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## Everyday without exception? Making space for the exceptional in contemporary sociological studies of streetlife

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*Everyday without exception? Making space for the exceptional in contemporary sociological studies of streetlife*

**Abstract**

Over the last twenty years we have witnessed an increasing prevalence of ethnographic studies concerned explicitly with the social and cultural life, and production, of space and specifically of the urban public realm. In line with a wider trend, many of these studies seek to analyse urban public life through the prism of the 'everyday', using accounts of the ordinary to explore the ways that city streets are used and experienced. In this paper I seek to interrogate this multifarious deployment of 'everydayness' in ethnographic work on urban 'streetlife.' This interrogation is both theoretical, exploring how the everyday became the privileged approach for studies of the street, and methodological, asking what is it about our methodological choices that lends itself to conceptualising public life as everyday, and what might we do differently? At the same time, the paper will draw on ethnographic work on London's South Bank to open up a space to consider the exceptional in sociological studies of streetlife.

**Introduction**

Over the course of the fieldwork for my study of London's South Bank<sup>i</sup> (Jones 2013; 2014) I became interested in the ways that urban public realm in this area was secured, and specifically in contrasting *practices* of socio-spatial regulation (of behaviours, activities, subjectivities and so on) with some of the more abstract characterisations of the securitisation and privatisation of contemporary urban space (e.g. Sorkin [ed.] 1992). My writing on this subject comprised the analysis of various data from my interviews and fieldnotes, which I used to argue that in practice a patchwork, discretionary approach to securing space on the South Bank prevailed (in contrast to de-materialised characterisations of the application of punitive and immutable 'regulatory regimes' [Ruppert 2006] in such settings).

While scholarship concerning 'public space'<sup>ii</sup> has to some extent blossomed precisely because areas of accessible urban realm have been identified as sites of everyday life that have hitherto been downplayed or ignored by researchers (cf. Holloway and Hubbard 2001), my argument in this paper is that as urban ethnographic accounts concern themselves more-and-more with the 'streetlife' of cities, a more analytically precise conceptual deployment of the term 'everyday' is required. This speaks on the one hand to a well-established understanding of the 'everyday' concept as ambiguous

and fuzzy (Felski 2000; also Higham 2002), and so arguably in need of more rigorous definitional work in relation to its given deployment, and on the other to a need, I argue, for ethnographers' accounts of 'streetlife' to be more attuned to the ways that aspects of the social worlds they portray can variously be constructed (by the researcher and research participant alike) as everyday and/or exceptional.

With this aim in mind I want to return first of all to some fieldnotes I collected one evening on the Queen's Walk (a wide pedestrianised walkway that runs the length of the riverside extent of the Southbank Centre and beyond). During observations I was conducting that evening (at around 10pm on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2005) I observe, first from a raised terrace and then from the Queen's Walk itself, a group of young people disembark from a passenger boat at 'Festival Pier' which leads onto the Queen's Walk. The boat is a 'party boat' – one of many that can be chartered for social functions on the Thames.

Down below I see that the party boat crowd have now spilled up onto the promenade [Queen's Walk]. It seems to be a [final secondary school year] party, with a large number of young men and women in suits and skirts/dresses respectively. The latter (I think) have certainly drawn the attention of the guards, and the two in fluorescent jackets plus the male in blue uniform ... stand together leaning on the section of balustrade that juts inland just west of the pier and overlooking it.

I head down onto the promenade and note that one girl is passed out by a railing, and that many of the partygoers are still on the pier and/or the walkway up to the promenade. It seems many of those present don't know what to do from here, and that they have just been let out to their own devices (in this respect the rather quiet South Bank seems a strange place to stop). The guards continue to chat to one another, and have been joined by a more senior-looking guard ... . They seem oblivious to the girl that has passed out, though some friends carry her round a corner, and off the main section of promenade, to attend to her.

As I continue to observe, I am struck by the private security guards' failure to proactively respond (at least physically) to the behaviour of this group, many of whom are clearly inebriated. As members of the group of revellers start to sing football chants, throw glass bottles and fight each other the guards noticeably opt not to intervene, instead talking together and agreeing to monitor the situation and keep their supervisor informed. When several police vehicles arrive moments later it's

clear that the unfolding events had also been reported to the police, and at this point the reluctance of the security guards to intervene becomes clearer still:

As the police come in the security just stand by oblivious - earlier a girl had asked them, crying, to help her friend, but they had declined - and when I speak to them [*the guards*] about it they tell me that the area occupied by the young people (the pier, and the upper [*directly riverside section of*] promenade [Queen's Walk] fronting the undercroft) is not their territory; 'this is our bit,' they inform me, [*indicating*] the [*central section of*] walkway [Queen's Walk] from the Oxo Tower to the London Eye. While their territorial justification seems at odds with the drunken antics taking place (many of the youths are on the walkway [*for example, the passed out girl*]), the guards at this point seem very helpless, and incredibly reluctant to intervene. ...

The girl ... then returns to the two more obvious, jacketed guards (now standing away from the balustrade) to complain to them about their inaction – she is crying and emotional, but they still do nothing, turning back and apparently unable to do anything (not just in terms of what they can or can't legitimately do, but in terms of they seem to lack the skills/nerve/authority to deal with what's going-on around them).

In my write-up of my ethnographic study of London's South Bank I used the fieldnotes reproduced above to underline my argument that *in practice* the 'regimental', revanchist qualities of spatial regulation putatively realised through the increasing privatisation of security roles in urban public realm are subject to transgression and, at the South Bank at least, are more akin to a discretionary politics of space. In this mode of regulation security personnel employ their discretion in the regulation of incivility and deploy rules not just as a basis for acting but also in order not to act (or secure space). This account of group disorder is used to bolster my analysis of more routine forms of the regulation of space I observed over the course of my fieldwork. By revealing how in moments of heightened disorder guards opted not to act but instead deferred to state authorities, a richer account of the discretionary nature of securing public realm on the South Bank emerges. For the purposes of the present paper, the argument that this account enabled was one that capitalised on the exceptional to strengthen an ethnographic description, and subsequent conceptualisation, of the practices of securing public realm. It is the under-explored use of accounts of exceptional events like these in ethnographic studies of urban public life that will be the focus of the argument that follows.

Before shifting to this focus, however, it is important to consider positionality vis-à-vis for whom, and how, the events described above might be experienced as exceptional (cf. Brinkmann 2000: 12).

On a frequency-basis, this incident certainly stood out in my fieldnotes, constituting (by some distance) the largest disturbance I recorded over a four-year fieldwork period and standing in contrast to the uses of public space I would more typically observe. I contend, however, that in a similar vein to Lofland et al's (2006: 124) description of 'episodes' in fieldwork, the event was experienced as an exceptional episode by myself and the guards (the primary protagonists in this strand of my research) alike. This is not just a quantitative assessment. Rather, details recorded in my fieldnotes support this inference being made. Thus, the lengthy deliberations undertaken by the security personnel present, and the involvement of more senior staff and of significant numbers of police officers, suggested this event was being treated as atypical by the security guards. More than this, however, I was struck by the contrast between the guards' behaviour on this occasion and elsewhere in my fieldnotes. While their typical role seemed to be one of steward (actively assisting, directing, interacting with and responding to passers-by, including those using the walkway they so pointedly disowned as 'their bit' on this occasion), on this evening their reticence to intervene indicated that their assessment of this situation was that it was out of the ordinary. This is not to say that events are uniformly experienced as everyday or exceptional (in this case or any other), and indeed differences in how events are interpreted (in terms of their exceptionality) can be insightful. Rather, it is to flag two issues that I will return to later – the importance of subjectivity in ethnographic accounts of public life (e.g. Soukup 2012) and the value of detailed fieldnotes to helping analysts interpret social phenomena in ethnographic studies (esp. Becker 1998: 76-83).

### **Theorising everydayness and exceptionality**

*The powerful resonances of... appeals to everyday life are closely connected to its fuzzy, ambiguous meanings. What exactly does it refer to? The entire social world? (Felski 2000: 15)*

In his book *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, Ben Highmore (2002) describes how in cultural theory the concept (or problem) of 'everyday life' has had a rich 'social life', being reformulated, re-employed and re-used in an arc of theoretical works stretching from Georg Simmel to Michel de Certeau (via Walter Benjamin and Henri Lefebvre). Despite this rich history, however, Highmore (2002: vii) argues that the everyday is 'an arena of life that manages, for the most part, to avoid scrutiny.'

Fifteen years on, and in terms of research attention the social life of the everyday has truly blossomed, at least in the sub-discipline of urban sociology and allied fields. Sociological scrutiny of the everyday characterises much urban ethnographic work conducted in the intervening period (eg Degen 2008; Hall 2013; Wessendorf 2014), and 'everyday life' has become a recurrent theme in

journal articles and special issues (eg Neal and Murji 2015). Rather than seemingly avoiding scrutiny, in contemporary sociological accounts of 'streetlife'<sup>iii</sup> the 'everyday' is a dominant concept, notable for its ubiquity rather than absence. Thus Neal and Murji (2015: 812) note 'that the rise and rise of interest in everyday life means that the hidden, the slight, the ordinary, the mundane – the bread and butter focus of everyday life perspectives – have never been more scrutinized, analysed and generally "unhidden"' (after Pink 2012).

So prevalent is the use of the concept that this apparent reversal of fortunes begs the question: *what is the 'everyday' scrutinised and deployed in relation to?* Does 'everyday life' signify so ambivalently (Higham 2002: 1) that it adequately captures and describes all (urban) experience, both the familiar and the non-familiar? Is the 'exceptional' part-and-parcel of everyday life, or is it perhaps no longer the domain of the sociologist, for whom consciousness of historical charges that the discipline had become 'increasingly distant from the man in the street' (Tudor 1976: 479) has become ingrained?

Rather than requiring further extension of the concept of the everyday to different domains (life, space, practice), I propose that we need to pay closer attention to the exceptional as a constituent, imminent and sociologically vital facet of the everyday.<sup>iv</sup> This has methodological implications, and it is notable that overviews of sociologies of everyday life (eg Adler, Adler and Fontana 1987; Kalekin-Fishman 2011; Neal and Murji 2015) share an emphasis on the methodological underpinnings of this 'theoretical arena' (Adler, Adler and Fontana 1987: 218) and in particular on its associations with ethnography (esp. Neal and Murji 2015: 815). Specifically, while sociological studies of everyday life have been heralded for their 'emphasis on methods innovation' (ibid 2015: 816), this innovation has largely concerned the diversity and diversification of sources of data collected and used to explore the everyday (including, alongside ethnographic data, 'surveys, interviews, biography, diaries, scrap books and the non-human' [ibid 2015: 816]). The 'scientific object' (Desmond 2014) of these studies – ie everyday phenomena – and importantly the ways that these are analysed and interpreted have not, however, received equivalent methodological attention. Researchers are adopting novel ways to observe the 'everyday,' but efforts both to conceptualise this empirical object and to interpret data collected in relation to it would appear to be less well-developed.

### **'Everyday' as a concept in Sociology**

Like many social scientific concepts, 'everyday' does not have a singular semantic trajectory (cf. Williams's [1983: 225-227] discussion of the term 'ordinary'). Rather, its usage speaks to one or more of three interrelated traditions. First, lay meanings of the term 'everyday' are important.

These overlap with, but have important differences to, more conceptual uses of the term. In the Oxford English dictionary, two definitions warrant reproducing: the adjectival use of the term, meaning '[o]f or pertaining to every day, daily,' and its related definition '[t]o be met with every day, common, ordinary. Of persons and their attributes: Commonplace, mediocre, inferior.' In this tradition, 'everyday' refers to common occurrences, people and attributes, and from this an 'unfavourable' (Williams 1983: 225), mediocre characterisation of the given subject can often be inferred.

Related to these uses, in social theory 'everyday life' is a thoroughly modern conceptual paradigm (Highmore 2002: 5-12), analogous (in its monotony, repetitiveness and so on) to the assembly line of the factory floor. In this tradition routinized experiences of the workplace in modernity, or experiences that were perceived by theorists as such, are emblematic of the wider 'deadening routinization of everyday modernity' (ibid 2002: 9) and resultant boredom as a universal condition. Here, 'everyday life' is deployed as both description (of the social consequences of modernity) and critique (whereby analysis of the practice of everyday life reveals the subversive and resistant qualities of everyday culture).

Finally, another important tradition underpinning current deployments of the 'everyday' concept is that described by Adler, Adler and Fontana (1987) as 'everyday life sociology.' Here, the 'everyday' qualifier relates to the scale of analytical focus of a given piece of work, with everyday life sociology specifically comprising 'a broad spectrum of micro perspectives' (ibid 1987: 217). Sociological work concerned with the 'everyday' in this reading is therefore distinguished from the dominant macro sociological tradition of the mid-twentieth century, and in particular from the overly deterministic portrayal of the individual in society that this tradition was seen to privilege. Central to this paradigmatic shift, everyday sociologists sought to capture the complexity of the everyday world through an emphasis on empirical work, and in particular on 'studying people in their *natural context*: the everyday social world' (ibid 1987: 219 [emphasis in original]). In this tradition:

*Describing and analysing the character and implications of everyday life interaction should thus serve as both the beginning and the end point of sociology. This includes the perceptions, feelings, and meanings members experience as well as the micro structure they create in the process.* (Ibid 1987: 219)

Notwithstanding other deployments and interpretations of the 'everyday' (for instance its variegated usage in social and cultural theory) we can already see that conceptually the term has considerable baggage, implying, variously, daily mundane practices, the cultural life of modernity

(and the source of its critique) and a sociological shift from de-individualised theory to attentive micro-analyses. So, how have these various usages filtered into analyses of everyday streetlife?

### **Everyday streetlife**

In the remainder of this paper I seek to critically explore the framing of the urban (and of 'streetlife') as the domain of the 'everyday.' I will start by reviewing recent sociological accounts of the urban condition that employ the 'everyday' as a defining concept. Out of this review I will argue that an emergent set of classifiers – namely everyday life, everyday practices and everyday spaces – can be identified in analytical deployments of the 'everyday' concept in contemporary urban sociology. My particular concern will be with the third of these, everyday spaces, and the implications that use of this particular conceptual category has for how we collect, analyse and interpret data pertaining to how such spaces are used, experienced and rendered meaningful by people.

There is a well-established tradition of social scientific studies of social life centred on the streets and wider public realm of cities. In terms of their methodological roots, and empirical emphasis, the pioneering urban ethnographic studies of the Chicago School (eg Anderson 1923; Wirth 1928) are undoubtedly formative in this tradition. The attention to contemporary urban 'problems,' and to studying these through extensive fieldwork, that characterised these works clearly resonates with subsequent urban sociological accounts of various aspects of 'streetlife' (eg Anderson 1990; Duneier 1990; Hall 2013; Sánchez-Jankowski 1991; Whyte 1943). Notwithstanding their diverse objects of analysis (from public behaviours in residential settings to urban gang membership), for all of these works it is notably not just the urban that is foregrounded, but rather the 'street' (or 'pavement' or 'sidewalk') that takes centre stage as the site for analysis. Moreover, while none of these works sets out to theorise or address the 'everyday' explicitly, it is worth noting that the theoretical underpinnings of the Chicago School – that, broadly, '[s]ociologists can learn to take the role of others because this is how all humans learn to become part of society' (Deegan 2001: 19) – has been characterised as 'a vibrant and flexible theory of everyday life' (Deegan 2001: 19). Crucially, this theoretical approach is inextricably tied to the ethnographic methods (or 'field studies' [Palmer 1928]) employed by sociologists influenced by this tradition.

Almost invariably, such methods also underpin sociological treatments of 'streetlife' that do more directly speak to the 'everyday' (either as a theoretical body of work, as critique or as analytical approach). As Amanda Wise puts in an interview about 'researching the everyday,' 'I don't think there is a whole lot that can really stand in for just being there, for getting that ethnographic depth' (Neal 2015: 994). Indeed, in recent years ethnographic methods have been advocated in both

methods texts (eg Brinkmann 2000) and more substantive accounts of everyday life (eg Day 2006; Pink 2012) as particularly apt for empirical studies of this domain. Here, the naturalistic qualities of ethnographic work (Becker 1996) are invoked as enabling the researcher to delve beneath the typically one-off accounts of behaviour, attitudes, perspectives and so on fostered through in-depth interviews, and to recognise how ‘random and contradictory things’ articulated or practised by people in the course of their lives ‘coexist in practice’ (Neal 2015: 993). In this respect, it is precisely the extensive, regular engagement with the field (and social actors in it), as opposed to the momentary exchange of the interview, that allows ethnographers access to ‘our everyday “being in the world”’ (Holloway and Hubbard 2001: 6). In Amanda Wise’s (2005; 2010) work, for instance, this comprised spending ‘two hours a day sitting in a food court for a year’ (Neal 2015: 993). While alternative approaches to studying the everyday have been taken (most notably time-budget surveys [eg Andorka 1987] and documentary analyses [eg Owens et al. 2010]), there is a satisfying methodological parsimony in the association between studies of everyday life and ethnography, at least in relation to how data is collected.

Importantly, in Wise’s account the ‘everyday’ that is accessed ethnographically is one comprised of ‘minor events’ that somehow ‘connect people to the world in profound ways’ (Neal 2015: 992). Notably, the street is again an important site in the example Wise uses to describe the importance of the ‘everyday’ to her concept of the ‘concrete other.’ In this example, Wise describes how through her ethnographic analysis of the ‘morning walk’ in Ashfield she came to understand how passers-by ‘are not just the kind of stranger in the street but the product of...rhythm and habit, gesture, familiarity, minor civilities and incivilities’ (Neal 2015: 992). Here, an empirical deployment of the ‘everyday’ is evident, one that bears a strong resemblance to lay understandings of the term – the morning walk as a daily routine, Ashfield as an ordinary place and so on. The term ‘everyday’ is not deployed as a means to situate the work as a critique of routinized modernity, but rather Wise uses it to fit her work into an emergent sociological tradition concerned with ‘the way that people’s movements and behaviours centre on a set of local, “everyday” places whose importance has often been ignored or downplayed in [the...] rush to develop large-scale “grand” theories’ (Holloway and Hubbard 2001: 16). In such work, research ‘approaches....have focused primarily on the way that **individuals** interact with their surroundings in their everyday lives’ (ibid 2001: 8 [emphasis in original]). In doing so, researchers have taken a concern for personal experience situated in everyday settings – a concern that clearly lends itself to an ethnographic research disposition – as the starting point for their studies.<sup>v</sup>

The exploration of 'everyday multiculturalism' (ibid 2015: 989) with which Wise is concerned, or studying 'what it means to live with difference' (ibid 2015: 990) as she eloquently sums it up, has become a dominant trope in everyday life research (esp. Wise and Velayutham [eds.] 2009). In this research, routine encounters (in the context of the multicultural as both 'a space of encounter but... also a material place' [Neal 2015: 989]) are taken as the object of analysis, with ethnographic methods typically adopted so as to capture the 'ambivalence and complexity' (ibid 2015: 990) of living with difference that more abstract accounts and media representations have failed to account for. In Wise's case, her analysis centres on the daily life of 'average suburban communities' (ibid 2015:989), while for others fields of analysis include bus journeys (Wilson 2011), shopping streets (Hall 2013), street markets (Watson 2009), 'new city spaces' (Kesten et al. 2011), 'sustainable communities' (Horton, Hadfield-Hill and Kraftl 2015), public parks (Clayton 2009; Neal et al. 2015) and franchised café space (Jones et al. 2015).

As well as dealing with day-to-day encounters in 'cities of difference' (Fincher and Jacobs [eds.] 1998), many of these authors also deal with 'everyday practices' as they relate to multiculturalism. This emphasis on practice draws on the one hand on de Certeau's (1984) theoretical work on the practice of everyday life. In particular, his work on the 'tactics' of everyday life has been influential, whereby 'actors in the everyday do not simply rehearse an established order of the city; rather, they make their own spatial meanings, producing urban space in canny and idiomatic ways' (Tonkiss 2005: 138). On the other hand, empirically this emphasis on the minutiae of social practice is indebted to 'a broad spectrum of micro perspectives: symbolic interactionism, dramaturgy, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and existential sociology' (Adler, Adler and Fontana 1987: 217). While the more formal procedures of these approaches are largely absent in contemporary mainstream sociological research on everyday life, some of the guiding principles – for instance the foundational emphasis on 'contextuality' (ibid 1987: 219) and the related concern with unpacking the 'meaningfulness' of behaviour through proximity (Goffman 1962: ix-x) – prevail.

Combining this micro-sociological sensibility with a concern for how urban space is 'tactically' produced through use, sociologists (and others) have often characterised everyday practices in terms of resistance (to more top-down, strategic modes of governing, organising and producing the city). For instance, Zieleniec (2016: 13) analyses 'graffiti in Lefebvrian terms as everyday acts of intervention and engagement with urban space' and Wallace (2014: 16) considers how the 2011 London rioters 'revealed borderings between "everyday" urban performance and an antisocial, dysfunctional annex'. In a related way, other scholars have drawn on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in city centre urban public realm settings to explore the ways that the meanings of these

spaces are produced not only through urban planning and design processes but also through the everyday practices of their users (Low 2000; REFERENCE OMITTED).

In the same way that the everyday concept has been fused with social practice ideas in work on a broad range of areas linked to the social life of the street, there has also been a move to *spatialize the everyday* (eg Clayton 2009). Indeed, as Ross (1988: 9) notes, Lefebvre's term 'social space' 'can be understood as a re-coding of his initial concept of everyday life.' Not in the least, in urban design 'everyday urbanism' has become a distinct topic of analysis (esp. Chase, Crawford and John [eds.] 2008) and rallying call for bottom-up approaches to urban planning. This intervention fits within a wider trend for reorienting sociological attention away from cities at the top of western-centric global rankings constructed according to macro-economic measures (esp. Sassen 2001) and towards 'ordinary cities' (esp. Robinson 2006) and their constituent urbanisms and urbanisation processes. For a paper on streetlife it is important that this heuristic has been employed at the street level, with an analogous conceptualisation of 'ordinary streets' proposed, this being an urban realm typology 'evoked by an *overlapping urbanism* of trade and exchange, where a diversity of proprietors and customers intersect' (Hall 2015: 858 [emphasis in original]). In this work, everyday life is central to the analysis presented, whereby 'the quotidian frame allows for the dominance of an hierarchical global order to be reconsidered through "ordinary cities" and "everyday resistance"' (ibid 2015: 865).

Taking this synthesis of urban space and the everyday further, the notion of 'everyday space' has become a feature of research in a number of substantive areas. In health sociology, for instance, Cattell et al. (2008) explored the relationship between the use of 'everyday public spaces' and well-being in a multi-ethnic area of east London. Elsewhere, the heterosexualisation of 'everyday space' has been considered (Browne 2007), as has the art-everyday space boundary and its potential transgression (Bonnett 1991). As with Hall, Bonnett (1991: 69) offers a definition of such spaces predicated on their ordinariness and the absence of 'specialized activities':

*Lefebvre defined everyday life as "whatever remains after one has eliminated all specialized activities" (quoted by Debord, 1981, page 69; see also Lefebvre, 1975). The phrase 'everyday space' evokes similar images of the 'ordinary'; places such as the street and the home, which are the familiar setting of our day-to-day lives.*

### **Everyday without exception?**

As the preceding review demonstrates, there is clearly no longer a lack of empirical social scientific scrutiny, at least in name, of everyday life (cf. Highmore 2002: vii). Rather, in relation to the social

life of the street and wider urban public realm alone an explosion of studies privileging the everyday has been witnessed. As part of this, particular social practices associated with social uses of streets, as well as particular urban spaces themselves, have been conceptualised and analysed expressly as 'everyday.' In urban sociology, at least, a reversal of Debord's (1981: 69) comment that '[t]he majority of sociologists...recognize specialized activities everywhere and everyday life nowhere' is in train. Rather, there is an increasing sense that the everyday is a ubiquitous quality of the public life of cities.

However, in the context of a turn towards 're-materialising' studies of the social that has heavily influenced accounts of 'streetlife' (esp. Jackson 2000), I would concur with Felski (2000: 15) that despite 'the current [empirical] interest in the concrete and the particular, ...everyday life is rarely taken under the microscope and scrutinised *as a concept*' [emphasis added]. In turn, this paper argues that in practice in the move to investigate the 'everyday' and the 'ordinary' in urban sociology, there has paradoxically been a diluting of the conceptual scrutiny afforded to understanding the social life of cities. This can be observed in two ways. First, given the various interrelated, but significantly different, meanings associated with the term 'everyday' (as theoretical domain, epistemology [or broad methodological approach to get at the empirical] and lay adjective), there is a characteristic failure to clearly situate empirical studies concerned with everyday life in relation to these semantic trajectories. Second, and related to this, there is a collective, albeit not universal (eg Smith and Belgrave 1995; Robinson 2015), failure to articulate what the 'everyday' is being analysed in opposition to. Specifically, this raises the question of what role the 'exceptional' plays in how the street is lived, experienced, practised and rendered meaningful? It is this second conceptual area that is the concern of this paper and to which I will now turn.

### **Accounting for the exceptional in ethnography and ethnographies**

Critical to the argument of this paper is an intriguing disconnect between textbook accounts of how to deal with the exceptional in ethnographic work and the deployment of exceptional data in ethnographies of streetlife. While the analysis of participant observation data is an under-explored domain of ethnographic methods texts (see LeCompte and Schensul [2013] for a notable exception), an analytical 'trick' (Becker 1998) routinely described is that of deviant or negative case analysis; of paying particular attention to cases that 'jar' with the rest of your data (Becker 1998: 85-87). As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 169) put it:

*In addition to focusing on the performance of routine actions and rituals, analysis must also... give attention to unusual, deviant and problematic events and situations. ...These types of*

*event may be numerically rare, but they often provide illumination of more mundane phenomena, by throwing the latter into sharp relief and by providing important information based on how social actors respond to them. ... [D]eviant and unusual cases are important in helping us understand the limits of the normal and the unremarkable, and in mapping the types and variety of actions in any given social setting [emphasis added].*

Remarkable events and situations recorded in ethnographic fieldwork are advocated as important analytical devices, or analytics, for the ethnographer. They are one dimension by which the researcher can cut her or his data to not only more comprehensively map the range of social activities constituent of a setting, but also to extend and deepen the scope of their analysis.

In a similar vein, in relation to the qualitative observation and analysis of social settings *per se*, including public realm settings, Lofland et al (2006: 124) identify 'episodes' (including 'crowd disorders such as riots and so-called panics') as the second of nine units of social settings that might usefully be discerned in fieldwork. As with Hammersely and Atkinson's account of deviant cases, Lofland et al (2006: 124) distinguish episodes from routine occurrences:

*In contrast to practices, episodes are more remarkable and dramatic to the participants and therefore to the analyst as well, for the simple reason that they are not fully anticipated and/or do not occur so routinely or regularly.*

Lofland et al (2006: 124) go on to describe a range of studies (in the sociological sub-fields 'of deviance, crime, disasters, crowd behaviour, and social movements') dedicated to the analysis of episodes of this kind. In this paper, however, my interest is in how studies centred on streetlife accommodate and treat 'episodes' or empirical instances of deviant events.

Although perhaps not in name, deviant case analysis has long been a feature of urban ethnography. In his classic account of 'street corner society' in the North End of Boston, for instance, Whyte (1943: 14-25) famously uses his own, exceptional, victory in a ten-pin bowling contest he participated in with the members of the Nortons gang he was studying to enrich his analysis of the relationship between bowling and social ranking among gang members. As Ocejo (2013: 151-2) puts it:

*When Whyte unexpectedly wins a competition between the members, he learns that they consider it a concession that they allow him to have, since he is not an official member of the gang. ... Whyte's performance is not a form of socialization, but an event that highlights the group's social structure and the salience of social boundaries.*

By understanding what happens when a non-member of the gang unexpectedly wins a bowling contest, and specifically discussing the significance of this outcome with his research participants (Whyte 1943: 21), Whyte is able to better understand the ways that social order is produced and maintained through bowling for members of the gang. Whyte, that is, uses an unusual occurrence to more fully understand the typical order of things, and importantly he frames his analysis along these lines.

As the notion of the 'everyday' has become more central to ethnographic accounts of streetlife, and deployed in a more theoretical (as opposed to descriptive) way, however, a conflation of the exceptional with the everyday (in terms of empirical substance) seems to have occurred that goes beyond discerning the profound in the everyday (Neal 2015). Rather than conceptualise 'episodes' analytically at 'the limits of the normal and the unremarkable' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 169), that is, such fieldwork moments are analysed as (markers of) the everyday. Take, for example, Hall's engaging account of 'ordinary cities and everyday resistance'. In this paper, Hall (2015: 862-863) uses her data to produce a vivid account of a dispute over the purchase of a mobile phone that resulted, exceptionally, in '[a] heated street protest representing the party who had bought the phone', a meeting between the sides to mediate this dispute and a short film of this meeting. Drawing on this example, Hall (2015: 864) argues that '[e]veryday street politics evolves through both crisis and common ground, where crisis provides a momentum for collective action, and common ground provides a medium for refining the forms of collective engagement' (ibid 2015: 864).

In this reading, a protest is not analysed in contra-distinction to the everyday, but precisely as constitutive of 'everyday street politics on Rye Lane' (Hall 2015: 864). The empirically exceptional is framed as definitive of the everyday in this instance; the exceptional is subsumed into the everyday. Notably, in Hall's (2015) account the term 'everyday' is being used in relation to a wider call for more scholastic attention to 'ordinary cities' (Robinson 2006), and specifically to locate her research in 'the commonplace local urban high street within ethnically diverse and comparatively deprived urban localities' (Hall 2015: 855). However, the term is then used not only to locate the analysis that follows, but also to characterise the practices and situations observed in that space as instances of 'everyday resistance' and 'everyday street politics'.

Wilson's (2011) ethnographic account of the social setting of the urban public bus as 'an indelible symbol of public space and daily encounter' (ibid 2011: 634) can be read in a similar manner. To underpin a key argument of her paper, about the unspoken rules of bus passengering, Wilson (2011: 639-641) reproduces a lengthy set of fieldnotes in which she observes an uncomfortable encounter

over the rightful occupation of a bus seat. Notably, Wilson (2011: 641) describes this sort of encounter as ‘not...commonplace,’ noting how what makes the fieldnotes described ‘stand out’ is the severity with which the matter at hand is dealt. Nevertheless, the encounter is treated analytically as *constitutive of* ‘everyday multiculturalism and the daily negotiation of difference and intercultural relations’ (ibid 2011: 635). In these examples it is the putative qualities of the settings (as ‘ordinary’ [Hall 2015] or ‘prosaic’ [Wilson 2011: 637]) that come to characterise the social activity described, rather than the experiential ‘everydayness’ of these phenomena.<sup>vi</sup> In these instances exceptional social activity in an ‘everyday setting’ is itself framed as ‘everyday’ and it is in this sort of move, I argue, that the utility of ‘the analytic of the everyday’ (Hall 2015: 859) starts to break down and demand further attention.

## Conclusion

Graham Day (2006: 1) sets the groundwork for his book *Community and Everyday Life* by highlighting that ‘many...would agree that “community” is a concept that has been worked to death: its range of meanings is so wide and diverse, its connotations so inconsistent..., that it deserves no place in any serious social analysis.’ I would argue that as the other subject of his book, ‘everyday life’, comes to proliferate in ethnographic accounts of streetlife, and further afield, there is a danger that usage of the conceptual qualifier ‘everyday’ is heading in the same direction. Notably, the methodological focus of this paper, ethnography, has recently been the subject of a similar treatise. Thus in an impassioned article, Ingold (2014: 383) asserts that ‘[e]thnography has become a term so overused, both in anthropology and in contingent disciplines, that it has lost much of its meaning.’ As use of the term ‘everyday’ likewise heads in the direction of apparent ubiquity, to the extent that Felski (2000: 15) fairly asks if it refers ‘to the whole social world’, my argument here echoes Ingold’s (2014: 384) in his call for more definitional ‘precision.’ Without this, I argue, the qualifier ‘everyday’ risks becoming redundant, signifying little to the reader about the particularities of the empirical content being described (or worse still obscuring their understanding).

In particular, my argument is that in ethnographic accounts of ‘streetlife’, where the ‘everyday’ concept has become particularly salient, deployments of the term ‘everyday’ *as an ‘analytic’* – as an analytical device for specifying claims made on the basis of our empirical data – warrant refinement. Here I am referring very explicitly to the data used by ethnographers to substantiate their arguments about the everyday, and how more attention ought to be paid – in the spirit of ‘deviant case analysis’ – to the ways that exceptional ‘episodes’ recorded in fieldwork collected in social settings are framed and interpreted vis-à-vis the everyday (cf. Brinkmann 2000: 16-17). Concurring with Highmore’s (2002: 3) argument that ‘[t]he non-everyday (the exceptional) is there to be found in the

heart of the everyday', I would argue that rather than framing the focus of a given study as either 'everyday' or 'exceptional', instead ethnographers should be attentive to the ways that (potentially profoundly formative [Bhattacharjee and Mogilner 2014; also Berman 2006: xxxii-xxxiii]) episodes punctuate individuals' experiences of everyday life.

Of course, exceptionality is not a given – as indicated earlier an exceptional set of circumstances for one group might be constructed as an everyday experience by another (eg Iveson [2006: 205-6] on police harassment 'becoming an everyday occurrence for many young people in cities in Australia'). But it is only by harnessing the immersive qualities of ethnographic fieldwork to be attentive to, and reflexive about, how researchers and the researched variously conceptualise events as routine or not – to a young person quipping in Iveson's (2006: 205-6) case that as a member of 'a group of ethnic minority young people on the street, they were bound to attract the attention of police' – that we can start to deviate from the academic habitus in ethnography (Bourgois 2002) and instead turn to more accurately depicting and doing justice to the local meanings with which ethnography has been fundamentally concerned (Becker 1996: 58).

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<sup>i</sup> The Southbank Centre is Europe's largest assemblage of cultural institutions and is located on the south embankment of the River Thames in central London. The Southbank Centre occupies a 27-acre estate comprising a number of Arts institutions and the public realm between and around these institutions' respective buildings. It is this constituent public realm that was the subject of my study.

<sup>ii</sup> 'Public space' is itself subject to a range of critiques, both as a sociological concept (eg Iveson 2007: 1-19) and as a physical realm (eg Carmona 2010), and the labile qualities of 'publicness' in the city have likewise been theoretically developed (esp. Madanipour 2009; also Lofland 1998: 14-15). For the purposes of the research cited in this article I took a 'topographical approach' (Iveson 2007: 4-9) to public space whereby I was interested in how an accessible set of spaces formally produced as 'public realm,' albeit with a complex ownership and management arrangement (Jones 2014: 6-7), was experienced, practised and produced by users of that space.

<sup>iii</sup> In this paper, 'streetlife' will be taken to refer to the social life of the urban public realm – the streets, squares, plazas and so on 'of urban settlements in which individuals in copresence tend to be personally known or only categorically known to each other' (Lofland 1998: 9).

<sup>iv</sup> Here comparison can be drawn to Proust's account of an episode of involuntary memory associated with the 'everyday' practice of eating a madeleine, whereby the exceptional, overwhelming sensations experienced derive from the banal and typically forgettable act of eating a snack.

<sup>v</sup> This re-orientation towards the sites and settings of everyday life is mirrored in other social science disciplines, for instance the political scientist and anthropologist James Scott's body of work on micro-politics (eg Scott 2012).

<sup>vi</sup> For another example of this analytical disconnect see Hung's (2016: 536-537) interpretation of 'occasionally' observed instances of customers using a West Los Angeles convenience store in unintended ways as instances of everyday place-making.