that everyday life is created and maintained by human practice, such human practice always operates within a signifying system – a signifying system that is realized in social practice. Everyday life, as I have said numerous times, is like a language that enables and constrains human practice, but like any language without human practice it would quickly die – it is only human practice that keeps it alive. To paraphrase Williams, while there is

more to everyday life than signifying systems, it is nevertheless the case that it would be wrong to suppose that we can ever usefully discuss everyday life without including, as a central part of its practice, its signifying systems, on which, as a system, it fundamentally depends. I think it is from Williams' concept of culture as a realized signifying system that a cultural studies concept of everyday can be constructed. What I hope is that these notes towards a definition will have laid some of the foundation stones for such a project.

Notes

1. Both quotations are from the song 'Love Minus Zero, No Limit' (*Bringing It All Back Home*, 1965).
2. On my first day at the CCCS I was asked by another postgraduate, who had been there for a while, not about my politics but if I was a culturalist or a structuralist.
3. I first approached these issues in print in the mid-1990s (see Storey 1997).
4. Organic intellectual is a term coined by Gramsci (1971). It refers to intellectuals who emerge from and work on behalf of the subordinate class in the struggle against the dominant class's hegemony.
5. I fully understand the frustration of those politically active on the left when they read some work that claims to be cultural studies. Such work often takes the form of a kind of self-serving vicarious politics in which we are told that this or that is wrong with the world, in a knowing expectation that this knowledge is destined for the library, or, if it is very lucky, the lecture theatre and seminar room. But what is radical about such writing? It is neither a significant contribution to the further development of the discipline nor does it make any contribution to a grounded politics.

   Contrary to this is the academic who enters political life. Outside his life as an academic, while obviously informed by it, Stuart Hall, for example, was active as a public intellectual, making a very significant contribution to the politics of the everyday. See the wonderful documentary, *The Stuart Hall Project* (BFI 2013).
6. See Graeme Turner (2012) for specific concerns about this in relation to the training of PhD students.
7. Those who reject the idea of cultural studies as a discipline often do so from the security of another discipline. They work safely in one discipline and use cultural studies as a platform to pontificate about the need to oppose disciplinarity.
8. Williams uses realized in the double sense of the word: a) to apprehend (I realized what was happening); and b) to accomplish something (I realized my ambition to play professional football).
9. See, for example, Orwell's (2001) discussion of middle-class attitudes to the 'dirty' working class having baths with running hot and cold water.
10. What Williams actually says is this: 'we cannot think of communication as secondary. We cannot think of it as marginal; or as something that happens after reality has occurred. Because it is through the communication systems that the reality of ourselves, the reality of our society, forms and is interpreted' (1989: 22–3).
11. But, as Lefebvre points out, 'A social space is not a *socialized* space' (1991a: 190, italics in original). Although it is a human production, it is not a human production in which nature is transformed into culture. As he explains, 'In reality, whenever a society undergoes a transformation, the material used in the process derive from another historically (or developmentally) anterior social practice. A purely natural or original state of affairs is nowhere to be found' (1991a: 190).
12. This does not mean I will be using the term as used by Lefebvre (1991a).
13. But to repeat, when we say something is a social construction this does not mean it does not have a material reality, it means that the material reality of the thing in

question has been made meaningful in a way that shapes our understanding of it. In this sense gravity is a social construct – it is a scientific explanation of a natural phenomenon; this does not mean it is not real or that it does not produce real effects; it means that science constructs it as an object of study and understanding and without a scientific explanation it is impossible to talk about it.

14. While global interconnectedness may not be new, it is certainly the case that it has become more intense than it was in the past. But for many parts of the world this is something they experienced a long time ago. Recent worries about this aspect of globalization are mainly Western anxieties; this is because the mixing of the 'local' and the 'global' became a significant feature of all countries that experienced European and US imperialism. What is happening in the West is a reflection of what the West has already inflicted on other parts of the globe.

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INDEX

Locators in *italic* refer to figures

academic discipline, cultural studies as 123–7
accidents, parapraxes 34
Accion populers (action popular) 4
accomplishments, of everyday life 73, 74
action, meaning of 67, 68; actor-network-theory 76, 77; ethnomethodology 75; symbolic interactionism 69, 70, 71, 72
active audience model of mediatization 110
activity, of everyday life 74; *see also* ethnomethodology
actor-network-theory 67, 75–9, 112, 113
Adventures of Pinocchio, The (Collodi) 28–9
aesthetic gaze/distance 87–8
Africans, slavery 90
agency: and alienation 21; popular culture as 12; sociology of 67, 79–80; and structure 79; *see also* actor-network-theory; ethnomethodology; symbolic interactionism
alienation 14, 38; actor-network-theory 76; Lefebvre on 19–24; Marx on 14–18, 16, 17; transformation of everyday life 24–6
American culture/Americanization 7–8
anaesthesiology, hospital 100
animal nature 15, 18
anthropological studies 40, 44–7, 46–52
apartheid regime, South Africa 91
Arnold, Matthew 42, 43
art: aesthetic consumption 87–8; and alienation 15, 16, 19, 20, 21; surrealism 39; transformation of everyday life 24, 25–6
art gallery, actor-network-theory 77
articulation 12, 32, 34, 97, 107, 133
As You Like It (Shakespeare) 95
association, chains, dreams 30–1
associations, personal 69, 70–1; actor-network-theory 76, 78; *see also* symbolic interactionism
Austin, JL 103, 104
authenticity, popular culture 2, 5, 6, 12, 13

back region of a performance 100–1
background expectancies 74–5; *see also* ethnomethodology
Banet-Weiser, Sarah 91, 92
Barthes, Roland 2
'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory' (Williams) 130
BBC coverage, football World Cup 10
Beatles, The 11
beauty industry 82, 92
Ben Hur (Wallace) 36
Berger, Peter 54, 57, 58, 60, 63, 64
Berlin 83
binary model of the psyche 28
biology of gender roles 103–5
Blackheath, East London 44, 45, 46, 47, 48

Blackpool, Lancashire 40, 45, 46, 48, 49, 50
blacksmith dream 30–1
Blake, William 37
Blumer, Herbert 67–8, 69, 70, 71
Bolton (*Worktown*) 40, 44–52
Booth, William 41
Bourdieu, Pierre 9, 86–7, 88–9
boycotts, consumer 91
brand loyalty 92
Brecht, Bertolt 2
Breton, Andre 37–8
bungled actions, parapraxes 34, 37
bureaucratic control, and consumption 81–2
Butler, Judith 95, 102–6, 107

capital, economic/social/cultural 10, 88, 89, 93
capitalism, and alienation 16–18, 22, 23, 24, 25; *see also* consumption
cause and effect, actor-network-theory 79
celebrity, and alienation 21–2
Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), Birmingham University 123, 125
Certeau, Michel de 6, 24, 89–90, 110
chains of association, dreams 30–1
Che Guevara 13
Chicago School 67
Chinn, Sarah 104
Christianity, African slaves 90
Christmas, English 8, *43*, 43; parties 97
civilization: and class division 48, 49; and repression 27–8
class distinction/division 40–4, 51; and consumption 83–4, 86–9; working class culture 48, 49; *see also* mass observation movement
clothing, and consumption 82; *see also* fashion
clumsiness, parapraxes 36–7
coercive power of State 11
Collodi, Carlo 28–9
colonial gaze 40–4, 46
colonization, South America 89–90
commerce, in popular cultures *see* consumption
commodities, and alienation 14, 17, 23, 24
commodity activism 90–3
common sense 1, 28, 129; love 114; phenomenological sociology 54–5, 58–9; *see also* taken-for-grantedness
communication: consumption patterns 84–6; impression management 96; and language 56
'Communications and Community' (Williams) 130, 133
Communist Manifesto 44
competitive display 84–6
compromise equilibrium, consumption 92–3
condensation process, dream-work 30–1
conflict, psychic 28–9; parapraxes 33–4
conscience, super-ego 28
conscious: life-activity 15; mind 28
consensus, veneer of 97
conspicuous consumption 82–90
constative language 103
constraints: cultural 13; discourses 51; everyday life 38, 55, 57; language 56, 114; roles 57; symbolic interactionism 70
consumer boycotts 91
consumption 6, 7, 12, 13, 93, 110; and alienation 21; bureaucratic control 81–2; conspicuous 82–90; neoliberalism/commodity activism 90–3
corporate philanthropy 91–2
creativity 26; *see also* art; poetry
Cresswell, Tim 1
Crete 27
critical thinking 124
Critique of Everyday Life (Lefebvre) 1, 19–24
crying, meanings of 68–70, 72, 74–8
cultural capital 10, 88, 89, 93
Cultural Consumption and Everyday Life (Storey) 4
cultural history 12
cultural studies 1, 3, 11–13, 122; as academic discipline 123–7; mass-observation movement 52; social space of everyday life 127–37
Cultural Theory and Popular Culture (Storey) 4
culturalism 12
culture: definitions 127–9, 131, 133, 135, 137; and meaning 129–33; signification 131–3, 135; working class 48, 49; *see also* anthropological studies
Culture (Williams) 128, 130
'Culture is Ordinary' (Williams) 129
culture shock 58–9, 129

de Beauvoir, Simone 102–3
de Certeau, Michel 6, 24, 89–90, 110
de la Rochefoucauld, Francois 113
defence mechanisms, parapraxes 36
definition of the situation, impression management 96–8, 101
definitions: culture 127–9, 131, 133, 135, 137; everyday life 1–4, 13; place 1;

popular 4–5; popular cultures 2, 4–13; social 76; symbolic interactionism 67–8
Delinquent Gang, The (Thrasher) 67
Derrida, Jacques 104
destructive information 96
Dickens, Charles 10, 43–4
direct forms of communication, impression management 96
discipline of cultural studies, academic 123–7
discourses: gender roles 104; power and knowledge 51–2
displacement process, dream-work 30–1
display, competitive 84–6
Disraeli, Benjamin 41
distance, aesthetic 87–8
distinction, social *see* class distinction/division
disturbed/disturbing intentions 33–4
division of labour 16
Dog of Montargis, The/Forest of Bondy 9
dominance 131; *see also* power
doors of perception 37, 38
Douglas, Mary 84, 86
Dove Campaign for Real Beauty 92
drag artists 105
dreams 28, 29–32, 39; phenomenological sociology 64; and reality 38; *see also* surrealism
dream-work 30–2
dreamworld, popular cultures 8–9
dress, and consumption 82; *see also* fashion
drives, repression 27
dropping things, parapraxes 34
Dylan, Bob 11, 87, 122

East, the 131–2
East End of London, anthropological studies 44, 45, 46, 47, 48
Eco, Umberto 114
economic capital 89
education 88
Edwards, Stephen 47
ego 28–9
Elias, Norbert 2–3
email 110, 111, 117, 119
embodiment: meaning 134; reality of everyday life 65
Engels, Friedrich 41, 44
English Christmas 8, *43*, 43
ethnomethodology 67, 73–5, 112
everyday life viii–ix, 13; actor-network-theory 76; and alienation 19, 20, 24–6; definitions 1–4; media role 20–1; social space of 127–37; symbolic interactionism 73; *see also* Lefebvre
evolution, and class 42
exclusivity, social 10, 11; *see also* class distinction/division
expectancies, background 74–5; *see also* ethnomethodology
experience, everyday life 55
expression, popular culture 12
exquisite corpse exercise 38
externalization 58, 66, 134

face-to-face actions 76
Facebook: and media love 116, 118–20
failure, and success 122
falls, parapraxes 34
false obviousness 2
fan cultures 6; *see also* celebrity
fantasy, popular cultures 8–9
fashion 82, 83–4
feminine beauty 82
financial crisis (2008) 24
Fiske, John 7
folk culture/folksong 5–6, 12
football, professional 10, 22–3
foreignness, American culture 8
Forest of Bondy/The Dog of Montargis 9
forgetting parapraxes 35–6
Foucault, Michel 51–2, 114
Frankfurt School 12, 21
Franklin, Aretha 105
Freudian slips 28, 32–7, 76
Freudianism: Freud, Sigmund 27; meaning 68–9; repression 27–37; revolutionary 37–9
Frith, Simon 7
front region of a performance 100–1
fronts, personal 99–100

Garfinkel, Harold 73, 74, 75
Gasset, Ortegay 87
gay liberation movement 91
gaze: aesthetic 87–8; colonial 40–4, 46
gender roles: and consumption 21, 82; impression management 98–9, 101–2; performativity theory 103–7
generalization principle 83
Ghetto, The (Wirth) 67
Giddens, Anthony 113
globalization 136
Goffman, Erving 95–101, 106, 107
Gold Coast and the Slum, The (Zorbaugh) 67
Gramsci, Antonio 11–12, 127, 130, 132
grave-diggers 43–4

Greenwood, James 43
greetings, social construction 54
Grossberg, Lawrence 124
Gurney, Peter 49

habitualization 56–7, 66
Hall, Stuart 123, 124, 125, 126, 133
Harrison, Tom 40, 44–6, 46–52
Harrow school 44, 49, 50
Harvey, David 91
hegemony 11–12, 127, 130–1
high culture 5, 9; and popular culture 10–11
historical perspectives 12; consumption 84, 91–2; East and West 132; popular/popular culture 4–10
Hoggart, Richard 3, 126
hostility, unconscious 33, 36, 37
human nature: and class 42; Marx on 14–18
hybrid culture 9

id 28–9
'Idea of a Common Culture, The' (Williams) 129
identity, social 58, 60, 64; *see also* gender roles
Ignorance (*A Christmas Carol*) 43–4
imagination 15, 17; in surrealism 37, 38
imitative individuals 83, 84
imported American culture 7–8
impression management 95–8, 100–2, 106, 107
In Darkest England and the Way Out (Booth) 41
inarticulate masses 46
indirect forms of communication 96
individuality, and consumption 83
Induction Week, students 57
inferiority, popular cultures 9
instincts, repression 27
institutionalization: cultural studies 125–6; phenomenological sociology 56–7, 58, 60–1
intentions, disturbed/disturbing 33–4
interactions: actor-network-theory 75, 76, 77; ethnomethodology 73, 74, 75; symbolic interactionism 67–73
intermediaries, objects as 78
internalization, phenomenological sociology 58, 59–60, 66
interpretation: dreams 29–30, 31–2; and meaning 69, 133
intersubjectivity, everyday life 58
Isherwood, Baron 84, 86

Jack-Roller, The (Shaw) 67
Jennings, Humphrey 40
job interviews, impression management 96

Keating, Peter 43
kingship 129, 130
Knossos, Crete 27
knowledge: adjudged worth of 1; at hand/stock of 55; and power 51–2

labour, alienation 16–18, 22–5
Lambeth Walk dance 49
Lancashire: Blackpool 40, 45, 46, 48–50; Bolton 40, 44–52
language: consumption patterns 85–6; impression management 101; media love 114; performative 103–4; phenomenological sociology 56, 58; social space of everyday life 135
laptops, habitualization to 56
latent dream thoughts 29–30
Latour, Bruno 75–6, 76, 78, 112
lectures, impression management 97–8
Lefebvre, Henri ix, 1, 2, 14, 16, 19–24, 81, 134
legal definition of popular 4
legitimate culture 2, 10, 86, 88–9, 94
leisure: and alienation 22–3; class 82; *see also* middle-class
Leverhulme, Lord 50
Lewis, CS 32
life-activity, conscious 15
lines of action 71
Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, The (Lewis) 32
logic, media 111, 113
London Labour and the London Poor (Mayhew) 41
Long Revolution, The (Williams) 3, 129, 130
love, mediatization of 111–20
Luckmann, Thomas 54, 57, 58, 60, 63, 64

Madge, Charles 40, 44–6, 49, 50, 52
Malekula, island of 44, 47, 48, 49, 50
Maltby, Richard 8
Manchester 91
manifest content, dreams 29–30
Manifesto of the Communist Party, The 44
market economy 24, 39
Marley, Bob 12
Marriage of Figaro, The (opera) 9
Marxism: Marx, Karl 22, 41, 44, 129; cultural studies 126; human nature 14–18; and surrealism 39

Marxism and Literature (Williams) 130
mass consumption *see* consumption
mass culture/urban masses 6–7, 8
mass media *see* media; mediatization
Massey, Doreen 135–6
mass-observation movement 52; Bolton 44–52; colonial gaze 40–4, 46
material action, actor-network-theory 78–9
Mayhew, Henry 41
meaning: consumption patterns 85; and culture 129–30, 131, 132–3; embodied 134; media love 114; phenomenological sociology 64; sense of place 135; social construction 51, 56, 58–61, 69, 129; sociologies of agency 68–78
media: effects on everyday life 20–1; technologies 78
media effects model 109–10, 111, 114
Media Love project 111–13, 120
mediatization 109–11, 120; of love 111–20; and mediation 111, 112, 116
mediators, objects as 78
memory parapraxes 35–6
metamorphosis *see* transformation
methods, everyday life 74; *see also* ethnomethodology
'Metropolis and Mental Life, The' (Simmel) 82–3
microphones 78
middle-class: consumption 82, 83; observations of everyday life 40–4, 46–52; phenomenological sociology 59–60; *see also* mass observation movement
Minotaur 27–8, 29
mislaying of things, parapraxes 36
misreading, parapraxes 36
money, and alienation 23, 24, 26
Morris, William 26
moustache, parapraxis 32–3
Mukherjee, Roopali 91
music, and media love 114–15

names, forgetting 35–6
natural attitude 61, 66
natural self 95, 101–7
naturalistic studies, symbolic interactionism 67
'Need for Cultural Studies, The' (Giroux et al.) 123
neoliberalism, and consumption 90–3
'Nessun Dorma' (Puccini) 10
networks (actor-network-theory) 67, 75–9, 112, 113
New Hebrides, anthropological studies 44, 47, 48, 49, 50
New Statesman and Nation 44–5
new towns 21
news broadcasts 21, 109–11
News From Nowhere (Morris) 26
'Night in a Workhouse, A' (Greenwood) 43
non-symbolic social interaction 70; *see also* symbolic interactionism

objectivations, phenomenological sociology 58, 59, 60, 61, 66
objective realization, human nature 15, 18
objects: actor-network-theory 77–9; symbolic interactionism 72, 73
obviousness, everyday life 2; *see also* common sense; taken-for-grantedness
Ollman, Bertell 16
opera 9
ostensive definitions, social 75
Oxbridge 46, 50

Pacific Island cannibals, anthropological studies 47, 49
paramount reality 63–5
parapraxes 28, 32–7, 76
party politics, mediatization 111; *see also* politics
passions, and the id 28–9
patterns of action, repetition 71
Pavarotti, Luciano 10
perception, doors of 37, 38
performance, in everyday life 56, 75, 77, 95–102
performative: definitions 75; effects, signification 131–2
performativity theory 95, 102–6, 107; *see also* theatricality model of everyday life
perruque, la (the wig) 24–5
personal fronts 99–100
perspectives: and meaning 133; reciprocity of 62; *see also* taken-for-grantedness
phenomenological sociology 54–66
philanthropy, corporate 91–2
place: definitions 1; sense of 135; *see also* social space of everyday life
pleasure principle 28–9
poetry 2, 9, 15, 20, 21, 35–8, 44–5
politeness 86, 97, 101, 126, 129
political economy 12
politics: and consumption 92–3; and cultural studies 123–7; mass-observation movement 52; mediatization 111
pop music 11, 12

populace *see* working class
popular, definitions 4–5
popular culture, definitions 2, 4–13
postmodernism 10–11, 114
poverty, in midst of wealth 41
power: class 11; and consumption 86, 93; and cultural studies 126; and knowledge 51–2; and meaning 133; and signification 130, 131; *see also* politics
PowerPoint 78
Practice of Everyday Life, The (de Certeau) 89
preconscious mind 28
presentation, self 95–8, 100–2, 106, 107
Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, The (Goffman) 95, 101
primary socialization, phenomenological sociology 59–60
production: and alienation 16, 17, 22, 25; and consumption 89; reflective 15–16
production of culture theory 9
professional football 10, 22–3
professors, role of 97–9
programmed consumption 81
projection 27–8
psyche, tripartite model 28–9
psychoanalysis, dreams 29–30
psychopathology of everyday life 27, 29, 32; *see also* Freudianism
Puccini, Giacomo 10

Raine, Kathleen 45
Rastafari 12
real culture 9
reality: and dreams 38; paramount 63–5; phenomenological 54, 55, 57–66; principle 29; social construction 54–5, 132, 133; *see also* surrealism
reason, ego 28–9
reciprocity of perspectives 62; *see also* taken-for-grantedness
reflective production 15–16
reflexes 70
religion: African slaves 90; and alienation 17; mass-observation movement 52
repetition, patterns of action 71
repression, in everyday life 27–37
resistance 11, 12, 13, 21, 24; *see also* transformation of everyday life
restaurants, impression management 101
revolutionary Freudianism 37–9
Richards, Keith 93
Rochefoucauld, Francois de la 113
roles 97–9; constraints 57; typification 61; women; *see* gender roles
Rolling Stones, The 93
romantic love, mediatization of 111–20
Rosemont, Franklin 38, 39
Ross, Andrew 8
rules, social 71, 130

schoolteacher roles 99
Schutz, Alfred 54, 55, 56, 61, 62, 63
Scrooge (*A Christmas Carol*) 43–4
seaside holidays 8; *see also* Blackpool
secondary production 89, 110
secondary revision, dream-work 30, 32
secondary socialization, phenomenological sociology 60
self: presentation 95–8, 100–2, 106, 107
self-expression 135
sense of place 135; *see also* social space of everyday life
seriousness, in popular culture 11
settings, performance 98
sexual: behaviour 48; intimacy 112, 113, 116–17; symbols 31, 33, 34, 36
Shakespeare, William 9, 10, 95
Sharp, Cecil 6
Shaw, Clifford 67
Sheringham, Michael 2
shopping mall, young woman in 68–70, 72, 74–8
Shorter, Edward 113
sign-equipment 98, 99–100
signification: culture 127–33, 135; social space of everyday life 136–7
Simmel, Georg 82, 82–3, 84, 86
Skype 118–19
slavery, Africans 90
slips of the tongue 32–4
social: action 78–9; capital 89; exploration 41–4, 46, 51, 52; history 12; mobility 60, 100; norms 113; production of human nature 14, 16; sociology of 75, 76; space of everyday life 127–37; status management 99–100; structure of everyday life 74
social construction: gender roles 103–6; meaning 51, 56, 58–61, 69, 129; phenomenological sociology 54, 55, 57, 58, 65; popular cultures 9; reality 54–5, 132, 133; *see also* actor-network-theory
social exclusivity 10, 11; *see also* class distinction/division
social identity 58, 60, 64; *see also* gender roles
social interaction 70, 72; *see also* symbolic interactionism
socialization 59–60, 64

sociology: of agency 67, 79–80; phenomenological 54–66; *see also* actor-network-theory; ethnomethodology; symbolic interactionism
Sontag, Susan 10
sound bites 111
South Africa, apartheid regime 91
South America 89–90
space 134–6; *see also* social space of everyday life
Spain, colonization of South America 89–90
specialization principle 83
stability 71
staging, performance 95–8, 100–2, 106–7
State, coercive power 11
stock of knowledge 55
Stone, Lawrence 113
strings of actions, networks as 78
structuralism 12
structure: and agency 79; popular culture as 12
students 57, 75; roles 97–9
subjective reality 58, 59, 60, 66
subjective realization, human nature 14
subordination 131; *see also* power
substitutive formations 29
success, and failure 122
super-ego 28–9
superior culture *see* high culture
surrealism: mass observation movement 45, 46; revolutionary Freudianism 37–9
symbolic interactionism 67–73
symbolic universe, phenomenological sociology 61, 63–6
symbolism, consumption patterns 84
symbolization process, dream-work 30–2
symptomatic acts, parapraxes 34, 35

tactics of consumption 90
taken-for-grantedness 1–2; ethnomethodology 73, 74, 75; performance 97; phenomenological sociology 56, 58–66; sociology of agency 79–80; *see also* common sense
taste 4, 7, 20, 21, 82, 84, 86–9
technology, actor-network-theory 78
teleological individuals 83, 84
telephone voice, impression management 96
television news 21, 109–11
texting 109, 110, 111; and media love 115–18
theatricality model of everyday life 95, 106–7; performance 95–102; performativity theory 102–6, 107
Theseus 27–8, 29
Thrasher, Frederick 67
trade union movement 41
transcendence of everyday life 21, 38
transformation of everyday life 24–6, 134–6; *see also* social space of everyday life
travellers, impression management 98
Trevelyan, Julian 51
tripartite model of the psyche 28–9
triviality, everyday life 2, 19, 20, 21
truth discourses 52
Tunbridge Wells 50
typification 61–3, 65, 66

unconscious mind 28; dreams 31, 32; meaning 68–9; parapraxes 32, 33, 34, 35, 36; *see also* psychopathology of everyday life; Freudianism
Universal Magazine, The 113
urban masses 6–7, 8
US/American culture 7–8
Uses of Literacy, The (Hoggart) 3

Varley, Rod 46
Veblen, Thorstein 82, 84, 86
veneer of consensus 97
Vietnam War (America's war in Vietnam) 93
village life, social space 135, 136
voice, working class 41, 47
Volosinov, Valentin 132

walking 76
Wallace, Lewis 36
Want (*A Christmas Carol*) 43–4
West, the 131–2
Williams, Raymond 3, 122, 127–33, 135–7
Wirth, Louis 67
women, role of *see* gender roles
work, alienation 16–18, 22–5
working class 40–4, 46–52; phenomenological sociology 55, 59–60; *see also* mass observation movement
Worktown 40, 44–52; on holiday 40, 45, 46, 48, 49, 50
World Cup, BBC coverage 10
Worpole, Ken 8

youth subcultures 6, 72

Zeppelin airship, sexual symbol 31
zone of primary relevance 63
Zorbaugh, Harvey 67