

THE  
NIKOS  
PAPASTERGIADIS  
SPATIAL  
AESTHETICS:  
ART, PLACE,  
AND THE  
EVERYDAY

**THEORY  
ON  
DEMAND**

A SERIES OF READERS  
PUBLISHED BY THE  
INSTITUTE OF NETWORK CULTURES  
ISSUE NO.:

**5**

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AESTHETICS**

Theory on Demand #5

## **Spatial Aesthetics, Art, Place, and the Everyday**

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**For Victoria Lynn**

**Abstract**

This book examines the most recent shifts in contemporary art practice. By working with artists and closely observing the way in which they relate to urban space and engage other people, locally and globally, Nikos Papastergiadis provides a critical account of the transformation of art and public culture. He shows art has sought to democratise the big issues of our time and utilize new information technologies.

While the concept of the everyday highlights the potential for transformation at the level of the individual, at the same time it has to be seen as a critique of broader structures; in this book Papastergiadis stresses the importance of situating a work within art history as well as relating it to its social context.

Spatial Aesthetics will help artists, curators and cultural workers think about the ways they intervene in public life. Challenging recent declarations in the art world that theory is obsolete, it seeks to show how art uses ideas, and how everyone can be involved in the ideas of politics and art.

**Acknowledgements**

What is the place of art today? This book explores the new processes, contexts and relations through which contemporary art is produced. It traces the complex patterns of cultural exchange and the diverse forms of social interaction that inspire artists. At a time when the contradictions of globalization are becoming more visible and new local forms of attachment are being spliced with diverse influences it is necessary to rethink the ways we connect with others. This process of connection is central to our understanding of art. Romantic and nationalist categories that emphasized either the supreme creative genius of the artist's ego, or the unique distillation of cultural values, no longer serve as useful models for interpreting the meaning of art. The flows and reference points that shape the aesthetic and political power of art exceed the boundaries of an individual and national identity.

Thinking about the place of art is not just a debate over the line that is drawn between local, national and global contexts. It also involves an examination of the structures that confer authority and value to art. In the transition from cathedral, to gallery and then to the streets of everyday life, it is not only the place but also the authority of art that has undergone radical transformation. The authority of art has moved from sacred to secular, and the production of art has blurred the boundary between the unique object and the mass commodity. In many of the essays in this book I reflect on the role of photography in this transition. As Walter Benjamin observed, the aura of art has changed in the age mass of reproduction. Photography has exposed the ambivalence that is associated with the use of images in everyday life. Artists not only use popular techniques and situate their work in familiar contexts, they also raise questions about the proper place and value of art. They have disconnected it from the elevated sites of authority and brought it closer to experiences of ordinary people. The use of photography has been the primary agency through which art has been brought closer to home. This has also stimulated new doubts. Despite the greater proximity to images and access to the technologies of visual production, there is still a barrier that separates art from everyday life. In an age when the production of the object in art is being displaced by the initiation of experiences, the old questions of the value and meaning of art are no longer causes for snobbery or melancholia but a return to the bigger quests for identity and truth.

For many years I have had the privilege of working with artists from places as far apart as Finland and Australia. Without these connections I could not have witnessed the constellation of ideas in local clusters and the transformation that occurs as messages pass from one place to the next. This book owes a debt to many artists, writers and curators who encouraged the earlier versions of these essays. For the purpose of this publication they have been modified, but I hope the original ideas, which were found in conversation with other people are still evident. In particular, I would like to thank Bryndis Snaebjornsdottir, Ross Sinclair, Roger Palmer, Jonathon Watkins, Dan Fleming, Charles Green, Lyndal Brown, Patrick Pound, Jorma Puranen, Phillip George, Helene Black, Eugenia Raskopoulos, Polixeni Papapetrou, Lucy Orta, Erika Tan, Nick Tsoutas, Tony Bond, Carlos Capelan and Charles Esche. Lois McNay, while walking along the beach in Brighton, pointed out the broader significance of the concept of the everyday. I would also like to thank my colleagues and friends in Manchester, Mike Savage, Sheila Rowbotham, Peter McMylor, Anna Grimshaw, David Macintosh, Martin Vincent, Richard Hylton, Maria Beraibar and Kiran Kamat. And in Melbourne, this book has benefited from the longstanding support from Scott McQuire, Jeanette Hoorn, Barbara Creed, Peter Lyssiotis, Bill Papastergiadis and Leon Van Schaik. Without the editorial support of Linda Michael and the patience of Liz Fidlou this book would not have found its final form.

Dedicated to Victoria Lynn.

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### 3. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE EVERYDAY

For most of the twentieth century, the concept of the 'everyday' lay submerged as a minor concept in the sociological tradition. It was popularized in the 1980s by debates in cultural studies and subsequently introduced into the discourse of contemporary art in the mid to late 1990s. The reclamation of the concept of the everyday followed a period of theoretical hesitation and uncertainty. After decades of intense theoretical contestation over the relationship between art, power and discourse, there was a hiatus in the writing on the significance of the social context of art. The introduction of the concept of the everyday seemed like a neutral concept for addressing the diverse forms of artistic practice. If the relationship between art, politics and theory was at an impasse, then it was assumed that the concept of the everyday could reveal the specific forms of lived experience that shape artistic production and engage politics without introducing a theory with a predetermined ideological agenda.

While the popular use of the concept of the everyday may have helped acknowledge the specific location of art and its relation to other social activities, there was little appreciation of its own place within the history of ideas. The concept of the everyday can only appear neutral if its meaning is confined to common-sense uses. At various points in the twentieth century, the concept of the everyday shifted from a mere descriptor of the prosaic elements in social life, to becoming a critical category for not only confronting the materiality and totality of the contemporary culture, but also a means of redefining reality for the purposes of social transformation. The Russian formalists were amongst the first artists to rethink the relationship between art and the everyday. By asserting that art was always in dialectical relation to other cultural developments, they invented new artistic practices which were a direct engagement with the materiality of industry and the forms of the mass media. The shifts in the understanding of the everyday were not confined to the visual artist, for, as John Roberts noted, during the early phases of the Russian Revolution both Lenin and Trotsky recognized the significance of a critical portrayal of the everyday. They believed that literature, film and theatre could stage 'proletarian culture' from within a new universalist perspective:

The everyday was not something that was to be constructed out of a narrow experience of working-class culture, but out of the resources of world culture, to which the forms of European bourgeois culture were a particularly rich contribution and, along with world culture as a whole, the just inheritance of the working class as the vanguard of humanity.<sup>1</sup>

When placed in relation to the history of the avant-garde, the concept of the everyday also enables the re-evaluation of a series of practices which mainstream culture may have considered trivial or marginal. From the dadaists and the surrealists, to the situationist and fluxus movements, there have been ongoing experiments which sought to subvert the conventional use of the everyday objects and associations in modern art. At the centre of these experiments was not just a documentation of the artifacts and customs of the modern world, but also the joining together of artistic practice with new industrial techniques in order to liberate the creative potential in modern life. These artistic collaborations were seen as a vital counter-force against the homogenization of culture and the pacification of subjectivity in modernity. The perceptual habits that were developed in urban life were seen as 'problems'. The early twentieth-century German sociologist Georg Simmel described this muting of critical powers as a corollary of the blasé attitude in the modern

city. Maurice Blanchot accentuated this insight when he defined the dominant effect of modern culture as producing 'boredom', a form of consciousness in which images lose their form and the 'citizen in us' is put to sleep:

There results from this a perilous irresponsibility. The everyday, where one lives as though outside the true and the false, is a level of life where what reigns is the refusal to be different, a yet undetermined stir: without responsibility and without authority, without direction and without decision, a storehouse of anarchy, since casting aside all beginning and dismissing all end. This is the everyday. And the man in the street is fundamentally irresponsible; while having always seen everything, he is witness to nothing. He knows all, but cannot answer for it, not through cowardice, but because he takes it all lightly and because he is not really there. Who is there when the man on the street is there?<sup>2</sup>

Through the tactics of shock, juxtaposition and interaction modern artists sought to awaken the 'citizen in us'. For Blanchot, everyday life had become wrapped in a series of mental, political and cultural straitjackets. Art was seen as a means for exposing the totalitarian underside of the social imaginary and for stimulating critical modes of perception. Attention to the role of the arbitrary and the unconscious in the everyday became invested with political and psychic dimensions. In order to break out of the strictures of convention, the function of art expanded from the transmission of a particular message to the transformation of the viewer's mode of attention. The avant-garde was to lead in the transformation of everyday consciousness. By representing familiar objects from unexpected positions they not only sought to reveal hidden poetry but also unleash a new revolutionary understanding of reality. These ambitions were to underpin many of the debates on the role of the artist. However, despite a long tradition of avant-garde experimentation, and the repeated efforts to break the divide between popular culture and high art, the concept of the everyday has remained relatively untheorized within the contemporary discourse of art. Most of the theoretical work on the concept of the everyday was undertaken in sociology, philosophy and psychoanalysis.

As a sociological concept, the everyday is clearly opposed to other concepts which emphasized structural, transcendental or ahistorical forces. The concept of the everyday was not a retreat or an escape from the social, but a means of rethinking the relationship between the particular and the general, or how attention to the details of daily life can reveal an insight into the broader system. Yet, when applied to art, the concept of the everyday was perceived as being distinctive from earlier theoretical models in that it did not seek to confine the significance of art within the *a priori* categories of a given political ideology, nor explain art's meaning according to predetermined psychoanalytic and philosophical categories. To consider art from the perspective of the everyday is to stress that the measure of art is not found by borrowing the yardsticks of other discourses, but rather from its articulation and practices within everyday life. Yet, this aim, which seeks to take us directly into the lifeworld, without the mediation of other discourses, cannot be conducted in pure form. There is never a direct access to the representations of everyday life. Theories of language, culture, and the psyche are always inextricably interwoven in our every effort to represent the details of everyday life. While the concept of the everyday may have appeared as a novel way to articulate the context of artistic practice, it is important to remember that it was embedded in longstanding sociological and philosophical debates on praxis. Within the art historical discourse on 'art and the everyday' there is a decisive step from the art of living to the politics of social

trans-formation. The critical reaction against realism at the end of the nineteenth century and the associated attempts to expand the subject matter of fine art, were also motivated by a re-evaluation of the bourgeois distinctions between the noble and the ordinary, the beautiful and the scarred, the refined and the prosaic.<sup>3</sup> Champions of modernism like Baudelaire were to stress the vital representation of the 'everyday'. It is not my aim to illustrate how artists have either grappled with this process, or striven to energize the nodal points between art and the everyday, but rather to contextualize this concept within a number of earlier debates. As Scott McQuire pointed out:

While the term 'everyday' has longstanding oppositional connotations, stemming from its usage in Marxist sociology (notably Henri Lefebvre's 1947 *Critique of Everyday Life*) and passing, by way of phenomenology and the Situationist International (Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life* published in 1967 was the companion volume to Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*), into the doxa of contemporary cultural studies, what it represents has undergone significant mutations in the passage.<sup>4</sup>

The genealogy of the concept of the everyday could be traced much further back, and the net cast more widely. Mike Featherstone finds echoes of the concept from antiquity, and draws on phenomenological as well as Marxist traditions.<sup>5</sup> The Ancient Greek philosophers paid meticulous attention, and were in ongoing debate, about what made the 'good life'. In the phenomenological tradition, the term 'lifeworld' has a central role, and when Alfred Schutz first introduced it to sociology he defined it in relation to the heterogeneity of attitudes in action and thinking, which were in contrast with the dominant institutionalized actions and rationalized modes of thinking. Agnes Heller's attempt to synthesize both the phenomenological and Marxist traditions of the everyday lead her to characterize it as 'encompassing different attitudes, including reflective attitudes'. These attitudes are not just those which situate the self and help make sense of the world, but also include those imbued with critical force that are capable of offering a vision of a 'better world'. In her definition, everyday life is seen as the co-constitution of self and society. It is the aggregate of both the attitudes that shape the self and the processes of shaping the world<sup>6</sup>

While the everyday is a sort of amoeba concept, its contents and contours varying according to the content it absorbs and surrounds, it needs to be stressed that it is not somehow outside of theory or politics. The concept of the everyday is not boundless. While it was defined in opposition to the unidirectional or reductive theories of social change, it was not proposed in order to argue that there were spaces which were totally open-ended and free from institutional constraints. The parameters of the everyday can be sharpened by positing its relation to its counter: the non-everyday.

In sociology, particularly within the ethnomethodological tradition,<sup>7</sup> the concept of the everyday was used to check the use of theory against either a prescriptive modelling of the world, or a totalising abstraction which determines the precise order of causes and consequences. The concept of the everyday also played an important role in the rethinking of the 'place' of theory. If we understand theory as operating *within*, rather than above, or beyond, a specific context, then this perspective, which implicates the process of representation within the structures and institutions of belonging, would enable a level of critique which also attends to the precise configuration of the flows and tensions within socialrelations. A theory of the everyday is thus located in the in-between spaces, the interstices, the margins and the disjunctive zones of the social. The location

and expression of the everyday was identified, for instance, in the way workers seize the moments that break their drudging routines, the discovery of unintended pleasures in mass cultural products, the transformation of a foreign space into the private place called home, or even the deep embrace of a pop song as a personal anthem. The focus of the everyday sought to demonstrate that there were pockets of resistance, tactics of adaptation and reflexive forms of agency which were overlooked by the essentializing and structuralist models of social theory.

Given the restless and disruptive dynamic of modernity, it is a modality which is particularly well suited to grasping the experience of displacement and rupture that is symptomatic of our age. The concept of the everyday in critical theory was closely linked to the tension between freedom and alienation in modernity. The more pessimistic veins of Marxist theory, in particular theorists influenced by the negative side of Adorno's writing on culture, tended to see the everyday, at best, as complicitous with the coercive forces of modernity, or even worse, as an expression of the false political reconciliations that are possible under capitalism. By contrast Henri Lefebvre was among the first to emphasize that the concept of everyday life was a positive supplement to Marx's concept of alienation.<sup>8</sup> While recognizing that capitalism creates social relations which alienate subjects from their 'species being' and from others, Lefebvre also stressed that the concept of everyday life can illuminate the complex ways in which subjects exercise their potential to be emancipatory and critical. Thus, Lefebvre created a new space within the Marxist tradition. For Lefebvre the significance of the concept of the everyday lies in the way it points to overcoming alienation. Lefebvre was convinced that alienation would not be overcome by political change alone. On the contrary, he noted that under Stalinism it deepened. Lefebvre saw the energy within the everyday in luminous terms. Unlike the idealists who expressed nothing but haughty disdain towards the everyday, Lefebvre believed that an imaginative engagement with everyday life could stimulate the desire for social transformation. He stressed that popular art forms like film and photography contained both radical content and presented glimmers of hope for the renewal of a Marxist cultural theory.

Lefebvre's theory of the everyday was, however, limited by the uncritical repetition of two flaws in the Marxist theorization of alienation. First, the theory of self, which served as the counter to alienated subjectivity, presupposed the existence of a unified personality. Second, the privileging of the commodification of labour in the definition of alienation overlooked the domain of non-economic work. Alienation was thus confined to forms of non-reciprocal relationships between an individual and their work. According to Marx, as value is concentrated in the object of work, and as the worker is perceived as another commodity in the chain of production, there is a process which ensues that leads to the externalization of the value of production, the estrangement of the worker from the object of work, the undermining of the worker's sense of worth through production, and the objectification of all social relationships in the workplace. Ultimately, the worker is left feeling alienated from nature, the essence of their own identity, and their consciousness of the totality of all other human relations. Marx thereby argued that the consequences of alienation are the estrangement of the worker from their 'species being'.

In Marx's dialectic, the space of the everyday was defined as the other side of alienation. It is in the space of the everyday, Marx claimed, that the worker, outside of their oppressive work relations, had a genuine sense of self-worth. In this space, Marx believed that there was the possibility of

integrating the fragments of the social world with the essence of identity. Heller also continued this line of argument when she stressed that Marx's theory of the self assumed a necessary unity between personality and the sphere of action that constitutes society. The integrated self was capable of both recognizing the flux and fragmentation of the social world, and providing a critique through the synthesis between its subjectivity and everyday life.

Lefebvre also extends this integrative logic when he defines the concept of the everyday as referring to all the spheres and institutions which in their unity and their totality 'determine the concrete individual'.<sup>9</sup> From the choice of leisure to the structure of domesticity, Lefebvre draws our attention to the complex means by which social structures are internalized in daily life. This practice of internalization is neither passive nor neutral. The individual actively transforms the external social structures as they integrate them into their everyday life. This process of internalization has a double effect. It transforms the internal private sphere as it incorporates the external structures, and simultaneously creates a dynamic feedback on the shape of the social. The reciprocal relationship between the part and whole is critical in Lefebvre's theory. He sees 'the humble events of everyday life as having two sides',<sup>10</sup> as being marked by the arbitrariness of the particular, and carrying an essence of the social. By tracing the reproduction of the whole in the practice of the part, Lefebvre thought he found a way out of the base-superstructure model, that was stultifying Marxist debates on culture. However, it was also this double linkage between the particular and the general, where the former was seen as both the counter and the isomorph of the latter, which in turn imposed another form of idealism over the everyday.

Michel de Certeau's concept of the everyday goes even further and provides a way of understanding the everyday without idealizing the integrative logic that was central to the Marxist tradition. When de Certeau represents an analogy between the part and the whole, he also suggests a displacement effect. He is more attuned to the sly step towards transformation in every act of internalization.

The presence and circulation of a representation ... tells us nothing about what it is for the users. We must first analyze its manipulation by users who are not its makers. Only then can we gauge the difference or similarity between the production of the image and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization.<sup>11</sup>

It is this investigation of the difference between the laws, rituals and representations imposed by the dominant order, and the subversive practices of compliance, adoption and interpretation by the powerless that fuels Michel de Certeau's study of social relations. His concern is not with the intended effects of a social system, but the uses made of it by the people who are operating within it. The politics of the everyday, for de Certeau, is focused towards the micro ways in which people subvert the dominant order. De Certeau tracks two levels of response against the oppressive and homogenizing pressures of modernity. First, the ways in which people make ethical responses to the social order, and thereby humanize their relations with each other. Second, in the face of a social order that constitutes the majority of the people at the margin, he also notes the countering techniques by which the weak make an ingenious and devious use of the strong. These tactical responses are necessary, he argues, since the individual is increasingly situated in a position where the social structures are unstable, boundaries are shifting, and the context is too vast and

complex to either control or escape.

From this perspective, de Certeau's concept of the everyday is significantly different from Lefebvre's. Given the complexity and diversity in the social field of the everyday, de Certeau does not claim that the part can carry the essence of the whole. Globalization, through the shift in forms of production, relocation of central command centres, rapid flows of financial and speculative trading across national borders, increasing interpenetration of local cultures by the media industries, and new patterns of migration, has heightened the complexity and fragmentation of the social order. The identity of the social whole can no longer be represented according to neat categories and discrete boundaries. This re-evaluation of the identity of the whole also complicates the representative status of the part. For instance, can art of the everyday represent the lifeworld of the whole nation? Or do we need to make smaller and more specific claims about the relationship between the particular, which is always a tactical response to a number of conflicting demands, and the whole, which is already too fragmented and complex to appear as a single unit? At the micro level of everyday life, the individual is now compelled to utilize intelligence, cunning and ruse, both in order to survive and to gain pleasure. 'This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment.'<sup>12</sup>

The metaphor of a house is an apposite one for this exilic epoch. According to de Certeau, our mode of being in this world, that is, our ability to insert ourselves into the present and to make the meaning of our time memorable and affirmative, is like the practice of renting an apartment. The space is borrowed, the structures are given, and the possibility of dwelling is thus not infinite. However, the practice of living is neither closed nor predetermined by the architecture of the building. We enter the apartment with our baggage, furnish it with our memories and hopes, and make changes which give form to our needs and desires. The orders in which our belongings are arranged are like the fingerprints of our social identity.

The home is saturated with emotive associations and social meanings, but unlike those from other historical periods, the contemporary home gains its identity from the oscillation between arrival and departure, integration and fragmentation. Bauman characterized our relationship to home in late modernity not in terms of displacement but unplacement.<sup>13</sup> Not only are more people living in places which are remote and unfamiliar to them, even those who have not moved are increasingly feeling estranged from their sense of place. The concept of home needs to be fused with the fluid practice of belonging. 'Home is no longer a dwelling but the untold story of life being lived.'<sup>14</sup> 'Home' must act as a verb, as well as a noun. For home is no longer confined to either a place in the past, where our sense of origin is fixed to a geographical spot; it also appears as a horizon that eludes the present and compels the search for a new destination. As with all senses of destiny there is an unending effort to approach it but today it never reveals itself in the full and final sense of arrival. The meaning of home now combines the place of origin with the struggle for destiny. To tell the story of the life being lived in the home, we must perform what John Berger calls the 'bricolage of the soul'. When Gaston Bachelard applied the tools of psychoanalysis to the structure of the house, renaming the garret as the superego, the ground level as the ego, and the basement as id, thereby providing us with topoanalysis, he gave us that first look into the soul of architecture.<sup>15</sup> Or was it an insight into the architecture of the soul? Through these figurative techniques Bachelard was to address the practice of making meaning through the assemblage of

the fragments that constitute home.

Psychoanalysis, which in Freud's hands was driven to uncover the hidden meanings of the banal and trivial in everyday habits, was lifted out of its therapeutic context by Bachelard and released into the realm of critical poetics. Psychoanalysis can benefit our understanding of the everyday when its application is not just confined to a diagnostic and medical science, but extended to a mode of investigating the psychic drives in the constitution of the social. While all the messy desires and neurotic habits of the everyday cannot be removed by 'working through' their origin in the primal sexual scenes, psychoanalysis has opened the door to our understanding of the repressed in everyday life, provided a great epistemic insight into the orders of the psyche, and exposed the unconscious layers that were obscured by the commonplace distinction between truth and lies. In one of his earliest works, *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud made the point that something was always left out; something remained unspoken, even when the speaker expressed their views sincerely and to the best of their recollection. The meaning of this elusive 'something' was for Freud located in the unconscious. Despite Freud's determined effort to establish psychoanalysis as a science, it is now most valuable as a creative method for excavating the grit from the silent disavowals and recognizing the rub they cause in our experience of the everyday.

The utilization of psychoanalysis and Marxism by the Frankfurt School took an even more decisive role in tracing the 'itinerary of desire' in everyday life. Adorno and Horkheimer were conscious of two shifts in the political terrain. Unlike the classical Marxists, they no longer believed that the role of the proletariat resembled that of a vanguard, and they also lost faith in the view that the internal dynamics of history would inevitably lead to the overthrow of the capitalist system. Adorno and Horkheimer sought in psychoanalysis new clues to explain the culture of survival. Their critique against domination and authority was also significantly framed through an emphasis on the redemptive potential of memory. The work of memory was not confined to a nostalgic retreat, but knotted into the emancipatory project of uncovering the elements of subjectivity, and heightening the reflexive attitude that had been suppressed by the instrumental rationalism of the modern world.

From the combined perspective of Marx's theory of alienation and Freud's theory of repression, it could now be argued that the dynamics of culture and the role of agency could never be reduced to a merely negative or positive expression of material forms of production. If Marx's great contribution to social theory was to position the intellectual within the site of struggle, it could be said that Freud's equally significant epistemic insight was the idea that the analyst must offer his or her body, through the act of transference, as a model for uncovering the meanings of the past and transforming the everyday. After Marx and Freud the critical distance between the subject and object was redefined. These theories breathed a sense of hope into our understanding of the levels of freedom in the everyday. It produced a new kind of awareness of our own capacity to be attentive to the possibilities within destiny.

The future will be like the past, not in the sense of repetition, but in the sense of having been uncalculated. So one of the aims of analysis is to free people to do nothing to the future but be interested in it.<sup>16</sup>

The theorist, the analyst and the artist would no longer need to claim an aloofness from the social

in order to evoke a radical position. The relationship between the abstract and the concrete could no longer be thought of as, to use Walter Benjamin's phrase, 'a one-way street'. The culture of the everyday was not a mechanical part that neatly revolved around the pivots of the dominant order. Most significantly the concept of the everyday was a challenge against the structural determinist tendencies in social theory. According to Peter Burger it also represented the basis for the renewal of both the left and the avant-garde as it reintegrated 'art into the praxis of life'.<sup>17</sup> Agents could not be represented as being the mere 'dupes' of an overarching ideology. By drawing attention to the intricate and reciprocal relationship between agency and structure, the theories of the everyday rejected the assumption that change could only be imposed from above, or sustained by purely external forces. The everyday became a concept for understanding how the strategies of resistance in the practices of living were not always explicitly oppositional. The heroics and ethics of the everyday did not appear in either titanic stature or saintly guise; rather they were enacted through subtle acts of involvement and displacement. The spirit of resistance did not always come from beyond or above, but also from *within*.

It is important to stress the limits of individual action. Choice is often confused with freedom, and as a consequence the space of the everyday is exaggerated. The sociological debates on agency and the everyday attempted to trace the radial network and critical feedback mechanisms that interconnect individual choice with social structures. An individual's ability to choose is always framed by a broader context, but these internal practices always impact on the external structures. The flow of influence was thus not seen as emanating only from above, but circulating in turbulent patterns and taking multifarious routes. As people consciously utilize the dominant structures, this creates a double displacement effect: at the micro level their subjectivity is affected, and at the macro the boundaries of the system are modified to accommodate the specific patterns of use. The exterior forces are changed as they are internalized within the individual's subjectivity, producing both a destabilizing effect on the social structures and a displacement of the prior state of identity. The concept of the everyday is thus part of a tradition in identifying the potential for critical practice, and for offering alternative interpretations on what makes the 'good life'.

The key advantage of the concept of the everyday was that it highlighted the potential for transformation at the level of the individual's experience. It showed that radical gestures could also be witnessed in the small steps taken by individuals in the course of their everyday lives. However, as Lois McNay observed, cultural theorists began to stretch the emancipatory potential of the everyday and fetishize the micro-revolutionary gestures of individual practices.<sup>18</sup> According to McNay, the critical dimensions of cultural theory have been disproportionately focused towards the small gestures of the individual. Hybrid identities formed out of the contradictory forces of everyday life were seen as the ideal form of survival, rather than as a critique of the broader structures. By stressing the liberties and pleasures found in 'counter-cultural' activities, theorists began to blur the political process of contestation. It elevated the agency of the individual and evaded discussion of the structural limits in the collective assumption of power.