Introduction: mundane methods and the extra-ordinary everyday
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Researching the everyday

Researching the everyday is more important and significant now than ever before: beyond a fad or cultural currency, understanding the mundane is key to critical and conceptual social science. But what is the everyday, and how do we research it? These questions have long perplexed social and cultural theorists. While no firm consensus has ever been reached, what scholars do agree on is that there is no ‘one’ everyday – that everyday lives are multiple, messy and full of methodological possibilities. Though, as Cloke, Crang and Goodwin (2014: 926) note, the everyday is ‘a notoriously difficult term to define, … we can generalise that it is an arena of social life that includes repetitive daily cycles and routines that we learn but eventually take for granted’. This academic interest in everyday life, while not an especially new phenomenon, can contemporaneously be traced back to the ‘cultural turn’ within the social sciences, from around the early 1970s, when engagements between cultural studies and philosophical traditions were raising questions about ‘how we make sense of the world around us’ (Clayton, 2013: 1).

As a result, scholarly interest in everyday life has grown considerably since 2010, with the ordinary and mundane now at the fore of social science research. Where previously interested in the spectacular and the extraordinary, social science has turned away from a focus on
grand structures and functions to pay attention to the grounded, the experiential and the ‘blindingly obvious’ (Woodward and Miller, 2007: 335). In trying to make sense of the everyday, it is common for authors (and we are no exception!) to pepper their work with synonyms like ‘mundane, familiar and unremarkable’ (Scott, 2009: 2), and to draw attention to the habitual, rhythmic and banal; ‘the things that people do on a day-to-day basis’ (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001: 1). This can, at times, give the impression that the everyday is limited to the realms of the prosaic and parochial, and can have the effect of making the everyday seem (for some) an unexciting avenue for research.

It would be a misunderstanding, however, to assume this – or that a conceptual or empirical focus on the everyday provides a narrowing of scale or practice: that which is close, localised, observable. Rather, the everyday can be a window into ‘the ongoing problematic of the relationship between the local and the global, in the context of global flows of capital, information and people that have produced a heightened interconnectedness of different parts of the world’ (Dyck, 2005: 234). Moreover, researching the everyday is not an unproblematic endeavour, and by raising concerns about the practice and performance of knowledge and power, ethical considerations also surface (Rose, 1993). Furthermore, positionality and reflexivity play an important role, where everyday life and academic life collide (Hall, 2014).

So, instead of limiting our understanding of human societies and cultures, the lens of the everyday offers possibilities, both big and small. In addition to offering micro-, meso- or macro-level analysis, ‘theoretical perspectives that inform our understanding of everyday life … cut across the disciplines of the social sciences, from psychology to philosophy and sociology’ (Scott, 2009: 10). We adopt a similar approach within this collection, exploring social science as broadly defined and recognise, like Aitken and Valentine (2005: 8), that ‘disciplinary boundaries are not cast in stone; they are fuzzy and chameleon-like, changing before our eyes as we focus deeper’. Everyday life, as a result, is an exciting and expanding field incorporating a wide range of interdisciplinary scholars, attempting to engage with the vivacity of the (extra)ordinary everyday. In doing so, scholars tune into recent theoretical and methodological advances in the fields of new materialism, sensory and embodied approaches and the ever growing mobilities turn, while also paying homage to longer histories, such as the influence of feminist methods – of the
Mundane methods and the extra-ordinary everyday humble interview and intimacy of Memory Work. By exploring the minutiae of daily experiences and ways of making sense of the world we inhabit, such work also highlights their cultural, ethical, social and political significance.

Methods for exploring everyday life

While research on the everyday is rapidly growing (Back, 2015; Pink, 2012; Rinkinen, Jalas and Shove, 2015), methodological approaches for studying the mundane seemingly lag behind. As Back (2007: 8) notes, 'we need to find more considered ways to engage with the ordinary yet remarkable things found in everyday life.' Social scientists, it seems, are no longer content with research designs comprising only traditional methods such as interviews, focus group or observation, and there is a real need to expand the empirical toolkit. This is not to argue against using the traditional interview, or other staples in the researcher's toolkit (see also Les Back's foreword in this collection), but rather to think about ways in which we can broaden our methods and techniques to fully encounter everyday life in all its sensory, multifarious glory.

To date minimal literature or resources exist which explore methodological approaches for studying the everyday. While such methods are undoubtedly occurring in varying disciplines and involve a multitude of settings and subjects, the practicalities of how one may undertake such research are seldom documented. Exceptions to this include the methods-based texts of Mason and Dale (2011) and Back and Puwar (2010), whose ground-breaking work has opened up the arena for research into the everyday, renewing and invigorating social science research. In doing so, Mason and Dale (2011) present a range of mixed, creative methods for studying the fields of personal life and relationships; places and mobilities, and socio-cultural change: from working creatively with longitudinal survey data; to considering socio-technical methods; to innovative approaches to mapping. Similarly, Back and Puwar's Live Methods (2010) engages with the experimental and serendipitous nature of research on the everyday, exploring ‘storying’, ‘art’-based and digital approaches to sociology. Sarah Pink's (2013) work has also been an influential voice on visual methods, dealing with all aspects of the visual methods, including photographs, video and also digital media; focusing on the practicalities
of conducting such methods, as well as considering theoretical and analytical perspectives. Buscher, Urry and Witchger (2010) apply a similar focus to advance mobile methods for social science research. In their key text, *Mobile Methods* they draw upon the interdisciplinary work of scholars in the field of mobilities to discuss the challenges and opportunities of researching movement.

Aside from the more contemporary inroads into methodological approaches to studying the everyday, we must also credit two key qualitative methods texts which we believe have provided the foundations for such innovative work. These include, but are no means limited to, Mason’s (2017) comprehensive guide to conducting qualitative research, a go-to guide for social science undergraduates; and Cook and Crang’s (2007) practical toolkit for conducting all aspects of ethnographic research. These hands-on texts have paved the way for bottom-up, grounded approaches to research; a prerequisite for conducting research on the everyday.

With this in mind, we should also mention the influence of feminist perspectives on methods for studying the everyday. Work such as that of Roberts (1981), Bell and Roberts (1984) and the Women and Geography Study Group (1997) implicitly explores the everyday through its focus on the experiences, narratives and stories of research. Such work encourages us to consider the reflexivity and positionality of ourselves, and the ethics of our own research practices (Davies, 2008). This now essential component of qualitative research is vital to studies on the mundane and everyday. Reflexivity urges us to pay attention to how we as researchers are active participants in the construction of knowledge and to listen closely to the multiple voices of other parties and experiences (Panelli, 2004). Indeed, as this collection illustrates, those voices and experiences come from a range of arenas – including animal, material and non-human worlds.

These key texts offer the foundations from which *Mundane Methods* begins – enabling us to bring together an innovative and original set of chapters which make a distinctive methodological contribution to research on the everyday. This collection is purely qualitative in approach, providing a non-positivist understanding and interpreting, rather than measuring, the everyday world. We provide flexible, hands-on methods for studying the messy, slippery and multiple dispositions of the mundane. This is not to undervalue the significance of the empirical material given in this collection in any way. Rather,
this book aims to approach the everyday both as an object of study and as a method of inquiry, weaving them together to offer chapters which are both appealing in terms of their empirics but also innovative in terms of their methods. In this way the collection differs from other methods textbooks, bringing methods to life while also demystifying them.

**About the collection**

The aims of this collection are twofold. First, and primarily, it is to provide students and scholars at all career stages with a methodological toolkit for studying the mundane and the everyday, including practical, hands-on information about using such methods in different research fields. Such instructive advice is particularly lacking in current methodological literature on the everyday and also within teaching resources. This collection bridges this lacuna. Secondly, and as a result, the collection will showcase examples of some of the most innovative, fresh and interesting contemporary social science research on the everyday, with a view to providing research inspiration to other scholars.

The collection is structured into three key themes: materials and memories; senses and emotions; and mobilities and motion. We discuss each of these in more detail below before introducing the chapters. However, it must be stressed that each theme also interweaves encounters, relationships, practices, spaces, temporalities, imaginaries and much more. In sum, and as the collection illustrates, research on the everyday will always overspill any categories or classifications we assign.

**Introducing the themes**

**Materials and memories**

The material turn within social science prompted a focus on the materials and objects of everyday life. Following calls for the ‘rematerialisation’ of social and cultural studies (Jackson, 2004: 172), a new body of scholarship emerged devoted to the material culture of everyday life. In the main this was about rejecting previous scholarly focus on ‘spectacular consumption’ and commodities as cultural markers, and rather replacing such ‘symbol over substance’ (Gregson and Crewe, 1998: 40) approaches with those which centre on how the fibres, textures, patterns and forms (Miller, 2005) of the objects and
materials around us structure our everyday lives and interactions. Such work has focused on ‘ordinary’ forms of consumption (Gronow, 2001), such as second-hand shopping (Clarke, 2001; Gregson and Crewe, 2003; Tranberg-Hansen, 2005), food consumption (Miller, 1997, 2002) and networks of household reciprocity (Hall, 2016; Holmes, 2018a). ‘Follow the thing’ has been one such methodological approach for studying everyday materiality – following an object or commodity from its raw material through to its disposal or re-use (Cook et al., 2004; Evans, 2018; Norris, 2005). Other work on material culture has engaged with the embodied and sensory capacities of materials and objects, drawing on the relationships that cultures and individuals form with objects.

Studies on memory explore the experiences and stories of participants, revealing how memory practices are beholden to social contexts and are laden with values and norms (Misztal, 2003). Collective memory has been of particular interest to social scientists, illuminating mnemonic communities whereby memory is a means of creating shared understandings of history and identity (McNay, 2009). In particular, work on memory has explored its importance to family identity, acting as a central component in family practice (Morgan, 2011). Approaches for studying memory include drawing on biographical accounts, diaries and stories to reveal the work of memory in everyday life (Widerberg, 2011).

Other work unites materiality with memory. Studies such as those by Hallam and Hockey (2001) on death, Finch and Mason (2000) on inheritance and Holmes (2018b) on the material affinities of kinship unite materiality with memory to reveal how objects are used to memorialise loved ones passed. Similarly, work on the home has explored the importance of objects in creating ‘private museums of memory’ (Hecht, 2001: 123), whereby furnishings, objects, smells and atmospheres are a means of sensory place making, enabling inhabitants to construct and display narratives about their identity and family (Hurdley, 2006; Widerberg, 2010). Other studies have explored how material objects can represent memories of past places and people (Waters, 1999).

With this collection we build on and consolidate this work on materiality and memory. Opening up the theme on materiality and memory is Sophie Woodward. Exploring the mundane objects people collect, Woodward reveals how a combination of innovative material methods, involving collection audits, object mapping and object
biographies, can reveal the mundane materialities of collections. Clothing as a collection is similarly drawn upon in the following chapter by Alison Slater, who uses the textile metaphor of pleats and folds to explore the memories of dress. Using oral testimony, the clothing memories of women living in the North West of England during the Second World War are unfolded. Karin Widerberg is next, detailing her methods for studying memory and the mundane. This includes a set of techniques used to elicit the memories and experiences of participants, the researcher and research-subjects and how these can be developed through analysis and writing. Material methods are further explored in the following two chapters. Helen Holmes draws on her work on everyday thrift to examine the role of the object interview in revealing how mundane objects structure the everyday; offering practical guidance on how to conduct such interviews, while Sarah Marie Hall and colleagues explore material transformation through a cook-along method involving talking, doing and observing.

**Senses and emotions**

Senses and emotions have been examined by many philosophers, though for a long while Cartesianism (from the work of seventeenth-century philosopher, Rene Descartes) dominated Western philosophy, positing ‘mind/body dualism’ as pivotal to understanding lived experience. According to Descartes, the mind was the core of human possibility, intelligence, spirituality and personality, whereas the body was simply a machine, a fleshy envelope, subordinate to the mind (Bordo, 1993). So it goes, ‘all of the social sciences [have] been built upon a particular conception of the mind and the body which sees them as separate, apart and acting on each other’ (Johnson, 1989: 134, cited in Longhurst, 1997), rather than considering their interrelationality. These ideas have, since the 1970s, been critically addressed across the social sciences disciplines, as part of the cultural and reflexive turns, and with wider social shift around feminist politics and the body (e.g. abortion, contraception and sexual violence). This ran concurrent with a ‘welling up’ of curiosity about the social implications of emotions (Davidson and Milligan, 2004: 523), and recognition of their ‘power to transform the shape of our lives, expanding or contracting our horizons’ (Davidson, Bondi and Smith, 2007: 1).
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What emerged was an attuned interest in not how the body and mind sit apart, but how they co-exist and converse. Emotions and senses became seen as inextricable, since emotions can be understood as ‘how we feel – as well as think – through “the body”’, with ‘tangible effects on our surroundings’ (Davidson and Milligan, 2004: 523–524). Emotions shape our everyday experiences and perceptions of social environment, and likewise our spatial surroundings can become a surface for emotional, psychological and affective qualities. Notwithstanding, qualities valued in the empirical exploration of senses and emotion are typically intersubjectivity, relationality and experience.

Furthermore, a sense of and feelings about ‘being-in-the-world’ are commonly referenced as key elements of everyday life (Davidson and Milligan, 2004; Holloway and Hubbard, 2001), relating directly to this theme of senses and emotions. Interestingly, and in this context, it is worth mentioning that the term ‘empirical’ (as in empirical research) comes from the Greek word ‘empeiria’, meaning ‘experience’. Our interactions with and understanding of the social world are constructed through our senses; sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch. Each sense offers nuanced, characteristic ways of capturing information about our social environment, and at different bodily scales and proximities.

Senses and emotions are not only ‘out there’ to be documented but are also tools for research. Moreover, empirical research also requires the active involvement of the researcher, being in and of the research process. While it is fair to say that ‘the researcher’s choice of method will reflect their ontological position (what they believe counts as valid knowledge)’ (Scott, 2009: 186), the materiality, sensory, corporeal, fleshy nature of fieldwork is ever present (Longhurst, Ho and Johnston, 2008), even if it is not considered fundamental to the data collected. Social studies on senses and emotions routinely adopt methods that involve deeper personal emersion and reflection, that is, techniques that connect with one’s own sensory and subjective – and reflexive – experiences. And so, with a growth of research around embodiment and emotion, researchers have recognised the need to research with and through all the senses; that words can only tell a partial story.

With this in mind, the chapters for this section include Sue Heath and Lynne Chapman, writing on sketching as method for capturing those elements less likely to be represented, or even possible to represent, within social research. Likewise, Dawn Lyon writes on using the body as a tool for research, but this time to look at rhythm and ways to capture rhythm using audio–visual techniques. The theme of
capturing and articulating emotions and senses is continued with Becky Tipper’s piece researching everyday human-animal relations through ethnographic eavesdropping, calling for more reflexive practices to truly master the art of listening piece on eavesdropping on animals, calling for more reflexive practices to truly master the art of listening. Chris Perkins and Kate McLean’s chapter also pushes the boundaries of sensory methods with a focus on smell mapping, mustering together senses, emotions and temporalities to make sense of the everyday. Closing this theme is Rebecca Collins on using auto-ethnography in life drawing classes as a means of delving into everyday sensory and emotional states of ‘reflexive-thinking-being’.

Mobilities and motion

Thirdly, everyday life is also a site of mobility and motion, across time, society and space. Suffice to say, the new mobilities paradigm brought forth questions about how social lives are characterised by movements as well as moorings (Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006); and how mobility and motion together get at a broad array of actions, subjects and possibilities of the everyday. With revitalised thinking about both mobility and motion, and cutting across disciplinary divides, the new mobilities paradigm sought to uncover the interdependence of mobilities, and the ways in which mobility and motion lead directly onto understanding social relationships, materials, economies and politics – across an array of quotidian spaces (Sheller and Urry, 2006). Urry’s (2003) contention that mobility and motion can be a lens for appreciating the networked nature of social life is in many ways closely connected to Massey’s (1991) ideas around time-space compression in a hyper-linked world of ever growing and faster movement. As Adey (2017: 1) explains, ‘we simply cannot ignore that the world is moving. Maybe, the world is moving a bit more than it did before too. We might even say that mobility is ubiquitous; it is something we do and experience almost all of the time.’

The ubiquity of mobility and motion has especially captured the recent imaginations of social researchers. In particular, ‘mundane mobilities’ is a budding area for social researchers interested in how mobilities are a ‘commonplace and regular occurrence … enmeshed with the familiar worlds we inhabit, constituting part of the unreflexive, habitual practice of everyday life’ (Binnie et al., 2007: 165). Examples of research on mundane mobilities and movements include
tourism, holidays, dance, cycling and journeying (see Edensor, 2007; Hall and Holdsworth, 2016; Jayne and Leung, 2015; Moran, 2005; McIlvenny, 2015), to name but a few. In relation to this, another growing and connected area of research relates to intimate mobilities. As Holdsworth (2013) posits, while research on mobilities might focus on exceptionalities of distant travel and movement (such as work on tourism, for instance), everyday life is littered with intimate mobilities, bound up with the forming or dissolving of intimate relations.

Despite this, few of these works centre the method within their work, and typically use traditional techniques – such as observations, photography and interviews – to collate data on motion and mobility, rather than pushing at empirical boundaries. Notable exceptions include recent work on sound walks (e.g. Butler, 2007) and videos of family car journeys and passengering (e.g. Laurier et al., 2008), thought to add sophisticated, real, embodied and nuanced understanding to experiences of place. On this note, the chapters within this section take methodologies of mobility and motion as their key premise, weaving together traditional as well as perhaps less oft considered forms of movement.

This includes Simon Cook’s use of jogging, or rather ‘jographies’, including a mixture of run-along interviews and mobile video ethnography. Wandering and derives form the basis of Morag Rose’s chapter on playful, ludic, and creative ways of exploring everyday walking, while Thomas Birtchnell, Theresa Harada and Gordon Waitt centre their discussion on the electric mobility scooter to rethink ideas of everyday movement and mobility, and how they can be researched and approached. With embodied, immersive methods, Lyndsey Stoodley introduces surfing techniques and techniques to explore surfing, sea and self. Back on land, and closing the collection, Samantha Wilkinson writes on walking, dancing, taxi-ing and bus journeying with young people on nights out, as well as mobile phones within and as method.

**Using the collection**

With these wide-ranging examples and exploratory flavours, taken together our collection presents readers with a plethora of practical approaches for studying the everyday. Filled with exercises, tips and
examples to guide users through each method, alongside interdisciplinary approaches from a range of scholars at various career stages, the collection is as much a hands-on, jargon-free, how-to guide as it is a key text on methodological reflections and academic debates. Ultimately, we hope to spark empirical experiments for our readers; illustrating that you do not need to reinvent the wheel in order to innovate methodologically – but perhaps you can take the vehicle in more exciting directions!

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