

The Lure of the Ordinary: Art and the Everyday

The banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual? [...] How are we to speak of these common things, how to track them down, how to flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they are mired, how to give them meaning, a tongue, to let them, finally, speak of what it is, who we are.

– Georges Perec, *The Infra-ordinary*

In recent years the everyday has become a key concept in the art-world. Since the mid-1990s numerous international biennales, site specific projects, historical overviews of modernism and themed group exhibitions have attested to the widespread appeal of the quotidian to curators and artists alike.¹ Coupled with this is the persistent presence of the term and its cognates in reviews, articles and essays, in which everyday life has attained the status of a global art-world reference point.

Drawing on the vast reservoir of normally unnoticed, trivial and repetitive actions comprising the common ground of daily life, as well as finding impetus in the realms of the popular and the non-specialized, the rise of the everyday in contemporary art is usually understood in terms of a desire to bring these uneventful and overlooked aspects of lived experience into visibility.

But why should we value the qualities (or anti-qualities) of ordinariness, triviality and familiarity and why has the everyday become so popular, so important now?

Moreover, if as numerous writers suggest, the everyday is a highly contradictory category and a notoriously obscure object of study, what happens when artists turn to the routine, the ordinary and the unremarkable for source material or inspiration? Does art fundamentally transform the quotidian in some way or is an art of the everyday simply archival or documentary in nature? Either way, what happens when the commonplace speech acts and/or actions of others are recoded into art? Is an art that values the everyday a weak form of anthropology or research, or is it a radical form of noticing? And if it is any of these things, what kind of knowledge does an art of the everyday produce? Finally, is it even possible to propose an art of the everyday, given that much theorizing on the subject rejects the idea that the artist might have a privileged access to the realm of the ordinary.

These questions and others about the everyday, art and value will be addressed in this series of seminar sessions. Looking back to the developments of Fluxus, conceptualism and the 'dematerialised' art practices of the 60s and 70s on the one hand, and to key theorists of the everyday such as Henri Lefebvre, Guy Debord, and Michel de Certeau on the other, we will examine the artistic precedents and theoretical ideas that underpin the contemporary turn toward the quotidian. Central to our discussions will be a consideration of the various strategies that are understood to positively identify a poetics of the everyday such as obsessive forms of attention, immersion and the cultivation of intimacy, as well as formal and stylistic qualities such as 'the unforced', the ad-hoc, the rule-bound, the makeshift, the repetitive and the playful.

Screenings will include *Un Homme Qui Dort* (Georges Perec), *Spare Time* (Humphrey Jennings) *Chronicle of a Summer* (Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin), *Aerial* (Margaret Tait), *Couch* (Andy Warhol), *Hotel Monterey* (Chantal Akerman), *London* (Patrick Keiller), *Railings* Francis Alys and the early super 8 films of Roman Signer.

Week 1 The Poetics of Noticing

Week 2 Intimacy and Proximity: The Ethnography of the Near

Week 3 Making Do: Play

Week 4 Making Do: The Makeshift, Ad-hocism, Bricolage, Cunning Knowledge

Week 5 Nothing Happens: Boredom and Slowness

Week 6 Walking, Drifting, Looking

