

# **The Everyday" in Contemporary Thought: Attempts to Challenge the Obvious**

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## **Abstract**

The concept of the "everyday" was long confined to normative definitions and negative descriptions, rendering it marginalized in research interests and of little epistemological significance. However, critical revisions led by postmodern thinkers have reevaluated this exclusionary perception, paving the way for cultural studies to adopt the "everyday" as a multidimensional subject with epistemological stakes. This work aims to explore the shift in addressing the "everyday" within cultural studies, which regard culture as part of daily life and strive to unravel its complexities and interconnections. The findings reveal that the "everyday" has become a fundamental element of cultural thought, highlighting the commitment of cultural studies to understanding social phenomena in a democratic and inclusive manner.

**Keywords:** cultural studies, daily, democratization, epistemology, marginalisation.

## **Le quotidien" dans la pensée contemporaine : tentatives de défier l'évidence**

### **Résumé**

Le concept du "quotidien" a longtemps été cantonné à des définitions normatives et à des descriptions négatives, le rendant ainsi marginalisé dans les centres d'intérêt de la recherche et d'une faible signification épistémologique. Cependant, des révisions critiques menées par des penseurs postmodernes ont réévalué cette perception exclusionnaire, ouvrant la voie à l'adoption du "quotidien" comme sujet multidimensionnel avec des enjeux épistémologiques dans les études culturelles. Ce travail vise à explorer le changement dans l'approche du "quotidien" au sein des études culturelles, qui considèrent la culture comme faisant partie de la vie quotidienne et s'efforcent de démêler ses complexités et interconnexions. Les résultats révèlent que le "quotidien" est devenu un élément fondamental de la pensée culturelle, mettant en lumière l'engagement des études culturelles à comprendre les phénomènes sociaux de manière démocratique et inclusive.

**Mots-clés** études culturelles, quotidien, démocratisation, épistémologie, marginalisation.

### **Introduction**

Institutionalized and transcendent thought has long been preoccupied with exploring grand questions about existence, knowledge, and the universe, often overlooking other questions tied to lived reality: the daily details and ordinary life. It has dismissed these as futile and meaningless, given their association with notions such as the temporary, the fleeting, and the informal. These aspects are also closely linked to the familiar, the habitual, the mundane, the commonplace, the trivial, the repetitive, and the lowly—concepts deemed "banal" and incongruous with the overarching reference framework of academic thought. For an extended

period, this framework rejected the legitimacy of investigating "the everyday." In the name of legitimizing the monopoly over epistemic truths, "the everyday" was excluded and marginalized from the sphere of general thought. It was imbued with notions of social inferiority, which the intellectual and cultural establishment viewed with suspicion and rejected, claiming that it did not rise to its lofty values. Thus, the everyday became associated with the banal and intertwined with the marginal, the popular, and the mass—concepts that belong to the realm of cultural practices that are unwelcome in academic spaces. These practices are perceived as counter-culture, opposed to official culture, and falling short of its elevated values. The overarching question emerges: How can the "everyday" be repositioned as a legitimate and valuable subject of academic and cultural analysis? And what does this shift reveal about the potential of cultural studies to democratize epistemology and challenge entrenched hierarchies of thought?

Ces hypothèses suggèrent que l'inclusion du "quotidien" dans les analyses culturelles offre une perspective enrichie sur la société, en soulignant l'importance des expériences ordinaires dans la construction des significations collectives. En défiant la hiérarchie traditionnelle entre les savoirs "élevés" et "banals", ces études permettent de mettre en lumière des pratiques quotidiennes souvent négligées mais essentielles pour comprendre les structures sociales, les rapports de pouvoir, et les transformations culturelles. Ainsi, l'exploration de ce domaine contribue à une approche plus inclusive et démocratique du savoir.

### **1-On the Trajectory of Conceptual Transformation**

**1-1 The History of the Word: The Burden of Etymological Legacy** It was no easy task to break the longstanding epistemological siege that had been imposed on the subjects of daily life, under the pretext of their futility and inability to align and harmonize with the demands of thought and its theoretical activity in building comprehensive, integrated, and profound knowledge in interpreting phenomena. The quotidian had long been associated in the minds of adherents to major ideologies and serious theories with sterility, triviality, banality, monotony, and other criticisms and suspicions that clung to the concept, pushing it off the research map and isolating it from the system of awareness, which was exclusively dedicated to serving fixed, closed systems and embracing totalizing and universal conceptions.

In fact, the quotidian remained captive to contemptuous views and moral and intellectual disdain, which burdened it with a negative value that distorted its terminological memory. As Derek Schilling puts it: "*The history of the everyday (l'histoire du quotidien) is, first and foremost, the history of a word.*" (Schilling, 2006, p. 29)

Returning to the etymology of the word and exploring the evolution of the dictionary meaning of the Latin *quotidianus*, it becomes clear that the word, in its original use, was tied to a religious context. It was an adjective used to describe ordinary, daily bread (*pain quotidien*), referring to earthly foods, in contrast to *pain béni*, the holy sacramental bread offered in churches during religious ceremonies. It seems that this humble, worldly descriptor accompanied the word as it shifted in meaning from the religious to the secular domain. Beginning in the seventeenth century, the term came to signify everything we do daily, everything we continually engage with, or to put it simply, what is routinely and repetitively

done each day. At this point, the word took on connotations of the fleeting, the temporary, the habitual, the banal, the familiar, the informal, and the popular... among other descriptions carrying a negative value, not because of their inherent qualities, but because they fall within cultural forms and practices that are not recognized by the academic elite's definition, which distinguishes between official scholarly culture and the popular culture practiced by ordinary people in their daily lives.

### **1-2 Breaking the Bonds of Relationship with the Obviousness of the Concept**

To act as if nothing is obvious, (Deleuze & Guattari, 1997, p. 29) even the most obvious things, such as daily life—this is the challenge that Western thought embraced as it reflected on itself and its progress, not hesitating to make strenuous efforts to achieve it. Its persistent attempts to displace obviousness from many concepts that had suffered from neglect and disregard due to their assumed obviousness have borne fruit. The concept of the quotidian is perhaps one of the most significant examples of this. The concept of the quotidian entered the realm of thought, sweeping through the public sphere, and gained a value that was previously unfamiliar to it, due to the intellectual elite's disdain, which was directed at serving grand causes.

What is striking is that “today, all of us turn to the quotidian to understand and question it, to extract its meanings, because it carries within itself an enormous set of ideas and purposes that have remained hidden behind various ordinary actions and practices.”

All human expressions, from arts, ideas, and various actions, attempt to extract meanings from the quotidian using different methods and techniques, such as the internet, digital photography, or satellite TV through live broadcasts. In fact, we now watch live TV programs that aim to present daily life to viewers and listeners, exposing areas that were once considered private. The focus on the ordinary has become so intense that creators in all fields—such as visual artists, filmmakers, theater directors, and others—now record daily events in their paintings, photographs, sculptures, films, novels, and poems, displaying the ordinary things we engage with daily in public and in our lives, as though they are forcing us to look at those things we see but do not scrutinize (Trekki, 2002).

The intensification of awareness of the present moment and the shift of attention to everything related to daily life reflects a real transformation in human thought. Within the trajectory of this transformation, the elitist disdain for the concept has been challenged, "in a more democratic use that proves all classes share in the rhythms of daily life. Every person, from the most famous to the humblest, eats, sleeps, yawns, and defecates, and no one escapes the dominance of banality." The idea of daily culture, which is often now used as a synonym for popular culture, has been re-evaluated, specifically as a concept that is valuable and important precisely because of its accepted, ordinary characteristics (Bennett, 2010, p. 722).

As is clear, the re-conceptualization of the quotidian and the restoration of the meanings, values, purposes, and symbols it refers to could not have occurred without the tireless efforts of many thinkers and researchers over several decades, working to liberate thought from its absolutes and democratize it, away from the authority of cultural centralities and the dominance of their elitist theories. One of the pillars of the thought of the quotidian, Michel Maffesoli, states: "We should not fear thinking in ways that oppose the current academic system. On the contrary, this reflects good intellectual health when rejecting the clamor in the chorus of

broadcasting some good feelings that are suitable to be the basis for the comforting doxa, which is often called the inverted meaning par excellence: knowledge. (Maffesoli, 2020, p. 9) "

Within the framework of this radical vision, which is based on restoring value to the margins of Western thought, attention was turned to the quotidian and a focus on the lived present—what happens here and now, in the present, with its small lived details, its negatives and positives, its rationalities and irrationalities. As Maffesoli always sees it, "The West has reached a form of saturation in the realm of abstract phenomena, grand values, and economic and ideological mechanisms. In contrast, there is a rise of the qualitative and the playful, a deepening of the image, and a revolution in communication. The masses began to focus and center on the quotidian, the present, and activities that have no particular end. Thus, a vital impulse has begun to invade Western societies, reclaiming collective rituals that signal a new turning point. (Maffesoli, 2020, p. 74)"

The concept has undergone profound transformations that have enabled it to occupy a distinguished place in the fields of sociology, philosophy, anthropology, history, and other social and human sciences. It has become one of the key concepts in understanding the lived present, with its issues, complexities, and excessive intricacies that require the adoption of entirely new approaches, different from those previously used in the intellectual institution. Therefore, it is not surprising that some speak of a universal daily life of the era, one with infinite faces through which the spirit of the age expresses itself (Maffesoli, 2020, p. 75). From here arises the complexity, and from here stems its importance. Daily life does not solely mean individual life in a restricted sense; it also refers to the collective commonality. It is an intensive and complex networked system, "where each element, subject, self, transient relationship, every significant event, every thought, action, and relationship... etc., only acquires its value by being connected to the whole, and its meaning only emerges in its totality. This is what is perceived, to varying degrees, in the contemporary appreciation of the quotidian. We feel aligned with others. We share with others in a larger collective.

The various gatherings, collective emotions, celebratory fervor in its many forms, tribal entertainments, and other fashion trends, whether in clothing, language, or gestures, all serve to emphasize daily the persistence of a way of life from which no one can escape. (Jappe, 1998, p. 113) " Thus, researchers have revealed the problematic nature of the concept at hand, with each, from their own perspective, attempting to grasp the meanings and boundaries of the concept in its ambiguity, complexity, and semantic transformations.

### **1-3 The Thought of the Quotidian: The French Precedence**

It is worth noting here that many researchers, such as Terry Eagleton, affirm that France is the cultural environment to which we owe the concept of daily life. This is confirmed by looking at the long list of French writers, thinkers, and philosophers who dedicated their pens to revisiting and scrutinizing the concept to uncover its existing and possible meanings. Among them is Henri Lefebvre, one of the pioneers who contributed to revealing the problematic nature and semantic richness of the concept of the quotidian. In the introduction to the first volume of his monumental work *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre highlighted the importance of daily life as an essential, yet unknown, dimension of human existence. He emphasized that this discovery was as significant as Freud's analysis of sexuality and Marx's analysis of labor (Jappe, 1998, p. 113).

In the same context, one can refer to the vast legacy left by literary realism in France, from Stendhal to Malraux. Here, it is worth recalling Franco Moretti's description of the realist novel as representing the culture of everyday life, rather than criticizing it. This is complemented by the efforts of the *École des Annales* and the social inquiries of Pierre Bourdieu, as well as the writings of Roland Barthes, and before him, Michel Leiris and Raymond Queneau, all of whom focused on the depiction of daily life. Additionally, there are the phenomenological theses of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his efforts in interpreting everyday life (Eagleton, 2008, p. 113).

It is worth mentioning here the pioneering role played by the Situationist movement (les Situations), a radical intellectual and cultural movement that emerged in France in the mid-1950s and extended its activity until the 1970s. This movement brought together left-wing thinkers such as Guy Debord, Raoul Vaneigem, Piero Simondo, and other Situationists who, through their studies, offered a radical critique of prevailing thought and daily life. Their theories had a profound impact on the eruption of the student revolution in France in 1968, which is considered a pivotal event in the history of the emergence of postmodern discourse in human thought. What is important for us to emphasize here is that postmodernism did not emerge suddenly or without preparation, and that the exploration of the inner workings of lived daily reality was not a product of the postmodern moment, even though it is closely related to it.

#### **1-4 Postmodernism: The Bias Toward the Quotidian**

There has indeed been a paradigmatic shift in the relationship with time, the indicators and early signs of which began to appear early in the writings of some avant-garde thinkers who, starting in the mid-20th century, took on the task of researching the topic of daily life and exploring its trajectories from multiple and diverse angles. Thanks to the efforts of what we can call the proponents of quotidian thought, the concept of the quotidian was able to free itself from its marginality and move beyond the realms of the unthought (*impensée*), gradually infiltrating various research fields one after another, taking new positions and strongholds. The result has been the emergence of new specializations.

Sociology of everyday life, anthropology of everyday life, philosophy of everyday life, archaeology of everyday life... Thus, the concept has moved in all directions, seeking new ground in contemporary issues such as globalization and everyday life, art and everyday life, new media and everyday life. Such engagements reveal the vital role the concept of the quotidian plays in uncovering the nature of the changes occurring in human consciousness regarding time and its counterpart, space.

David Harvey considered that "human consciousness of time and space is a social issue, depending on time and place. Despite our ability to invent a unified measure through calendars, clocks, regions, maps, telescopes, and the development of transportation, technology has artificially violated the natural boundaries of space. Harvey spoke of what he called the 'spatial and temporal compression,' which refers to processes that have revolutionized the objective characteristics of time and space, forcing us to radically change how we represent the world in our minds, often. Furthermore, the use of the concept of compression here is based on a strong argument: the history of capitalism has been marked by an acceleration of the pace of life and

the overcoming of spatial barriers to such an extent that the world seems as if it is about to collapse upon us from within. (Hussein Malkawi, 2017, p. 77)"

It is clear from this grim description that contemporary life has broken with traditional time—or rather, the time of traditional time has passed. This marks a turning point that presents difficult and unprecedented challenges for humanity as a whole. The "information revolution," which has driven the spread of electronic minds to absorb the vast amount of information that human memory can no longer contain, has begun to impose new characteristics and radical changes in what has been called the third civilizational wave—following agricultural and industrial civilization—generating sharp contradictions as it succeeds in changing life patterns, values, relationships, production, and consumption once again (AbdRahman, 1999, p. 2).

Indeed, the atomistic, fragmented view of things and the world has spread, and disintegration has prevailed after the era of great, cohesive entities—whether on the level of physical reality or the moral level—came to an end. This is perhaps what led some postmodern theorists to question the grand theories with universal scope and totalitarian, overarching characteristics, and to call instead for multiple, localized, temporary micro-narratives that address the issues of the marginalized, the outcasts, and the forgotten cultures at the periphery. These narratives speak the language of life and keep pace with its constant flow.

Postmodernists have realized that stability, permanence, and universality are all illusions negated by the reality of fragmentation, change, and becoming. Terry Eagleton says: "Postmodernism points beyond the narratives that were once imagined to have the secret, terrifying function of establishing a basis for a totalizing, universal human history and legitimizing it. We are now in the process of awakening, transitioning from the nightmare of modernity with its manipulative false consciousness and its exaggerated reverence for the idea of totality, to postmodern pluralism, the pluralism of conflicting, heterogeneous life styles and language games that have abandoned the longing for totalities and their legitimization. Consequently, science and philosophy must give up their grand metaphysical claims and view themselves with greater humility, considering themselves precisely as another category of narratives. (Harvey, 2005, p. 26)"

In fact, the game of intersecting and opposing mirrors, which postmodern thinkers excelled at, enabled them to confront the totalizing visions of the universe, life, reality, and society, along with all the cognitive and value systems that had been institutionally established. This declared confrontation required questioning the value and reliability of grand narratives, refuting their authority, and freeing oneself from their pre-existing presence. In contrast, these thinkers focused on producing alternative, smaller narratives that celebrate the incidental, the everyday, and the lived experiences. Thus, the research interest in grand stories and overarching concepts diminished, making way for smaller stories—those that relate to the daily conditions of human life, with all its complexities and dimensions. Against the backdrop of the decline of grand narratives, cultural studies emerged as one of the most dynamic research fields, enriching postmodern thought with its new perspective on the everyday in its lived details.

## **2- Cultural Studies: The Bet on the Everyday**

The preoccupation with the everyday and the engagement with its unknown, which the obviousness of certainty has denied, is the culmination of a problematic and complex trajectory in the relationship of Western thought with time. It was necessary to wait for the exhaustion of

the structural paradigm, or rather the collapse of the structural dominance of thought, before full recognition of the everyday as a pluralistic concept "that never submits to unifying or embalming systems, because—in its essence—it evades singular direction and reductive analysis." For instance, the French historian and philosopher Michel de Certeau demonstrated that the everyday always manifests itself in endurance and creativity. Endurance against social dominance in all its forms, and the creative daily actions that do not always conform to the social value system. What ties the everyday to resilience against systems and creativity in thought and action may take on a cultural form in its critical content. Culture, therefore, plays a crucial role in understanding the fluctuations and contradictions of the everyday, and its resistance to attempts to theorize and direct it (Trekki, 2012, p. 89) .

This may explain the centrality of the question of the everyday in cultural studies, which is rightly considered one of the most contemporary research fields that represents the differential and pluralistic approach called for by postmodern thought. The term "cultural studies" more realistically reflects the intellectual practices of postmodern theorists (Mustafa, 2018, p. 20).

The use of the term "cultural studies" in the plural form by researchers may have been in line with this pluralistic/liberatory approach that has been adopted since the foundational moment of this research field, starting with the establishment of the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964 by Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall. This pluralism is evident from a quick glance at the topics published in the institute's journal at the time: it studied and analyzed media, popular culture, subcultures, ideological issues, literature, semiotics, issues related to gender, social movements, daily life, and other diverse topics (Ouda, 2009, p. 20).

Although cultural studies lack a unified theoretical framework and a clear research methodology, this does not prevent identifying certain distinguishing features that make it definable. The first of these is the intellectual and ethical commitment to uncover biases and all forms of dominance that permeate the cultural body of contemporary human societies. For this reason, Simon During does not hesitate to define this interdisciplinary research field as "the committed analysis of contemporary cultures. Cultural studies is committed to three meanings: first, in the sense that it is not neutral regarding the exclusions, injustices, and harms it observes. It tends to position itself alongside those who receive little from social structures, meaning it is politically and critically committed. Second, it is committed in the sense that it seeks to promote and celebrate cultural experiences, conveying pleasure through a wide range of cultural forms, partly by analyzing these forms and the social supports behind them. This indicates its actual distinction from other types of academic work, as it aims to treat culture as part of everyday life without objectifying it.(Durham, 2015, pp. 15-16)"

Naturally, this perspective leads us to another distinctive feature of cultural studies: its new view of culture. The perception of culture as a standard of perfection, progress, and beauty has shifted, making way for another meaning of culture that ties it to the everyday lives of ordinary people, with all their complexities and political and social changes. Thus, we can speak here of an epistemic and interpretive shift in the cultural question, where the singular normative view of culture, as implied by its direct Latin roots referring to processes of refinement, care, and attention, has receded. It has given way to a new perspective that rejects the autonomy and

superiority of culture. This new view emphasizes the need to study culture within the system of social relations through which it is produced and consumed, and the necessity of linking cultural analysis to the study of society, politics, and economics (Edwards, 2012, p. 112).

According to this new approach to the cultural issue, it is no longer possible or effective to limit the study to "the products selected and celebrated by an elite of writers, artists, and intellectuals." Instead, the focus should be on studying the cultural, material, and symbolic products that are received by broader social groups. As a result of these developments, the view of culture as a standard of perfection, progress, and beauty has shifted, making way for another meaning of culture that connects it to the everyday lives of ordinary people, with all their complexities and political and social changes. Thus, we can speak here of an epistemic shift in the cultural question, by which the singular normative view of culture—implied in its Latin roots, referring to processes of refinement, care, and nurture, which includes the meaning of growth and development—has receded. This perspective, which was exclusively concerned with high and refined culture, has been replaced by a new view that rejects the autonomy and superiority of culture. This new perspective stresses the need to study culture within the system of social relations through which it is produced and consumed, and the necessity of linking cultural analysis to the study of society, politics, and economics .(Edwards, 2012, p. 112)


Naturally, such a new, non-stereotypical perspective requires the recognition that all human beings live in a world created by humans, and in this world, the meaning of their lives is found. Culture is this complex world that we encounter in our daily lives and navigate through.

### **Conclusion**

It is striking and significant that elevating the everyday required descending to it from the lofty heights of an arrogant, self-satisfied thought, proud of its comprehensiveness, abstraction, and elitism. It required, therefore, the liberation of thought from the dominance of metaphysical paradox and its reintegration through grounding and humanizing. However, it should not be understood that grounding means settling thought as ideological, religious, or political systems that monopolize meaning and claim the land, aiming for permanence. Rather, it refers to the concept of settlement in a Deleuzian sense, which is merely a moment of intensification within a process that has no law but its acceleration and constant change—or to put it differently—a founding moment in the here and now.

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