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The Everyday and Everydayness*

Before the series of revolutions which ushered in what is called the modern era, housing, modes of dress, eating and drinking—in short, living—presented a prodigious diversity. Not subordinate to any one system, living varied according to region and country, levels and classes of the population, available natural resources, season, climate, profession, age, and sex. This diversity has never been well acknowledged or recognized as such; it has resisted a rational kind of interpretation which has only come about in our own time by interfering with and destroying that diversity. Today we see a worldwide tendency to uniformity. Rationality dominates, accompanied but not diversified by irrationality; signs, rational in their way, are attached to things in order to convey the prestige of their possessors and their place in the hierarchy.

FORMS, FUNCTIONS AND STRUCTURES

What has happened? There were, and there always have been forms, functions and structures. Things as well as institutions, "objects" as well as "subjects" offered up to the senses accessible and recognizable forms. People, whether individually or in groups, performed various functions, some of them physiological (eating, drinking, sleeping), others social (working, travelling). Structures, some of them natural and others constructed, allowed for the public or private performance of these functions, but with a radical—a root—difference: those forms, functions and structures were not known as such, not named. At once connected and distinct, they were part of an undifferentiated whole. Post-Cartesian analytic thought has often challenged these concrete "totalities": every analysis of objective or social reality has come up with some residue resisting

* Translation of Henri Lefebvre, "Quotidien et Quotidienneté," *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, and reprinted with their kind permission.

analysis, and the sum of such realities as seemed irreducible by human thought became a matter for infinite analysis, a reserve of divine thought. Every complex "whole," from the smallest tool to the greatest works of art and learning, therefore possessed a symbolic value linking them to meaning at its most vast: to divinity and humanity, power and wisdom, good and evil, happiness and misery, the perennial and the ephemeral. These immense values were themselves mutable according to historical circumstance, to social classes, to rulers and mentors. Each object (an armchair just as much as a piece of clothing, a kitchen utensil as much as a house) was thus linked to some "style" and therefore, as a work, contained while masking the larger functions and structures which were integral parts of its form.

What happened to change the situation? The functional element was itself disengaged, rationalized, then industrially produced, and finally imposed by constraint and persuasion: that is to say, by means of advertising and by powerful economic and political lobbies. The relationship of form to function to structure has not disappeared. On the contrary, it has become a declared relationship, produced *as such*, more and more visible and readable, announced and displayed in a transparency of the three terms. A modern object clearly states what it is, its role and its place. This does not prevent its overstating or reproducing the signs of its meaningfulness: signs of satisfaction, of happiness, of quality, of wealth. From the modern armchair or coffee grinder to the automobile, the form-function-structure triumvirate is at once evident and legible.

Within these parameters, there come to be constructed multiple systems or subsystems, each establishing in its own way a more or less coherent set of more or less durable objects. For example, in the domain of architecture, a variety of local, regional, and national architectural styles has given way to "architectural urbanism," a universalizing system of structures and functions in supposedly rational geometric forms. The same thing is true of industrially produced food: a system groups products around various functionally specific household appliances such as the refrigerator, freezer, electric oven, etc. And of course the totalizing system that has been constructed around the automobile seems ready to sacrifice all of society to its dominion. It so happens that these systems and subsystems tend to deteriorate or blow out. Are even the days of car travel numbered?

Whatever the case may be, housing, fashion and food have tended and still tend to constitute autonomous subsystems, closed off from one another. Each of them appears to present as great a diversity as the old modes of living of the premodern era. This diversity is only apparent. It is only arranged. Once the dominant forces making it possible for these elements to combine with one another is understood, the artificial mechanism of their grouping is recognized and the fatuousness of their diversity becomes intolerable. The system breaks down.

All such systems have in common a general law of functionalism. The everyday can therefore be defined as a set of functions which connect and join together systems that might appear to be distinct. Thus defined, the everyday is a *product*, the most general of products in an era where production engenders consumption, and where consumption is manipulated by producers: not by "workers," but by the managers and owners of the means of production (intellectual, instrumental, scientific). The everyday is therefore the most universal and the most unique condition, the most social and the most individuated, the most obvious and the best hidden. A condition stipulated for the legibility of forms, ordained by means of functions, inscribed within structures, the everyday constitutes the platform upon which the bureaucratic society of controlled consumerism is erected.

A COMMON DENOMINATOR

The everyday is therefore a concept. In order for it to have ever been engaged as a concept, the reality it designated had to have become dominant, and the old obsessions about shortages—"Give us this day our daily bread . . ."—had to disappear. Until recently, things, furniture and buildings were built one by one, and each existed in relation to accepted moral and social references, to symbols. From the twentieth century onward, all these references collapse, including the greatest and oldest figure of them all, that of the Father (eternal or temporal, divine or human). How can we grasp this extraordinary and still so poorly understood configuration of facts? The collapse of the referent in morality, history, nature, religion, cities, space; the collapse even of perspective in its classical spatial sense or the collapse of tonality in music. . . . Abundance—a rational, programmed abundance and planned obsolescence—replacing shortage in the first world; destructive colonization of the third world and finally of nature itself. . . . The prevalence of signs; omnipresent war and violence; revolutions which follow one after another only to be cut short or to turn back against themselves

The everyday, established and consolidated, remains a sole surviving common sense referent and point of reference. "Intellectuals," on the other hand, seek their systems of reference elsewhere: in language and discourse, or sometimes in a political party. The proposition here is to decode the modern world, that bloody riddle, according to the everyday.

The concept of everydayness does not therefore designate a system, but rather a denominator common to existing systems including judicial, contractual, pedagogical, fiscal, and police systems. Banality? Why should the study of the banal itself be banal? Are not the surreal, the extraordinary, the surprising, even the magical, also part of the real? Why wouldn't the concept of everydayness reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary?

REPETITION AND CHANGE

Thus formulated, the concept of the everyday illuminates the past. Everyday life has always existed, even if in ways vastly different from our own. The character of the everyday has always been repetitive and veiled by obsession and fear. In the study of the everyday we discover the great problem of repetition, one of the most difficult problems facing us. The everyday is situated at the intersection of two modes of repetition: the cyclical, which dominates in nature, and the linear, which dominates in processes known as "rational." The everyday implies on the one hand cycles, nights and days, seasons and harvests, activity and rest, hunger and satisfaction, desire and its fulfillment, life and death, and it implies on the other hand the repetitive gestures of work and consumption.

In modern life, the repetitive gestures tend to mask and to crush the cycles. The everyday imposes its monotony. It is the invariable constant of the variations it envelops. The days follow one after another and resemble one another, and yet—here lies the contradiction at the heart of everydayness—everything changes. But the change is programmed: obsolescence is planned. Production anticipates reproduction; production produces change in such a way as to superimpose the impression of speed onto that of monotony. Some people cry out against the acceleration of time, others cry out against stagnation. They're both right.

GENERAL AND DIVERSIFIED PASSIVITY

Common denominator of activities, locus and milieu of human functions, the everyday can also be analysed as the uniform aspect of the major sectors of social life: work, family, private life, leisure. These sectors, though distinct as forms, are imposed upon in their practice by a structure allowing us to discover what they share: organized passivity. This means, in leisure activities, the passivity of the spectator faced with images and landscapes; in the workplace, it means passivity when faced with decisions in which the worker takes no part; in private life, it means the imposition of consumption, since the available choices are directed and the needs of the consumer created by advertising and market studies. This generalized passivity is moreover distributed unequally. It weighs more heavily on women, who are sentenced to everyday life, on the working class, on employees who are not technocrats, on youth—in short on the majority of people—yet never in the same way, at the same time, never all at once.

MODERNITY

The everyday is covered by a surface: that of modernity. News stories and the turbulent affectations of art, fashion and event veil without ever

eradicating the everyday blahs. Images, the cinema and television divert the everyday by at times offering up to it its own spectacle, or sometimes the spectacle of the distinctly noneveryday; violence, death, catastrophe, the lives of kings and stars—those who we are led to believe defy everydayness. Modernity and everydayness constitute a deep structure that a critical analysis can work to uncover.

Such a critical analysis of the everyday has itself been articulated in several conflicting ways. Some treat the everyday with impatience; they want to "change life" and do it quickly; they want it all and they want it now! Others believe that lived experience is neither important nor interesting, and that instead of trying to understand it, it should be minimized, bracketed, to make way for science, technology, economic growth, etc.

To the former, we might reply that transforming the everyday requires certain conditions. A break with the everyday by means of festival—violent or peaceful—cannot endure. In order to change life, society, space, architecture, even the city must change. To the latter, we might reply that it is monstrous to reduce "lived experience," that a recognition of the inadequacy of pious humanism does not authorize the assimilation of people to insects. Given the colossal technical means at our disposal and the terrifying dangers which lie in wait for us, we would risk, in that case, abandoning humanism only to enter into "superhumanism."

Translated by Christine Levich
with the Editors

Everyday Speech¹

The Everyday: What is Most Difficult to Discover

In a first approximation, the everyday is what we are first of all, and most often: at work, at leisure, awake, asleep, in the street, in private existence. The everyday, then, is ourselves, ordinarily. In this first stage, let us consider the everyday as without a truth proper to itself: our move then will be to seek to make it participate in the diverse figures of what True, in the great historical transformations, in the becoming of what occurs either below (economic and technical change) or above (philosophy, poetry, politics). Accordingly, it will be a question of opening the everyday onto history, or even, of reducing its privileged sector: private life. This is what happens in moments of effervescence—those we call revolution—when existence is public through and through. Commenting upon the law regarding suspects during the French Revolution, Hegel showed that each time the universal is affirmed in its brutal abstract exigency, every particular will, every separate thought falls under suspicion. It is no longer enough to act well. Every individual carries in himself a set of reflections, of intentions, that is to say reticences, that commit him to an oblique existence. To be suspect is more serious than to be guilty (hence the seeking of confession). The guilty party relates to the law to the extent that he manifestly does everything he must in order to be judged, that is, in order to be suppressed, brought back to the void of the empty point his self conceals. The suspect is that fleeting presence that does not allow recognition, and, through the part always held back that he figures forth, tends not only to interfere with, but to bring into accusation, the workings of the State. From such a perspective, each

1. Translated from Maurice Blanchot, "La Parole quotidienne," in *L'Entretien infini* [Paris: Gallimard, 1959], 355–66.

governed is suspect, but each suspect accuses the one who governs and prepares him to be at fault, since he who governs must one day recognize that he does not represent the whole, but a still particular will that only usurps the appearance of the universal. Hence the everyday must be thought as the suspect (and the oblique) that always escapes the clear decision of the law, even when the law seeks, by suspicion, to track down every indeterminate manner of being: everyday indifference. (The suspect: any and everyone, guilty of not being able to be guilty.)

But, in a new step, the critique (in the sense that Henri Lefebvre, by establishing "the critique of everyday life," has used this principle of reflection²) is no longer content with wanting to change day-to-day life by opening it onto history and political life: it would prepare a radical transformation of *Alltäglichkeit*. A remarkable change in point of view. The everyday is no longer the average, statistically established existence of a given society at a given moment; it is a category, a utopia and an Idea, without which one would not know how to get at either the hidden present, or the discoverable future of manifest beings. Man (the individual of today, of our modern societies) is at the same time engulfed within and deprived of, the everyday. And—a third definition—the everyday is also the ambiguity of these two movements, the one and the other hardly discernible.

From here, one can better understand the diverse directions in which the study of the everyday might be oriented (bearing now upon sociology, now upon ontology, at another moment upon psychoanalysis, politics, linguistics, literature). To approach such a movement one must contradict oneself. The everyday is platitude (what lags and falls back, the residual life with which our trash cans and cemeteries are filled: scrap and refuse); but this banality is also what is most important, if it brings us back to existence in its very spontaneity and as it is lived—in the moment when, lived, it escapes every speculative formulation, perhaps all coherence, all regularity. Now we evoke the poetry of Chekhov or even Kafka, and affirm the depth of the superficial, the tragedy of nullity. Always the two sides meet: the daily with its tedious side, painful and sordid (the amorphous, the stagnant), and the inexhaustible, irrecusable, always unfinished daily that always escapes forms or structures (particularly those of political society: bureaucracy, the wheels of government, parties). And that there may be a certain relation of identity between these two opposites is shown by the slight displacement of emphasis that

2. N. B. It is by this title that Henri Lefebvre published a first book in 1947 (*Critique de la vie quotidienne* [Paris: Grasset]); then, in 1958, as a preface to another edition of this first essay, a second study of different orientation. A third volume once again took up all these questions in a new light [Paris: Editions de l'Arche]. Since publishing this volume, Lefebvre has continued to extend his reflections still further. See *La Vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962); *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch [New York: Harper and Row, 1971].

permits passage from one to the other; as when the spontaneous, the informal—that is, what escapes forms—becomes the amorphous and when, perhaps, the stagnant merges with the *current* of life, which is also the very movement of society.

Whatever its other aspects, the everyday has this essential trait: it allows no hold. It escapes. It belongs to insignificance, and the insignificant is without truth, without reality, without secret, but perhaps also the site of all possible signification. The everyday escapes. This makes its strangeness—the familiar showing itself (but already dispersing) in the guise of the astonishing. It is the unperceived, first in the sense that one has always looked past it; nor can it be introduced into a whole or “reviewed,” that is to say, enclosed within a panoramic vision; for, by another trait, the everyday is what we never see for a first time, but only see again, having always already seen it by an illusion that is, as it happens, constitutive of the everyday.

Hence the exigency—apparently laughable, apparently inconsequential, but necessary—that leads us to seek an always more immediate knowledge of the everyday. Henri Lefebvre speaks of the Great Pleonasm. We want to be abreast of everything that takes place at the very instant that it passes and comes to pass. The images of events and the words that transmit them are not only inscribed instantaneously on our screens, in our ears, but in the end there is no event other than this movement of universal transmission: “the reign of an enormous tautology.” The disadvantages of a life so publicly and immediately displayed are henceforth observable. The means of communication—language, culture, imaginative power—by never being taken as more than means, wear out and lose their mediating force. We believe we know things immediately, without images and without words, and in reality we are dealing with no more than an insistent prolixity that says and shows nothing. How many people turn on the radio and leave the room, satisfied with this distant and sufficient noise? Is this absurd? Not in the least. What is essential is not that one particular person speak and another hear, but that, with no one in particular speaking and no one in particular listening, there should nonetheless be speech, and a kind of undefined promise to communicate, guaranteed by the incessant coming and going of solitary words. One can say that in this attempt to recapture it at its own level, the everyday loses any power to reach us; it is no longer what is lived, but what can be seen or what shows itself, spectacle and description, without any active relation whatsoever. The whole world is offered to us, but by way of a look. We are no longer burdened by events, as soon as we behold their image with an interested, then simply curious, then empty but fascinated look. What good is it taking part in a street demonstration, since at the same moment, secure and at rest, we are at the demonstration itself, thanks to a television set? Here, produced-reproduced, offering itself to our view in

its totality, it allows us to believe that it takes place only so that we might be its superior witness. Substituted for practice is the pseudo-acquaintance of an irresponsible gaze; substituted for the movement of the concept—a task and a work—is the diversion of a superficial, uncaring and satisfied contemplation. Man, well protected within the four walls of his familial existence, lets the world come to him without peril, certain of being in no way changed by what he sees and hears. “Depoliticization” is linked to this movement. And the man of government who fears the street—because the man in the street is always on the verge of becoming political man—is delighted to be no more than an entrepreneur of spectacle, skilled at putting the citizen in us to sleep, the better to keep awake, in the half-light of a half-sleep, only the tireless voyeur of images.³

Despite massive development of the means of communication, the everyday escapes. This is its definition. We cannot help but miss it if we seek it through knowledge, for it belongs to a region where there is still nothing to know, just as it is prior to all relation insofar as it has always already been said, even while remaining unformulated, that is to say, not yet information. It is not the implicit (of which phenomenology has made broad use); to be sure, it is always already there, but that it may be there does not guarantee its actualization. On the contrary, the everyday is always unrealized in its very actualization which no event, however important or however insignificant, can ever produce. Nothing happens; this is the everyday. But what is the meaning of this stationary movement? At what level is this “nothing happens” situated? For whom does “nothing happen” if, for me, something is necessarily always happening? In other words, what corresponds to the “who?” of the everyday? And, at the same time, why, in this “nothing happens,” is there the affirmation that something essential might be allowed to happen?

What questions these are! We must at least try to hold onto them. Pascal gives a first approach, which is taken up again by the young Lukàcs and by certain philosophies of ambiguity. The everyday is life in its equivocal dissimulation, and “life is an anarchy of clair-obscur. . . .

3. See Edgar Morin's *L'Esprit du temps* (Paris: Grasset, 1975), *New Trends in the Study of Mass Communication* (Birmingham, England: University Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1968). In this book, Morin does not deal directly with the problem of information, but studies what he calls Mass Culture: “that is to say, produced according to the large-scale standards of industrial output, distributed by techniques of mass circulation; addressed to a social mass, that is, to a gigantic agglomerate of individuals seized before and beyond the internal structures of society (class, family, etc.)” It is indeed a question of a culture with its myths, its symbols, its images. It “tends to erode, to break down other cultures. . . . It is not the only culture of the 20th century. But it is the truly massive and new current of this century.” Morin sometimes opposes this culture to others, for example to humanist culture—wrongly, it seems to me. I mean that the importance of “mass culture” is to put into question the very idea of culture by producing it in such a manner as to expose it to view.

Nothing is ever completely realized and nothing proceeds to its ultimate possibilities. . . . Everything interpenetrates, without discretion, in an impure mix, everything is destroyed and broken, nothing blossoms into real life. . . . It can only be described through negations. . . ." This is Pascalian diversion, the movement of turning this way and that; it is the perpetual alibi of an ambiguous existence that uses contradictions to escape problems, remaining undecided in a restless quietude. Such is quotidian confusion. Seeming to take up all of life, it is without limit and it strikes all other life with unreality. But there arises here a sudden clarity. "Something lights up, appears as a flash on the paths of banality . . . it is chance, the great instant, the miracle." And the miracle "penetrates life in an unforeseeable manner . . . without relation to the rest, transforming the whole into a clear and simple account."⁴ By its flash, the miracle separates the indistinct moments of day-to-day life, suspends nuance, interrupts uncertainties, and reveals to us the tragic truth, that absolute and absolutely divided truth, whose two parts solicit us without pause, and from each side, each of them requiring everything of us and at every instant.

Against this movement of thought nothing can be said, except that it misses the everyday. For the ordinary of each day is not such by contrast with some extraordinary; this is not the "*nul moment*" that would await the "*splendid moment*" so that the latter would give it a meaning, suppress or suspend it. What is proper to the everyday is that it designates for us a region, or a level of speech, where the determinations true and false, like the opposition yes and no, do not apply—it being always before what affirms it and yet incessantly reconstituting itself beyond all that negates it. An unserious seriousness from which nothing can divert us, even when it is lived in the mode of diversion; so we experience it through the boredom that seems to be indeed the sudden, the insensible apprehension of the quotidian into which one slides in the leveling of a steady slack time, feeling oneself forever sucked in, though feeling at the same time that one has already lost it, and is henceforth incapable of deciding if there is a lack of the everyday, or if one has too much of it. Thus is one maintained in boredom by boredom, which develops, says Friedrich Schlegel, as carbon dioxide accumulates in a closed space when too many people find themselves together there.

Boredom is the everyday become manifest: as a consequence of having lost its essential—constitutive—trait of being *unperceived*. Thus the daily always sends us back to that inapparent and nonetheless unhidden part of existence: insignificant because always before what signifies it; silent, but with a silence that has already dissipated as soon as we keep still in

4. Georg Lukács, *L'Âme et les formes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), as cited by Lucien Goldmann in *Recherches dialectiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959); Georg Lukács, *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1971, 1974).

order to hear it, and that we hear better in idle chatter, in that unspeaking speech that is the soft human murmuring in us and around us.

The everyday is the movement by which the individual is held, as though without knowing it, in human anonymity. In the everyday we have no name, little personal reality, scarcely a face, just as we have no social determination to sustain or enclose us. To be sure, I work daily, but in the day-to-day I am not a worker belonging to the class of those who work. The everyday of work tends to keep me apart from this belonging to the collectivity of work that founds its truth; the everyday breaks down structures and undoes forms, even while ceaselessly regathering itself behind the form whose ruin it has insensibly brought about.

The everyday is human. The earth, the sea, forest, light, night, do not represent everydayness, which belongs first of all to the dense presence of great urban centers. We need these admirable deserts that are the world's cities for the experience of the everyday to begin to overtake us. The everyday is not at home in our dwelling-places, it is not in offices or churches, any more than in libraries or museums. It is in the street—if it is anywhere. Here I find again one of the beautiful moments of Lefebvre's books. The street, he notes, has the paradoxical character of having more importance than the places it connects, more living reality than the things it reflects. The street renders public. "The street tears from obscurity what is hidden, publishes what happens elsewhere, in secret; it deforms it, but inserts it in the social text." And yet what is published in the street is not really divulged; it is said, but this "is said" is borne by no word ever really pronounced, just as rumors are reported without anyone transmitting them and because the one who transmits them accepts being no one. 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 in the street is there? At the most a "who?," an interrogation that settles upon no one. In the same way indifferent and curious, busy and unoccupied, unstable, immobile. So he is; these opposing but juxtaposed traits do not seek reconciliation, nor do they, on the other hand, counter one another, all the while still not merging; it is the *vicissitude* itself that escapes all dialectical recovery.

To the above it must be added that the irresponsibility of rumor—where everything is said, everything is heard, incessantly and interminably, without anything being affirmed, without there being a response to anything—rapidly grows weighty when it gives rise to "public opinion,"

but only to the degree that what is propagated (and with what ease) becomes the movement of propaganda: that is to say, when in the passage from street to newspaper, from the everyday in perpetual becoming to the everyday transcribed (I do not say inscribed), it becomes informed, stabilized, put forth to advantage. This translation modifies everything. The everyday is without event; in the newspaper this absence of event becomes the drama of the news item. In the everyday, everything is everyday; in the newspaper everything is strange, sublime, abominable. The street is not ostentatious, passers-by go by unknown, visible-invisible, representing only the anonymous "beauty" of faces and the anonymous "truth" of people essentially destined to pass by, without a truth proper to them and without distinctive traits (when we meet someone in the street, it comes always by surprise and as if by mistake, for one does not recognize oneself there; in order to go forth to meet another, one must first tear oneself away from an existence without identity). Now in the newspaper, everything is announced, everything is denounced, everything becomes image.⁵ How then does the nonostentation of the street, once published, become constantly present ostentation? This is not fortuitous. One can certainly invoke a dialectical reversal. One can say that the newspaper, incapable of seizing the insignificance of the everyday, is only able to render its value apprehensible by declaring it sensational; incapable of following the movement of the everyday insofar as it is inapparent, the newspaper seizes upon it in the dramatic form of a trial. Incapable of getting at what does not belong to the historical, but is always on the point of bursting into history, newspapers keep to the anecdotal and hold us with stories—and thus, having replaced the "nothing happens" of the everyday with the emptiness of the news item, the newspaper presents us with history's "something is happening" at the level of what it claims to be the day-to-day, and which is no more than anecdote. The newspaper is not history in the guise of the everyday, and, in the compromise it offers us, it doubtless betrays historical reality less than it misses the unqualifiable everyday, this present without particularity, that it contrives in vain to qualify, that is, to affirm and to transcribe.

The everyday escapes. Why does it escape? Because it is without a subject. When I live the everyday, it is anyone, anyone whatsoever, who does so, and this any-one is, properly speaking, neither me, nor, properly speaking, the other; he is neither the one nor the other, and he is the one and the other in

5. Photography—mobile, immobile—as exposition: the bringing to the fore and the preparing for appearance of a human presence (that of the street) that does not yet have a countenance, that one can neither approach, nor at which one can look full in the face. Photography, in this sense, is the truth of daily publication where everything is to be put in the limelight. See Roland Barthes's study "Le Message photographique" in *Communications*, vol. 1 (1961): 127–38; "The Rhetoric of the Image," in a collection of his articles entitled *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Hill and Wang, 1978), 32–55.

their interchangeable presence, their annulled irreciprocity—yet without there being an "I" and an "alter ego" able to give rise to a *dialectical recognition*. At the same time, the everyday does not belong to the objective realm. To live it as what might be lived through a series of separate technical acts (represented by the vacuum cleaner, the washing machine, the refrigerator, the radio, the car), is to substitute a number of compartmentalized actions for this indefinite presence, this connected movement (which is however not a whole) by which we are *continually*, though in the mode of discontinuity, in relation with the indeterminate totality of human possibilities. Of course the everyday, since it cannot be assumed by a true subject (even putting in question the notion of subject), tends unendingly to weigh down into things. This anyone presents himself as the common man for whom all is appraised in terms of good sense. The everyday is then the medium in which, as Lefebvre notes, alienations, fetishisms, reifications produce their effects. He who, working, has no other life than everyday life, is also he for whom the everyday is the heaviest; but as soon as he complains of this, complains of the burden of the everyday in existence, the response comes back: "The everyday is the same for everyone" and even adds, like Büchner's Danton: "There is scarcely any hope that this will ever change."

There must be no doubt about the dangerous essence of the everyday, nor about this uneasiness that seizes us each time that, by an unforeseeable leap, we stand back from it and, facing it, we discover that precisely nothing faces us: "What?" "Is this my everyday life?" Not only must one not doubt it, but one must not dread it; rather one ought to seek to recapture the secret destructive capacity that is in play in it, the corrosive force of human anonymity, the infinite wearing away. The hero, while still a man of courage, is he who fears the everyday; fears it not because he is afraid of living in it with too much ease, but because he dreads meeting in it what is most fearful: a power of dissolution. The everyday challenges heroic values, but even more it impugns all values and the very idea of value, disproving always anew the unjustifiable difference between authenticity and inauthenticity. Day-to-day indifference is situated on a level at which the question of value is not posed: "il y a du quotidien" [there is everydayness], without subject, without object, and while it is there, the "he" ["il"] of the everyday does not have to be of account, and, if value nevertheless claims to step in, then "he" is worth "nothing" and "nothing" is worth anything through contact with him. To experience everydayness is to be tested by the radical nihilism that is as if its essence, and by which, in the void that animates it, it does not cease to hold the principle of its own critique.

CONCLUSION IN THE FORM OF A DIALOGUE

"Is not the everyday, then, a utopia, the myth of an existence bereft of myth? We no more have access to the everyday than do we touch this

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moment of history that could, historically, represent the end of history. — That can, in fact, be said, but opens onto another meaning: the everyday is the inaccessible to which we have always already had access; the everyday is inaccessible, but only insofar as every mode of acceding is foreign to it. To live in the way of the quotidian is to hold oneself at a level of life that excludes the possibility of a beginning, an access. Everyday experience radically questions the initial exigency. The idea of creation is inadmissible, when it is a matter of accounting for existence as it is borne by the everyday.

— To put this another way, everyday existence never had to be *created*. This is exactly what the expression "il y a du quotidien" [there is the everyday] means. Even if the affirmation of a creating God were to be imposed, the there is (there is already when there is not yet being, what there is still when there is nothing) would remain irreducible to the principle of creation; and the there is is the human everyday.

— The everyday is our portion of eternity: the eternality of which Laforque speaks. So that the *Lord's Prayer* would be secretly impious: give us our daily bread, give us to live according to the daily existence that leaves no place for a relation between Creator and creature. Everyday man is the most atheist of men. He is such that no God whatsoever could stand in relation to him. And thus one understands how the man in the street escapes all authority, whether it be political, moral, or religious.

— For in the everyday we are neither born nor do we die: hence the weight and the enigmatic force of everyday truth.

— In whose space, however, there is neither true nor false.

Translated by Susan Hanson