READING THE EVERYDAY

Joe Moran

Reading the Everyday

Joe Moran

LONDON AND NEW YORK

A · H · R · B
arts and humanities research board

First published 2005 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

© 2005 Joe Moran

Typeset in Perpetua and Bell Gothic by
Florence Production Ltd, Stoodleigh, Devon
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin, Cornwall

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted
or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic,
mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented,
including photocopying and recording, or in any information
storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing
from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Moran, Joe, 1970–
Reading the everyday / Joe Moran
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
1. Sociology, Urban. 2. Civilization, Modern. 3. Popular culture.
I. Title.
HT153.M668 2005
307.76–dc22 2004029206

ISBN 0–415–31708–8 (hbk)
ISBN 0–415–31709–6 (pbk)

Reading the Everyday

Everyday life is a growing area of interest in cultural studies and cultural theory. *Reading the Everyday* provides an illuminating introduction to some of the key debates in this area with detailed readings of the spaces, practices and mythologies of everyday culture.

Drawing on the work of continental theorists such as Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Marc Augé and Siegfried Kracauer, Joe Moran explores the concrete sites and routines of everyday life and their representation in political debate, news media, material culture, sitcoms, reality TV shows, photography, CCTV and webcams.

Moran aims to rethink notions of everyday life within cultural studies, which have traditionally focused on questions of popular culture, consumption and lifestyle. He investigates some of the most under-explored, banal aspects of quotidian culture, such as office life, commuting, car parking, motorways, new towns and mass housing.

Reading the Everyday shows that analysing supposedly 'boring' phenomena can help us to make sense of cultural and social change; and it argues that the everyday has become a space for a new kind of 'post-political' politics which has obscured profound changes in work, domestic and public space.

Joe Moran is a lecturer in English and American Studies at Liverpool John Moores University. He is author of *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* (2000) and *Interdisciplinarity* (Routledge, 2002).

Preface and acknowledgements

This book is about everyday life in contemporary societies. It focuses on those mundane, 'boring' aspects of the daily (what the French call *le quotidien*, with more precision than the English 'everyday') that have been theorized by European critics such as Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Siegfried Kracauer and Marc Augé, but have received relatively little attention within Anglophone cultural studies. As the book's title suggests, it aims to extend the primarily theoretical emphasis of recent, groundclearing works in everyday life studies[1] through detailed readings of the spaces, practices and mythologies of the quotidian. Indeed, one of the central arguments of *Reading the Everyday* is that the everyday is always already read: its lived culture cannot be easily separated from its representation in architecture, design, material culture, news media, political discourse, film, television, art and photography.

The book explores the ways in which important changes in Western societies over the last few decades – such as the privatization of public services, the deregulation of markets, the managerial revolution in the workplace and the promotion of homeownership – have been articulated through these practices and representations of daily life. I want to argue that everyday life has become a space for a new kind of 'post-political' politics, in which the quotidian coalesces with the political in unnoticed but pervasive ways. Many of the examples I discuss are British, although there is frequent cross-referencing to European and American culture. At a time when the subject matter of cultural studies is being increasingly internationalized, I want to argue that the study of mundane life demands a necessary concreteness and specificity alongside an awareness of the increasing globalization of everyday practices. Just as many of the pioneering theorists of daily life (Lefebvre, Certeau, the Situationists) used Paris as a *locus classicus* in their writings, several of my case studies are linked

试读结束：需要全本请在线购买： www.ertongbook.com

to London, an increasingly global city whose everyday life still has its own distinctive landscapes and mythologies. I aim to show that quotidian spaces – offices, call centres, subway systems, traffic jams, new towns, suburbs, motorways and housing estates – are caught up in global processes while remaining tied to resilient local conditions and histories.

The introduction, 'Waiting, cultural studies and the quotidian', begins with a common daily experience – waiting for a bus – and uses it to suggest that the concept of the everyday in academic, media and political discourse has often neglected or obscured the specifically quotidian. The book is then divided into four main sections, each dealing with particular types of actual and discursive everyday space. Chapter 1, 'Workspace: office life and commuting', examines the representation of work culture and commuting in the context of recent changes in neo-liberal, globalized economies. Chapter 3, 'Urban space: the myths and meanings of traffic', discusses pervasive mythologies about vehicles and pedestrians in relation to questions of politics and the public sphere in the modern city. Chapter 4, 'Non-places: supermodernity and the everyday', investigates the dispersal of quotidian activity into liminal or peripheral spaces such as motorways, service stations and new towns, and explores the historical contexts and cultural politics of these supposedly blank environments. Chapter 5, 'Living space: housing, the market and the everyday', analyses ideas and representations of housing in contemporary capitalist societies, arguing that they serve both to romanticize and to conceal the everyday reality of the house. My conclusion, 'The everyday and cultural change', discusses the uneven development of daily life in a global context, in relation to colonialism, terrorism and social capital.

I would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Board, which granted me a research leave award for a semester to allow me to complete this book. I am also grateful to my colleagues in the departments of American Studies and Literature and Cultural History at Liverpool John Moores University, who covered my duties during this semester and a matching period of departmental leave. Rebecca Barden, Ross Dawson, Elspeth Graham, Michael Moran, Jonathan Purkis, Gerry Smyth and several anonymous reviewers for Routledge kindly read and commented on draft chapters of my book. Other people offered advice, information and various forms of help: Timothy Ashplant, Jo Croft, Rick Fell, Colin Harrison, Ben Highmore, Bob Kettle, Annette Kuhn, Liam Moran, Glenda Norquay, Joanna Price, Hazel Rayner, Cathy Wainhouse, Kate Walchester and members of the e-mail list, TheBusStopsHere. I am very grateful to the artists, filmmakers and photographers (Patrick Keiller, Martin Parr, Tom Phillips, David Rayson and Tom Wood) who have given me permission to reproduce images, helped supply me with film transcripts and reproductions and took the time to answer my questions about their work. Some brief sections of Chapter 5 appeared in my article 'Housing, Memory and Everyday Life in Contemporary Britain'

in *Cultural Studies* 18, 4 (July 2004) (http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals), and I thank the editors and publisher for permission to use this material again. Peter Wilby also allowed me to publish some of the research for this book in a very different form in the *New Statesman*.

This book is dedicated to my brother Liam, with love and respect; and my fellow passengers on the number 82 bus, with heartfelt sympathy.

Contents

List of illustrations vii
Preface and acknowledgements ix

1 Introduction: waiting, cultural studies and the quotidian 1

Reading the bus stop 3
Cultural studies and everyday life 7
The everyday and the public sphere 13
Rethinking everyday life 18
Ways of reading 22

2 Workspace: office life and commuting 29

The rise of the *Angestellten* 30
Exploring office space 36
The fall of the middle manager 41
Ethnographies of commuting 48
On the Underground 53

3 Urban space: the myths and meanings of traffic 61

Myths of the road 62
The cost of congestion 68
The secret history of the traffic light 72

The parking wars 77
Watching the pedestrians 83

4 Non-places: supermodernity and the everyday 94

The road to nowhere 95
Mapping Mondeo land 101
Roadside cultures 107
Imagining the new town 115
Wish we weren't here: boring postcards 124

5 Living space: housing, the market and the everyday 129

Houses and the pseudo-everyday 130
Location, location, location 134
The limits of tower-block chic 140
The politics of housebuilding 143
House viewings 151
Reading the market 158

6 Conclusion: the everyday and cultural change 163

Notes 170
Bibliography 177
Index 197

Illustrations

Figure 1.1	Adshel bus shelters, Liverpool	6
Figure 1.2	Stockbridge Village (Cantrill Farm), 1988	27
Figure 3.1	The Westway, London	63
Figure 3.2	Tom Phillips, '20 Sites *n* years': Site 18, Jones & Higgins, *c*.5.00pm, 1973, 1989 and 1992	87
Figure 3.3	From John Smith, *The Girl Chewing Gum*, 1976	90
Figure 3.4	From John Smith, *Worst Case Scenario*, 2002	92
Figure 4.1	Newport Pagnell Service Station (Welcome Break), M1 motorway, opened 1960	111
Figure 4.2	Tibshelf Service Station (Roadchef), M1 motorway, opened 1999	112
Figure 4.3	'The M1 Motorway'	124
Figure 5.1	David Rayson, *Griffiths Drive*, 2000	151
Figure 5.2	Chafford Hundred	157

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Waiting, cultural studies and the quotidian

IN HIS *CRITIQUE OF DIALECTICAL REASON*, Jean-Paul Sartre describes a queue forming early one morning at a bus stop on the Place Saint-Germain in Paris. He argues that those lining up at the stop 'achieve practical and theoretical participation in common being' because they have a shared interest, as people who regularly use the bus service and who all have business that day on the Right Bank (Sartre 1976: 266). But compared to people gathered together for some collective purpose such as a street festival or popular uprising, these bus-stop queuers produce only a 'plurality of isolations' (1976: 256). The bus passenger does not know how many people are going to be at the stop when he (*sic*) arrives or how full the next bus will be, and so is encouraged to see his fellow queuers as competitors for a potentially scarce resource. He takes a ticket from a machine by the stop, which indicates the order of his arrival and assigns him an order of priority when the bus arrives. By accepting this system, he acknowledges that his identity is interchangeable with that of the other passengers, a 'being-outside-himself as a reality shared by several people', which assigns him a place in a 'prefabricated seriality' (1976: 265).

What seems clear from this passage is that Sartre is not very interested in the actual experience of waiting for a bus. Indeed, the passage is typical of the slightly begrudging, tangential way in which the quotidian has emerged as a subject of intellectual inquiry over the last century. Sartre uses the bus queue as an easily understood example, raw material for a thought experiment that allows him to move on to weightier matters of politics and philosophy. He sees it as an abstraction of the laws of political economy, based on the competitive quest for a limited resource – in this case, seats on the awaited bus. The actual queue itself is devoid of any wider meaning: 'This unity is *not* symbolic . . . it has nothing to symbolise; *it* is what unites

试读结束：需要全本请在线购买： www.ertongbook.com

everything' (1976: 264). The example only works because of the nature of the queue that Sartre describes. This orderly cohort of people taking tickets from a machine would certainly seem very strange to a contemporary British bus queuer.

The ability to queue patiently is often seen as part of the British, or more especially English, national character. The Hungarian humorist George Mikes argued in *How to be an Alien* (1946) that 'an Englishman, even if he is alone, forms an orderly queue of one'. For Mikes, uncomplaining queuing was 'the national passion of an otherwise dispassionate race' (1958: 48) and was symptomatic of other characteristics of Englishness: politeness to strangers, respect for order and deferral to absent authority. Writing in the early 1990s, though, Patrick Wright noted the more elaborate protocol of the London bus queue. While conservative commentators were lamenting the decline of the well-ordered bus queue as symbolic of national decline and social anarchy, Wright suggested that the reality was more complex. The West End was indeed a 'sordid scrum', in which unprincipled natives pushed past tourists with impunity. But in quieter, residential areas, aggression and cheek did not always win out, as 'each time a bus pulls up the crowd negotiates a messy but still intricately structured settlement between the ideal of the orderly queue and the chaotic stampede' (Wright 1991: 125). Wright's argument about the disintegration of the queue into less obvious, fragmented forms of social behaviour proved to be prescient. In 1994, a London Passenger Transport bylaw introduced in 1938, which made it illegal to stand more than two abreast at a bus stop, was repealed because it was no longer seen as workable (Jones 1994).

In the centre of London, since 2003, passengers have had to pre-purchase their tickets from kerbside machines before boarding the bus, but this does not assign them any order of precedence in a queue. One problem with the modern bus queue is that it lacks what Barry Schwartz calls the 'ecological supports' of waiting, such as 'queue this side' signs or queuing channels created by cords and metal poles (1975: 99). These supports are increasingly common in commercial environments such as supermarkets, banks and cinemas, where they are often supplemented by buzzers, digital displays and recorded voices saying 'cashier number 5 please'. Bus queuers, though, are left to improvise their own waiting arrangements. On my own bus route, I have seen this lead to near-fistfights, as hordes of passengers clamber on to already packed buses in no particular order, and drivers with half-full buses speed past stops teeming with angry commuters, because they know they will have to let everyone board or no one at all. The bus queue is a reminder that even the most mundane routines incorporate complex spatial politics and cultural meanings.

This introduction has five main sections. First, it examines the bus stop as a way of considering the unspoken economic and political contexts of

everyday life. Second, it argues that cultural studies has downplayed these aspects of the everyday through an emphasis on popular culture, consumption and lifestyle. Third, it explores the ways in which an understanding of the quotidian can help to make sense of contemporary political culture, with its particular notions of the relationship between the market, the public sphere and 'ordinary people'. Fourth, it looks at how ideas of everyday life developed by French theorists in the immediate postwar era can be adapted to make sense of this new political culture. Finally, it discusses questions of methodology, 'ways of reading' that might be particularly useful in addressing these questions.

Reading the bus stop

Waiting for the bus may be a well-known British tradition, but it is about as unglamorous an experience as you can get. It is not just that the unreliability and bunching up of buses makes passengers feel that they do not have ownership or control over their own lives (hence the familiar complaint: 'You wait for ages and then three come at once'). It is that the second-rate service confirms their status as second-rate citizens. Buses are the most widely used form of public transport in Britain, and account for more than twice the number of journeys taken by rail (*Social Trends* 2004: 188). But they have low cultural status, because they are disproportionately used by (and, just as importantly, are associated with) women, children, students, the elderly and the poor. Although 86 per cent of British households are within six minutes' walk of a bus stop, a recent social attitudes survey found that nearly two-thirds of people agreed with the statement: 'I would only travel somewhere by bus if I had no other way of getting there' (Department for Transport 2004: 42; *Social Trends* 2004: 189). It is hard to stand at a bus stop, as the single-occupant cars stream by, without feeling somehow denied full membership of society. Insofar as it forms part of cultural representation at all, the bus is the vehicle that cannot keep up with the pace of modernity, that 'splutters along behind, picking up all those people who will never quite make it into either "History" or "Tomorrow"' (Bonnett 2000: 27).[1]

Just before beginning this book, I read a newspaper report about Britain's first queuing agency, Q4U, which aims to relieve Londoners of the hassle of queuing. For £20 an hour, the report said, its employees would line up for anything from passports to theatre tickets. Q4U recruits its workers from the ranks of the long-term unemployed, who, according to a company spokesman, are used to queuing: 'It's a job that doesn't require a lot of skill or experience. All you need is plenty of patience' (Eden 2001). I have seen no evidence of Q4U since then; it may have overestimated the demand for queuing services. In fact, a queuing agency has a fairly obvious problem. The economics

and practicalities of the more tiresome forms of waiting, such as standing at bus stops, do not support a market for surrogate waiters. In these contexts, it is difficult to separate the experience of waiting from its surrounding cultural practices and meanings.

In his classic study of queues, Schwartz argues that the experience of waiting and our attitudes towards it embody social differences (1975: 22). For the poorest members of society, waiting is simply a daily experience as they queue for public transport, state benefits and doctors' appointments. For the more affluent, waiting is less time-consuming and may be expected to come with compensatory props such as comfy chairs, bottomless coffee pots and reading matter. The changing fortunes of the British bus over the last two decades offer a case study in this differentiated experience of waiting. Under the 1985 Transport Act, the Thatcher government disbanded the National Bus Company and deregulated all local bus services outside London. To the act's supporters, it replaced inefficient local authority monopolies with healthy competition and consumer choice. To its detractors, it carved up the bus services into a morass of holding companies and private firms, with no integration of timetables or ticketing, less provision for unprofitable routes and nobody to blame when the bus did not show up. The view that deregulation confirmed the social marginalization of bus users was reinforced by a remark attributed, perhaps apocryphally, to Thatcher: 'If a man finds himself a passenger on a bus having attained the age of twenty-six, he can account himself a failure in life' (Grayling 1999).

When the Labour government came to power in 1997, it combined a new concern with the delivery of public services with an unwillingness to alter the economic and political landscape created by Thatcherism. As urban traffic congestion became a significant electoral issue, the Department for Transport published *From Workhorse to Thoroughbred: A Better Role for Bus Travel*, which set a target to increase bus use by 10 per cent by 2010. The government aimed to achieve this not through re-regulating the buses but through a 'Quality Partnership Approach' in which local authorities would work more closely with private companies to improve services (Department for Transport 1998: 2). It is a classic New Labour strategy: policy-making is not about weighing up competing priorities, but about public and private agencies working together to achieve pre-agreed ends, with 'everybody concentrating on what they do best' (1998: 2). While the local authorities could integrate and coordinate services, the private operators could show 'responsiveness to the customer', 'flexibility' and 'incentive to innovate' (1998: 22). The current status of bus travel suggests the limitations of such a policy. Labour is on course to achieve its target of increased bus use, but only because it has risen dramatically in London, which accounts for about a third of all bus journeys in Britain (*Social Trends* 2004: 188). The buses were never deregulated in the capital, and the Greater London Authority

formed in 2000 has exercised considerable central control. Almost everywhere else in the country, bus use is static or falling (Office for National Statistics 2003).

It would be difficult to find a piece of modern architecture that inspires less interest than the bus shelter. It is an omnipresent object of everyday life that, when it registers in the public consciousness, is usually only associated with graffiti and vandalism. But there has been an unnoticed bus-shelter revolution in recent years. Many of the world's shelters are now supplied by just two companies, both of which deal with outdoor advertising: Clear Channel Adshel and JCDecaux. These firms have built themselves into global brands since the 1990s, winning thousands of street furniture contracts throughout the world. As more and more local authorities contract out their public services to private companies, bus-shelter design has become an adjunct of the advertising industry.

In Britain, Adshel is the market leader with an 80 per cent market share. It supplies and maintains its shelters free of charge, in return for the right to display advertising on some of them in backlit '6-sheet' panels. Bus shelters will normally have just one advertising panel, but on prime sites in city centres they can have two or more, with rotating displays to maximize income. Adshel bus shelters are architect-designed, with trendy names for particular ranges: Metro, Classic, Skylight, Avenue. The company takes pride in the high quality of its shelters, which use graffiti- and etch-resistant materials, reinforced glass, bright colours and courtesy lights. A 2003 government White Paper on combating anti-social behaviour commended Adshel for its success in cleaning bus shelters and removing graffiti, and working with the police to reduce vandalism (Home Office 2003: 70). It is a public–private partnership that seems to benefit all parties: Adshel gets free advertising, while the local authority gets free shelters, and does not have to spend thousands of pounds cleaning them, removing graffiti and sweeping up broken glass. It is, according to Adshel's managing director, 'a win-win business model for all concerned' (France 2002).

But the sponsored bus shelter is also a case study in the colonization of urban landscapes by the market. Adshel has been supplying advertising in bus shelters since the 1970s, but it really began to boom because of two key developments in the late 1980s. The first was the installation of illuminated posters called 'Adshel Superlites'. The second was the advent of a data system called OSCAR (Outdoor Site Classification and Audience Research), providing information on vehicle and pedestrian traffic near poster sites (Sutherland 1989). These innovations allowed advertisers to direct their campaigns beyond the unglamorous target market of the habitual bus user. The ads are now also aimed at passing pedestrians and motorists, which is why they are big on visual impact and short on copy.

The economies of scale created by multinational advertising companies, combined with the need for these companies to sell attractive packages to city councils, have produced an interesting tension between global standardization and local difference. In Liverpool, the city where I work, there is a surprising variety of bus shelters built around the standard steel frame (see Figure 1.1). The contracts between the advertising companies and local authorities stipulate that the former will provide a certain number of shelters if they can advertise in an agreed proportion of them. The 'de luxe' shelters, with barrelled glass roofs, glass walls on all sides and dot-matrix displays with real-time passenger information technology letting passengers know when the next bus is due, do not have advertising. The shelters with adverts, which tend to be in the prime city-centre sites or the main routes into town, are much more rudimentary. They have a cantilevered roof or windbreak ends extending only part of their width, so that the ads can be seen by everyone. The outdoor advertising companies have understandably expended their energies not on prioritizing warmth and comfort for bus-stop waiters, but on developing new forms of advertising, such as talking adverts, triggered by motion sensors, and 'dynamic image' posters in which, for example, steam appears to rise from cups of Heinz soup (Clear Channel Adshel 2004).

Figure 1.1 Adshel bus shelters, Liverpool.
Photographs by the author.

In several British cities, we can see the logical culmination of this commodification of public space: redundant bus shelters built solely for advertising, where no buses stop and no bus users wait – unless, of course, they have been cruelly misinformed (Mintowt-Czyz 2000: 22).

Several recent news stories have suggested that innovative technologies will improve the experience of waiting for a bus. Twelve-foot poles with propellers on top will use wind power to generate electricity to heat the seats in bus shelters (BBC News, 16 January 2002). Buses4U, a pilot scheme funded by the Department for Transport, will allow passengers to book a bus by text message up to 30 minutes in advance, allowing them to wait in a nearby pub rather than the shelter (Monro 2004). Touch-screen bus shelters using plasma technology will be able to show timetables, maps and weather forecasts (Pearson 2002). Networked computers placed in shelters will allow bus passengers to access local news, council websites and e-mail accounts (*Daily Mirror* 1999).

The important point about these stories is not that they are untrue – in two cases they refer to schemes already in operation – but that such innovations are applied unevenly. For most people waiting in bus shelters, they remain in the realm of science fiction. The bus shelter is a kind of prism through which we can read the uneven modernization of everyday life and the changing priorities of society. It is no longer primarily a functional piece of architecture, still less a civic space; it is a marketing opportunity. Bus shelters may be more interesting to look at than they used to be, but waiting for a bus remains an unpredictable, low-status activity. Doreen Massey suggests that the practice of standing at a bus stop counters the more excitable visions of contemporaneity in cultural theory, which emphasize its restless mobility and pervasive mediatization. 'Much of life for many people, even in the heart of the first world', she argues, 'still consists of waiting in a bus-shelter with your shopping for a bus that never comes' (Massey 1992: 8).

Cultural studies and everyday life

I have begun this book with the experience of waiting for a bus because it encapsulates some of the theoretical and methodological problems of 'reading the everyday'. Waiting is frustrating because it is both an unavoidable and marginalized experience: an absolutely essential feature of daily life that is nevertheless associated with wasted time and even shameful indolence. In a society in which market imperatives increasingly invade the most routine operations, waiting makes economic sense. If servers are only occupied for half the time, if railway platforms are half-empty and buses half-full, then those who provide the service are losing money somewhere. Henri Lefebvre suggests that everyday life is increasingly made up of this 'compulsive time',

试读结束：需要全本请在线购买： www.ertongbook.com