

RESEARCH ARTICLE

How everyday life matters: everyday politics, everyday consumption and social change

Luke Yates, luke.s.yates@manchester.ac.uk
University of Manchester, UK

Everyday life, a nebulous and contested concept, is increasingly featuring in accounts of socioeconomic transformation. This article reviews its connections with consumption, sometimes referred to as ‘everyday consumption’; and to political action, ‘everyday politics’. It brings together different theoretical and empirical agendas to explore intersections and shifts in ideas around transformation. The first section describes the ways in which everyday life has become associated with consumption, especially through studying practices and their relationship with ecological change. It argues that power, politics and resources are largely absent from these discussions. The second section therefore reviews literature on power, noting that influential theory, including feminist perspectives, practice theory and the work of Michel Foucault, all places emphasis on quotidian situations, interactions and instances, offering ways forward to addressing the absence of power in research on everyday consumption. The third section explores and compares the diverse literature on ‘everyday politics’, lifestyle movements, everyday resistance, prefiguration, life politics and subpolitics. The article groups these and other claims about how the everyday matters for social change into a set of common debates around *resources, issues and themes, objects of study, and consequences*. This helps identify some notable empirical findings, contrasting analytical claims, and suggests some priorities for future research.

Key words everyday consumption • everyday politics • power • practice theory • social transformation

To cite this article: Yates, L. (2022) How everyday life matters: everyday politics, everyday consumption and social change, *Consumption and Society*, 1(1): 144–169, DOI: 10.1332/MBPU6295

Introduction

Since the mid-1980s there has been a rise in social scientific research referencing, examining or theorising everyday life. ‘Everyday’ is most commonly used as an adjective: everyday life, experience, language, practices, politics, deployed to identify and defamiliarise previously unappreciated social phenomena, but it is sometimes also a noun that is roughly synonymous to ‘everyday life’: ‘the everyday’. Everyday life

matters, in most arguments, because although it may appear familiar, ordinary, humble, banal and personal, these qualities also imply that it is also universal, ubiquitous and normal.¹ While it has commonly been used to justify attention to phenomena that have been historically overlooked, another perspective is that everyday life should attune social scientists to a distinctive way of seeing and analysing (Scott, 2009; Pink, 2012; Trentmann, 2012; Back, 2015), an orientation, it will be argued, that offers insights into understanding and theorising economy, politics and social transformation.

As Gardiner (2000) notes, the concept's history already encompasses claims around how important the everyday is for understandings of politics and consumption. While sociologists such as Schütz, Garfinkel and Goffman all identified everyday life as a starting-point for sociological analysis, Gardiner (2000) argues that an additional 'critical' tradition of scholars and movements used the concept for a critique of how power and resistance operate in everyday processes and practices. Everyday life for Michel de Certeau (1984), for example, was important in counteracting structuralist analysis of how images, representations and rules shaped reality, providing a sense of the ways in which these phenomena are received, understood, consumed and resisted. More radically, analysis of the everyday, and of consumption (understood here as *appropriation*, in Warde's [2010] formulation), was about assessing the extent and limits to the exercise of power through empirical attention to experience and techniques of resistance in spite of the strategies of elites. According to Henri Lefebvre (2014 [1947]), a focus on everyday life was also intellectually grounding, as a corrective to idealism. Yet he saw the everyday – while possessing a utopian character and potential – as being colonised and rationalised by commodities, work, consumption (here understood as *acquisition* [Warde, 2010]) and popular culture. That implied a necessary critique of everyday life, that would unpack the nature of its domination by untoward influences (Lefebvre, 2014 [1947]). For both de Certeau and Lefebvre, to defamiliarise the everyday and to identify tensions, contradictions and immanent possibilities of alternative realities was to commit to understanding dynamism, change and potential for social transformation. Pierre Bourdieu, meanwhile, viewed practice as the outcome of interaction subject to social power invested in fields and through forms of capital. Consumption practices (understood most often as taste, or *appreciation*) signalled and reproduced social distinctions and power – though with less sense of how they might be evaded or challenged. As Gardiner (2000) demonstrates, for intellectual and political movements throughout the 20th century, the social scientific significance of the everyday has been its relationship to domination, commodification and alienation, *as well as* its representing the domain or context in which all things happen, often unnoticed. This article seeks to draw out the implications of taking the everyday seriously in these different ways.

It is useful to expand on the distinction between everyday life 'mattering' in terms of its being an important domain or context; or having an important relationship to economy, power and politics. The boundaries of everyday life are vague and contested. Everyday life, because it is obvious, mundane, material and domestic, and experienced directly and continuously by everyone, can be framed as separate from abstract structures and categories, especially the extraordinary, exceptional, economic and political (Scott, 2009). Going further, some scholars suggest, everyday life is not only epistemologically more tangible, but is the only reality that can be meaningfully studied. For these authors, inspired particularly by ethnographic methodologies and sometimes flat ontologies, everyday life is significant *in spite of*

not pertaining to either economy or politics, the domains typically understood as those pivotal in a society's functioning, flourishing or failing. Everyday life, then, is sometimes characterised both by those who study it intensively and those who largely do not, as concerning only specific phenomena such as personal interactions and relationships, objects, and the immediate and directly observable (Back, 2015).

This article argues, somewhat contrastingly, that the concept matters precisely because everyday life offers an orientation: a way of seeing and analysing for exploring tensions around scale, time, and between the seen and unseen, the tangible and intangible, structures and local interactions. Rather than *replacing* fundamental questions of social science, the argument is that the types of observation and attention associated with everyday life shed new light, reveal angles and facets, and improve understanding of social phenomena whether they are normally unseen, or spectacular. Correspondingly, the article targets two scholarly positions on everyday life. One group do not need persuading that everyday life matters. For them, the argument is about reviewing and reimagining the ways in which everyday life analysis can be applied in order to defamiliarise economic and political phenomena, focusing on the question of social transformation. Considering the second group, already more animated by the question of transformation, politics and political economy, the article highlights how the study of everyday life draws attention to alternative mechanisms of change and alternative approaches to analysing change. In doing so, the article seeks to add to a growing literature that considers theoretical approaches to everyday life in relation to economy, politics and transformation (for example, Sztompka, 2008; Pink, 2012; Trentmann, 2012).

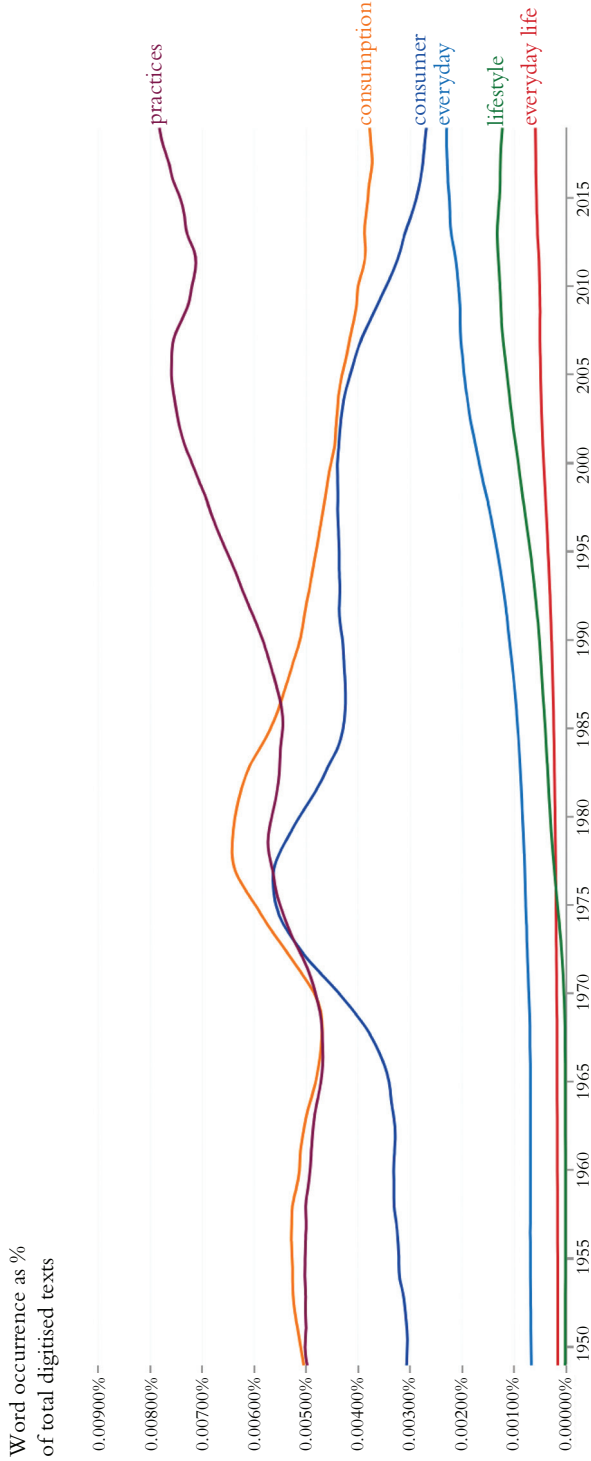
The article has three subsequent sections. First, the rise of social scientific interest in the area of everyday life and its relationship to consumption is established and contextualised. I note that the focus is normally justified either through the ubiquity yet often overlooked nature of the ordinary; themes around identity and resistance; or for the effects of resource consumption associated with everyday lives in the global North. Despite the history of the concept of everyday life, power and politics have become increasingly absent from debates. The third section, therefore, explores how important everyday life is in contemporary understandings of the exercise of power, and so also resistance and contestation. This suggests that a closer dialogue between power and everyday consumption is timely and feasible. Lastly, the article reviews the literature which has best addressed these intersections by mapping and comparing terms such as everyday politics, everyday resistance and lifestyle movements. It identifies four key puzzles or debates across these debates and also across literature on everyday life, centred on *issues and themes, resources, objects of study and consequences*. It also offers some hypotheses and questions for future research, arguing that using everyday as an *orientation* as opposed to simply a qualification justifying analysis of a specific realm, may progress understandings of economy, power and politics, as well as a better understanding of the articulation between different phenomena, scales and methodological approaches in social science.

Everyday consumption and how it changes

Shifting meanings of the everyday in relation to consumption

The rise in the centrality of everyday life in public debate and the social sciences should be viewed alongside other associated concepts such as lifestyle, practices and

Figure 1: N-gram analysis of the percentage of occurrence of *everyday*, *consumption* and *practices* relative to other words used in all digitised books published between 1949 and 2019



Source: [Google Books \(2022\)](#)

consumption. Though not a substitute for traditional forms of literature review, patterns in published debates can be mapped visually using ‘n-gram’ analysis of word incidence relative to other words in digitised books over time (see [Figure 1](#)).² This confirms that the term ‘everyday’ has become generally more important from the 1980s onwards, but especially from the 1990s to the present (for a longer genealogy and an intellectual history, see [Trentmann, 2012](#); see also reviews in [Scott, 2009](#); [Pink, 2012](#)). While the terms *everyday* and *everyday life* are growing over the 70-year period, [Figure 1](#) also displays trend lines for *consumer* and *consumption*, which both peak between 1975 and 1980, *lifestyle*, which peaks in around 2012, and *practices*, which has risen over time in three phases, most rapidly between 1975 and 1980 and subsequently from the early 2000s to the present. The interplay of these concepts is discussed qualitatively in what follows. A scan of the first page results since 2011 confirms that *everyday life* is salient in titles published in the social sciences but is also playing out in subfields as diverse as early modern material culture, theology, antiracism and education, linguistics, critical geopolitics, architecture, neuropsychology, sexism, sustainability and mathematics. In particular, though, an emphasis on the everyday, and its significance for social transformation, has coincided with increasing attention to consumption and, subsequently, practices.

Literature from the mid-1980s, influenced by cultural studies and theoretical perspectives on postmodernism, explored the everyday in the first major wave of sociological work dedicated to the theme of consumption. The primary inspirations were the themes of identity, resistance and transgression, which were studied through rituals, style and music (for example, [Hall and Jefferson, 1975](#)). The Birmingham School, especially Dick Hebdige, Stuart Hall and Angela McRobbie, focused on cultural consumption to do this, leading to an important link between consumption, everyday life and identity. The focus on the everyday understandings and practices of working-class subcultures led to interest in the consumption of the wider population, increasingly described as popular culture, or lifestyles. Lifestyle referred to the integration of practices spanning people’s daily lives ([Spaargaren and Van Vliet, 2000](#)). Yet the concept and its significance was differently inflected for different authors ([Featherstone, 1987](#)). Some were influenced by new cultural emphases present in both ‘Third Way’ politics and postmodernism, seeing lifestyle as expressing an ethos of fluidity, structurelessness, individual self-determination and choice associated with consumer culture; others understood lifestyle as a way of demonstrating the relationship between goods and practices that demarcated social groups from each other. Anthony [Giddens \(1991\)](#), among other theorists beginning to take consumption seriously, was somewhere in-between, and characteristic in connecting the importance of biography to the idea of an assemblage of self-conscious choices about activities. ‘A lifestyle’, he wrote, ‘can be defined as a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity’ ([Giddens, 1991: 81](#)). Style itself was seen by cultural studies as being a form of rebellion for specific generations and racial groups to a dominant society; whereas signs, identities, lifestyles and consumption began to be framed influentially for *everyone in society* as a domain for creative play, transgression, hedonism and freedom through the construction and combination of various consumer choices ([Graeber, 2011](#)). The ‘politics’ of consumption was initially about generation, identity and

forms of resistance by those with few resources, then increasingly, individualisation, reflexivity and life choices (McRobbie, 1994; Bauman, 1998).

However, in the late 1990s, a number of texts, again placing consumption at the centre of their analysis, began to suggest that the emphasis on meaning, texts, distinction and agency had led to what was really ‘everyday’ about consumption, and how it mattered, being neglected. That had implications for understanding consumption and everyday life, but also for what was starting to be understood as the critical reason to examine them: the environmental impacts of life in rich countries in the global North (Heiskanen and Pantzar, 1997; Wilk, 2002). This led to work about sustainable consumption (Cohen and Murphy, 2000; Southerton et al, 2004), ordinary consumption (Gronow and Warde, 2001) and inconspicuous consumption. The latter, discussed in an influential book chapter by Elizabeth Shove and Alan Warde (2001), argued that consumption studies so far had emphasised certain types of consumption at the expense of more ordinary, inconspicuous and ‘everyday’ things (see also Wilhite, 2005). They sought to show how social scientific understandings of consumption might address the environmental impacts of the resources expended in daily life.

The most environmentally problematic aspects of consumption are almost entirely beyond the remit of current sociological approaches [yet] taking analysis of these particular spheres of consumption seriously will again shift attention away from an intellectual obsession with the glamorous aspects of consumption toward its more routine, pragmatic, practical, symbolically neutral, socially determined, collectively imposed, jointly experienced, non-individualised elements. (Shove and Warde, 2001: 248)

Concepts such as lifestyle, ecological modernisation and Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and praxis circulated as potential answers to these challenges (Spaargraen and Van Vliet, 2000; Wilk, 2002). Increasingly, practices became the main object of study for studying everyday consumption. The rationales for this were complex and multifaceted. Focusing too directly on consumption can obscure the way that it is simply part of everyday life – the tacit, unremarkable and routine ways in which activity is understood by its practitioners and treated and governed by society (Warde, 2005; Røpke, 2009; Spaargaren, 2011). Dealing with consumption required dealing with the totality of social organisation, in order to understand and properly contextualise consumption as a ‘moment in every practice’ (Warde, 2005). A much wider body of social scientific work also addressed the normative, political and economic challenges and consequences of everyday consumption drawing on additional themes relating to (for example) work, growth economies and material culture (for example, Jackson, 2009; Schor, 2005; Miller, 2012). Yet theories of practice proposed an object of analysis and epistemology for examining everyday life, and increasingly, developed a theoretical framework for making sense of how it changes.

How do practice theories conceptualise social change?

Although few authors working with practice theories explicitly offer theories of social transformation, many are concerned with how practices coordinate different elements making up social organisation. These perspectives suggest that social change can be

seen in terms of the reconfiguration of practices. Some major perspectives include Bourdieusian, Actor Network Theory (ANT) and Schatzkian (for example, [Schatzki, 2002](#)) approaches. Each has had consequences for the way that transformation is theorised. Bourdieu's emphasis on taste has become important in measuring shifts in the expression of sociocultural inequalities around appreciation, and his concept of field has become important in a number of subdisciplines. ANT has reconfigured understanding of the material and poses generative questions about agency and causality. Many of these insights have become important for consumption scholarship in conjunction with other practice approaches, especially those influenced by Theodore Schatzki.

Scholars working on consumption and practices have mainly drawn on Schatzki (for example, [1996; 2002](#)), alongside science and technology studies, material culture, and the sociology of time. An important contribution has been [Shove et al's \(2012\) *The Dynamics of Social Practice: Everyday Life and How it Changes*](#). The book draws on and elaborates a number of studies which have examined shifts around the use of environmentally consequential and widely distributed domestic technologies. The book frames social change through the questions: 'How do practices emerge, exist and die?' and 'How do bundles and complexes of practice form, persist and disappear?' Shove and colleagues explain change through the idea that 'social practices consist of elements that are integrated when practices are enacted ... [and] that practices emerge, persist and disappear as links between their defining elements are made and broken' ([Shove et al, 2012: 21](#)). These elements are meanings (cognition, emotion and motivation) materials (objects, infrastructures and the body) and competences (skills, knowledge and understandings). Explanations of change, of the consequences of everyday life, remain focused at a relatively granular level around what people do. Everyday life is equated both to this granular level of activity, as with [Scott \(2009\)](#) and others writing on the topic. 'Everyday' practices also means the things that *everyone* does routinely. This universality suggests that differences in people's resources, or differences in the resources they consume, are less important than the resources expended in particular practices.

The emergence, persistence or decline of a practice – the form in which social change is understood – is explained by changes in the combination of different elements, enacted through *performances* of practices. This means that the entities we understand as practices, and the correct way to carry them out, are always subtly shifting. A second form of social change emerges from the *competition* between practices to 'recruit' practitioners and conversely their 'defection'. For example, the 20th century saw the rapid decline of cycling in most industrialised countries as more and more 'practitioners' were 'recruited' to driving due to increased space offered to cars in cities, and growing distances between homes and workplaces. [Shove et al \(2012\)](#) propose, in less detail, other mechanisms of change too, arising from relations between practices, through which practices form 'bundles', 'complexes' and 'constellations'. These terms have the function of translating phenomena such as norms, collectives and institutions into the practice ontology, but work according to the same logic of connecting, disconnecting and reconnecting elements of practice (see also [Blue and Spurling, 2016; Schatzki, 2016](#)). Transformation and consequences of everyday life take place through many people doing practices differently, adding up to change in aggregate.

Yet in producing powerful counter-narratives to conventional actor-based accounts, this and a number of other practice-based accounts of change can neglect the topic of political projects, social struggles and collective agency (Welch and Yates, 2018). Practices are shaped by companies that want to sell products and services, states that want to govern activity, social movements which want recognition or resources, but these actors' practices and goals are scarcely mentioned. Their absence is a surprising feature of this iteration of the practice theoretical approach, and it is also unnecessary (Sahakian and Wilhite, 2014; Schatzki, 2016; Welch and Yates, 2018). The book's use of the examples of Nordic walking and freezers, for instance, are drawn from secondary literature where the roles of collective actors, which include marketers of Nordic walking sticks and freezer manufacturers, *are* acknowledged. Such arguments and exceptions show that a practice theoretical account need not de-centre agency, the actor or strategic action. This is obvious even in Shove et al (2012), where in the final chapter the role of states seems pivotal for envisioning interventions.

The relative absence of politics and power from influential ways of understanding everyday life as it relates to economies is also a feature in the analysis of politicised forms of consumption, as the next sub-section describes. These absences suggest the potential usefulness of engaging with theories about everyday power and politics, which highlight some concepts and ways in which similar ordinary processes can be seen as part of struggles, domination and subjectivation, a task which the final two sections take up.

Politicised consumption and change

The implications of everyday consumption for social transformation are covered in literature beyond work on practices and sustainability. Most obviously, the implications of everyday consumption for change are also important in the politicisation of consumption and lifestyle in consumer movements and in boycotting and 'buycotting' (Micheletti, 2003; Lorenzen, 2012; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013; Wahlen and Laamanen, 2015). The argument of this sub-section, however, is that theories about political consumerism, like some theories of practice, also suffer from a model of social transformation that neglects power relations.

Early arguments suggested that political consumerism might dramatically shift the way that societies work, consumption representing a 'consumer vote' with which global challenges might be resolved (Beck, 1997; Micheletti, 2003). The classic mode of transformation associated with political consumerism was of the accumulated effect of the politicised decisions of individuals shifting patterns of consumption. Gradually, the economy would come to reflect the ethical individual choices of 'critical citizens' (Norris, 1999). Like some 'strong' theories of practice, this literature neglected some important questions of power and politics. A concern is that the literature reproduces narratives from companies, states, non-governmental organisations and commentators which have contributed towards 'responsibilising' individuals for the global environmental crisis, as opposed to states and corporations (Jacobsen and Dulsrud, 2007; Barnett et al, 2010; Sassatelli and Davolio, 2010). Rebecca Solnit (2021) argues, along these lines, that focusing on practices or individuals presents what she calls an 'additive' as opposed to 'multiplicative' logic of social change, whereby environmental crisis and its solution is seen as a problem of billions of everyday lives, and is addressed through those individuals or their practices changing. Transformations

lie in individuals taking responsibility and changing the world by embodying change in individual economic decisions. In its crudest form, everyday life matters in the original political consumerism cosmology – and in strong social practice theory – because the aggregation of the wrong consumer practices sustain environmental crises and various forms of inequality. It follows that policy interventions ought to focus on making people change their everyday practices, either by giving them the information to decide to do so through virtuous consumer choices, or by nudging them to do so by strategic interventions in the elements composing practices.

Yet as more recent work on political consumerism explicitly recognises, transformation related to political consumerism tends to take place when boycotts or boycotting are part of wider political campaigns which draw in many other political repertoires, modes of leverage, influence and interaction which normally work *together* with alternative consumption habits to achieve goals (see section 4.5; [Harrison et al, 2005](#); [Halkier and Holm, 2008](#); [Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013](#)). Collectives and alternative economic initiatives turn conflictual issues into everyday consumer politics. Although boycotting and buycotting are themselves relatively weak repertoires of collective action, they can be ways of framing and popularising issues, recruiting activists to a position, and solidifying a sense of togetherness that can be oppositional. There is an ambivalence here. Although people may be ‘responsibilised’ by political consumerism, it may also play a part in repertoires of collective action that are directed at those with the power to make interventions to change the way that practices are provisioned or are coordinated.

The argument is that emphasis on everyday consumption practices and on politicised practices such as boycotting can obscure the power relations which help in understanding how transformation works. There are complementary literatures on everyday power and politics that offer ideas about processes of transformation that are relevant to consumption beyond practices ‘adding up’ to problems or ‘adding up’ to change. Theories of everyday power and politics present additional ways through which everyday life matters – with respect to resistance, collective identities and collective action. This, it is argued, positions everyday life as a useful point of inflection between different types of phenomena, and its study and associated concepts as a way of negotiating dualisms between (for example) micro and macro, the ordinary and extraordinary, and between personal and public. A key way of demonstrating this, and important because of its relative neglect in the literatures described here, is to discuss the relationships between everyday life, theories of power and the literature on everyday politics, themes which the remainder of this article addresses.

Power and everyday life: sketching connections with consumption practices

Expanding understandings of power and politics since the 1960s have raised difficult questions about the subject matter of political sociology, social movement studies and political participation studies. Everyday life has been at the centre of these challenges. Feminist critiques challenge the idea that politics must necessarily relate to political institutions of the state and to public interactions by showing how patriarchy plays out in both obvious ways but also often invisibly and in private (for example, [Millet, 1970](#); [McRobbie, 1994](#)). Similarly, insights from social theorists including Michel Foucault, Stephen Lukes, James Scott and Judith Butler frame forms of power and domination

as widely distributed and continually reproduced, performed and challenged in and across social structures, and in relations of daily life. Given that these perspectives on power and politics place everyday life at the centre of analysis, their relative absence from the recent study of everyday consumption needs to be addressed. This section reviews the role of everyday life in relation to power, and highlights links with practice theoretical perspectives, suggesting approaches to everyday life and transformation that would benefit from their being placed in conversation.

Understandings of power have changed rapidly since the 1970s. [Stephen Lukes' \(1974\)](#) seminal contribution argued, inspired by Gramsci, that power was not only about the capacity to make an actor do something contrary to their desires. Power was also not just about limiting the agenda of what could be questioned or what might be considered controversial in order to suit an actor's agenda. The concept of the 'third face of power' argued that power might also shape people's perceptions in a way that leads to their accepting their role in the existing order of things without opposition. Michel Foucault's contributions to the debate strengthened and nuanced this position. They ranged from observations about the importance of the internalisation of discipline through the surveillance and monitoring of institutions in which people interacted (1977) to forms or practices of biopower, which allowed for the governance, maintenance and manipulation of entire populations (1979: 139). Examples include the use of practices around surveillance, medical examinations and statistics, which expanded regulation and self-discipline through the normalising forces applied through institutions but increasingly experienced in daily life and internalised in the subject itself. Foucault persistently referenced the intimate, micro-social and embodied self, and its desires, attributes and practices, as the level on which this form of power operates (1979: 145–6). The consent of populations to political arrangements are assured by these power relationships, but society and the everyday are also produced through these matrices of government and administration. A contemporary example might be in the ways in which healthcare providers classify individuals according to normal distribution curves on a range of criteria, and the associated widespread use of personal technologies which monitor, collect and gamify data around body weight and type, diet, exercise and sleep patterns in comparison with other users. These shape everyday embodied practices, through and alongside reshaping environments and algorithms (for example, [Whitson, 2013](#)).

Foucault (1994 [1982]) clarifies more directly his sense of how these forms of power are exercised in everyday life in the lecture 'The Subject and Power': 'In effect, what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions' (1994: 340). This power tends not to coerce or prohibit overtly, therefore, but is subterranean, it 'operates on the field of possibilities in which the behaviour of active subjects is able to inscribe itself' (1994: 341). Foucault playfully calls this the 'conduct of conduct' – the orchestration, organisation and coordination of behaviour and practices. The linguistic circularity highlights the circular reproduction of power relations by ordinary and widespread practices, and vice versa. This has significant implications for how everyday life should be viewed. Foucault is suggesting that power, and the work of government, is something that is constantly being brought into being by ordinary interactions and activity, not just executed by states and authorities; despite their particularly enhanced capacity to 'structure the possible field of action of others' (1994: 341). Changing

views of power were also emerging in public discourse over the same period largely through feminist thought and the concept of patriarchy (Eisenstein, 1979). These made more straightforward connections than did Foucault between power and the political, as in, for example, Kate Millet's (1970: 23) definition: 'The term "politics" shall refer to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another.'

These contemporary perspectives on power, transformed by feminist theory, Lukes, Foucault, Butler and others, have a number of parallels with social practice theory, which hint at how the latter might incorporate power, politics and collective action (Watson, 2016). They emphasise the ongoing production and reproduction of practices (Schatzki, 1996: 90) and, through them, institutions (Giddens, 1984). Emphasis is placed on how performances of practices and some common elements together compose what is seen as ordinary and appropriate behaviour in any scenario (for example, Warde, 2005: 140). Indeed, expanding on similar ideas, everyday practices are increasingly being framed as a promising way for examining interactions in relation of inequality, domination and actorhood (for example, Welch and Yates, 2018). This position is supported by interventions from Foucault, who illustrates through many examples that states and collective actors have particular advantages in coordinating action and shaping practices. In many practice theoretical accounts, and sister approaches such as ANT, the relative absence of collective actors and agency means that relations of 'power over', or the coordination of activity, are rarely mentioned, with much more emphasis on intermediary objects of analysis such as material contexts and objects themselves, and the competences and understandings that are available to practitioners. Yet Schatzki appears very close to Foucault when describing the coordinating work of practices and the material contexts of social orders (2002: 22), suggesting how the role of collectives and 'larger' social phenomena are compatible with his approach (see also Schatzki, 2016). Practices and orders:

make courses of action easier, harder, shorter, simpler, more complicated, shorter, longer, ill-advised, promising of ruin, promising of gain, disruptive, facilitating, obligatory or proscribed, acceptable or unacceptable, more or less relevant, riskier or safer, more or less feasible, more or less likely to induce ridicule or approbation – as well as physically impossible or possible and feasible and unfeasible. (Schatzki, 2002: 225)

How does this matter for thinking about everyday life and transformation? A Foucauldian or Schatzkian approach to power and resistance, helpful for improving practice theoretical approaches to everyday life, appreciates the capacity of collective agencies such as states and social movements to entrench practices, conducting or coordinating activity. That means that resistance, too, is shaped by power – the risks for engaging in boycotts, for example, are lower than those for defying the law and state authorities by engaging in civil disobedience. It also follows that effective contestation of power might involve blocking or occupying those sites which entrench, conduct or coordinate undesirable activity. Alternatively, it might involve coordinating activity in new directions, projects and institutions in prefigurative politics (Yates, 2021).

The implications are that a Schatzkian or Foucauldian approach to power and, by extension, resistance and collective contestation, could encompass a range of forms and processes of transformation, none of which need to be discarded on

the basis of ontological discontinuity with practice theory, and are relatively easily accommodated into existing accounts of social transformation that begin with or otherwise acknowledge everyday consumption practices. At the same time, it is worth highlighting that Foucault, Butler and others are *adding to* and developing existing understandings of domination and discipline, not seeking to replace them entirely as in some poststructuralist formulations. References to forms of domination such as ‘sovereign power’ are reminders of forms of interaction where the options open to other agents are much more proscribed. Governmental repression, incarceration, war and police brutality, though experienced very tangibly in ‘everyday life’, are not necessarily best understood by theories about everyday power relations. The ways in which governmentality and biopower work, and examples which allow us to see non-coercive power, supplement existing approaches to understanding domination in its different forms, which any theory must accommodate.

To summarise so far, the trajectory of the concept of everyday life in analysing consumption practices establishes a range of ways in which everyday practices matter. In doing so, I have already indirectly introduced four areas of particular importance: contrasting *consequences and modes of transformation*, some competing *objects of study*, and several *issues and themes* articulated in the context of these discussions, from generational politics, to identity, to sustainability, to gender politics, many of which draw attention to differences in *resources* being consequential in and through daily life.

Both everyday consumption and understandings of power experienced in, and shaping, everyday life, also hint in various ways at conflict, resistance, mobilisation, dissent, and their relationship to everyday life. The next and final section, therefore, reviews the array of perspectives on this specific topic through juxtaposing a number of definitions and summaries of terminology relating to everyday politics. It then highlights the debates which run across it and which concern the wider question of how everyday life matters in terms of understanding social change. It discusses the four areas where future research might pick up the questions raised by the article overall.

Mapping the ways that everyday life matters

Everyday political action: change, variation and alternative angles

The concept of everyday life has been important in work on consumption and power, in ways where different objects of study, themes, levels of resources, and forms of consequence and transformation, are being discussed and described. In relation to political action, too, a range of terminology relating to everyday life has been coined to describe either: new or newly identified forms of participation; more diverse forms of participation than were previously recognised; or the practices which underpin, hold together or otherwise help explain political action. The terms include everyday politics, lifestyle politics, identity politics, micropolitics, life politics, subpolitics, infra-politics, lifestyle movement, everyday resistance, personal politics, cultural movements, individualised collective action, quiet activism, prefigurative politics, political consumerism, and many more.

Although they are linked semantically and by some of the kinds of claims made, these concepts emerge from very diverse traditions and disciplines, including development studies, sociology, anthropology, geography, political science, women’s studies and social theory, and are very rarely brought into dialogue. [Table 1](#) presents

Table 1: Everyday politics and associated terms: mapping the literature

Term and context discussed	Source	Definition or scope
Everyday politics (Vietnam, other peasant societies)	Kerkvliet (2005; 2009); see also Scott (1987), resistance studies	Everyday politics ‘involves people embracing, complying with, adjusting, and contesting norms and rules regarding authority over, production of, or allocation of resources and doing so in quiet, mundane, and subtle expressions and acts that are rarely organised or direct’ (Kerkvliet, 2009: 232). Contrasted with <i>official politics</i> and <i>advocacy politics</i> .
Everyday politics (United States)	Boyte (2005); see also Beveridge and Koch (2019)	Everyday politics as immediate, non-partisan, local, hidden and within institutions: ‘The United States in the last generation has also been a laboratory for creative civic experiments, with parallels in other societies. These have generated an everyday politics of negotiation and collaboration ... rooted in local cultures, not only places but also cultures of institutions where people encounter each other on a regular, face-to-face basis ... based on values such as participation, justice, community, and plurality’ (Boyte, 2005: 3–4).
Everyday resistance (Malaysia, and other peasant societies)	Scott (1987); see also Kerkvliet (2005), resistance studies	Resistance ‘includes any act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are intended either to mitigate or deny claims [made by a superordinate class]’ (Scott, 1987: 290). ‘Where everyday resistance most strikingly departs from other forms of resistance is in its implicit disavowal of public and symbolic goals. Where institutionalized politics is formal, overt, concerned with systematic, de jure change, everyday resistance is informal, often covert, and concerned largely with immediate, de facto gains’ (Scott, 1987: 33).
Lifestyle movements (North America)	Haenfler et al (2012); see also Wahlen and Laamanen (2015), de Moor (2017)	Collective initiatives that lie between contentious politics and lifestyles: ‘We suggest that lifestyle movements (LMs) consciously and actively promote a lifestyle, or way of life, as a primary means to foster social change.’ They ‘lie in between lifestyles and movements, engaged in “individualized collective action”’ (Micheletti, 2003: 24) as lifestyle movements (LMs) that consciously and actively promote a lifestyle, or way of life, as their primary means to foster social change.’ (Haenfler et al, 2012)
Lifestyle politics (Europe, North America)	de Moor (2017); see also Giddens (1991), Beck (1997), Micheletti (2003)	‘Lifestyle politics refers to the politicization of everyday life, including ethically, morally or politically inspired decisions about, for example, consumption, transportation, or modes of living.’ (de Moor, 2017)
Life politics (implicitly Europe, North America)	Giddens (1991); see also de Moor (2017), Micheletti (2003), Beck (1997)	‘Life politics concerns political issues which flow from processes of self-actualisation in post-traditional contexts, where globalising influences intrude deeply into the reflexive project of the self, and conversely where processes of self-realisation influence global strategies ... a politics of life decisions. ... In exploring the idea that the “personal is political”, the student movement, but more particularly the women’s movement, pioneered this aspect of life politics.’ (Giddens, 1991) Contrasted with emancipatory politics and with labour politics.

(Continued)

Table 1: (Continued)

Term and context discussed	Source	Definition or scope
Quiet encroachment of ordinary/social non-movements (Middle East)	Bayat (2010) ; see also Kerkvliet (2005) , Scott (1987) , resistance studies	'The nonmovement of the urban dispossessed, which I have termed the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary," encapsulates the discreet and prolonged ways in which the poor struggle to survive and to better their lives by quietly impinging on the propertied and powerful, and on society at large. It embodies the protracted mobilization of millions of detached and dispersed individuals and families who strive to enhance their lives in a lifelong collective effort that bears few elements of pivotal leadership, ideology, or structured organization' (Bayat, 2010: 15).
Mobilising without the masses (China)	Fu (2017) ; see also Bayat (2010)	'Mobilizing without the masses provides a pathway to political agency for activists and participants of civil society organizations that is situated in between collective and individual contention. ... Organizations participate behind the scenes by coordinating <i>non-collective</i> contention in the form of coaching individual workers to threaten social stability or by organizing small-scale contention such as flash demonstrations' (Fu, 2017: 33).
Indirect activism (urban movements, global North)	Pink (2012)	'By considering everyday life and activism together, we can begin to see that activism has implications for everyday life, while at the same time, doing activism is itself an everyday life activity, often performed in environments such as homes, gardens or local neighbourhoods' (Pink, 2012: 5).
Subpolitics (Europe, North America)	Beck (1997) ; see also Offe (1985)	'In the world risk society, politics is made in various realms of subpolitics, whether it is in the firm, the laboratory, at the gas station, or in the supermarket. New types of conflict emerge and new coalitions become thinkable' (52). 'The activity of world corporations and national governments is becoming subject to the pressure of a world public sphere. In this process, individual-collective participation in global action networks is striking and decisive; citizens are discovering that the act of purchase can be a direct ballot that they can always use in a political way' (Beck, 1997: 64).
Prefigurative politics (non-specific, implied global North)	Yates (2015) ; see also Schlosberg and Coles (2016)	'Prefiguration necessarily combines the experimental creating of "alternatives" within either mobilisation-related or everyday activities, with attempts to ensure their future political relevance' (Yates, 2015: 13). Contrasted with subcultures and initiatives which remain secluded and uninterested in consolidating or diffusing a political vision, and with movements which are unconcerned by micropolitics and are not deliberately innovating their processes based on political beliefs.
The new environmentalism of everyday life (Europe, North America, Australia)	Schlosberg and Coles (2016) ; Wahlen and Laamanen (2015)	'No longer willing to take part in unsustainable practices and institutions, and not satisfied with purely individualistic and consumer responses, a growing focus of environmental movement groups is on restructuring everyday practices of circulation, for example, on sustainable food, renewable energy, and making' (Schlosberg and Coles 2016: 160). 'The focal point is not to organize to lobby or vote for change; the point is to literally embody that change, and to illustrate alternative, more resilient, and more sustainable practices and relationships' (Schlosberg and Coles, 2016: 174).

(Continued)

Table 1: (Continued)

Term and context discussed	Source	Definition or scope
Everyday feminism; see also third wave feminism (Europe and North America)	For example, Schuster (2017)	'A branch of feminism referring to a large array of practices, all focusing on what feminists can do to challenge gender inequalities as individuals in their day-to-day lives and which do not involve collective action' (Schuster, 2017: 648). Compared with second-wave feminists who are less likely to view everyday or <i>individual</i> action as political. Difference is argued to hinge on different interpretations of the slogan 'the personal as political'.
Individual collective action, political consumerism (Europe and North America)	Micheletti (2003) ; see also Giddens (1991) , Beck (1997) , de Moor (2017)	'My working definition of individualized collective action acknowledges the impact of these political landscape changes [postmodernization, risk society, and globalization] on our view of politics and political involvement. It is the practice of responsibility-taking for common well-being through the creation of concrete, everyday arenas on the part of citizens alone or together with others to deal with problems that they believe are affecting what they identify as the good life' (Micheletti, 2003: 25–6). Situated between the political and economic: 'People who view consumer choice in this fashion see no border between the political and economic spheres' (Micheletti, 2003: 2).

a selection of these terms, indicating the scope of each concept. It highlights the variation across apparently similar concepts. Many of the tensions in the study of everyday life that have been identified so far are also visible, for example in the relative politicisation or depoliticisation of different concepts and in the different models of social transformation implicit in the texts.

The literature's diversity can be plotted and mapped in various ways. Everyday politics literature discusses a range of contexts across the global North and South, capitalist and communist political economic contexts, repressive regimes such as dictatorships as well as pluralist democracies, and societies with significant variation over welfare and services, levels of political repression, and political cultures. Because the kinds of claims made in these contexts varies, this invites questions about whether these are contextual specificities or whether these reflect research gaps and biases. The different terms also have wider or narrower focuses. Some frame everyday politics as an epochal shift away from the political culture that preceded it; others suggest everyday politics is a separate set of repertoires that perhaps always existed; while others suggest that there is a relationship between everyday politics and non-everyday politics in which each resources the other in some way. And the forms of politics identified are either contrasted with another category of traditional politics, or are seen to fall between categories; for example between the political and economic, between lifestyles and movements, and between private and public. A single typology would gloss over these differences, ambiguities and gaps. The following subsections draw these elements out through the wider question of 'how everyday life matters' but also in relation to literature on everyday politics, around *issues, resources, objects of study and consequences*. The final sections of the article therefore outline where debate is with respect to each of these questions, alongside some illustrative contributions, some hypotheses and some future research questions.

Issues and themes: what claims and controversies animate everyday life and everyday politics?

The first half of the article covered some of the themes and issues of everyday life in the wider literature on consumption and power. Everyday life themes have included identity, class and generation, lifestyle, ordinary resource consumption, and forms of power such as patriarchy which shape everyday lives in tangible and intangible ways. There is great variation in these issues, but at the same time a sense that certain things are *not* everyday. Susie Scott's (2009) important book on everyday life sociology, for example, discusses connecting up agency and structure, individuals and society, and other dichotomies, but her book's focus on emotions, home, time, eating and drinking, shopping and leisure – and the absence of citizenship, economy or conflict, for example – is typical in seeing everyday life as rather narrowly circumscribed, directly or ethnographically observed, and local (see also Back, 2015). The danger of this is that the everyday elements of many phenomena are not appreciated, and the connections between them are not analysed.

Many contributions on everyday politics also suggest that everyday politics might be about the politics of very specific issues. For many authors, everyday 'political' claims are considered distinctive and historically speaking 'new', relating not or no longer to subsistence, survival or resources, but to culture, identity and recognition, the natural environment, and ideas about the 'good life' (for example, Offe, 1985; Beck, 1997; Haenfler, 2019). This suggests that, in Beveridge and Koch's (2019: 9) terms, 'the everyday is not only the stage but also the object of political struggle', suggesting that politics now takes a more tangible and quotidian form, around issues that are similarly that are ubiquitous, common and non-spectacular. But in fact, empirical examples suggest that there is a mix of types of claims at play in everyday politics, only some of which are cultural or relate to sustainability.

Indeed, another, sometimes overlapping, set of literature suggests that everyday politics are about economy – usually broadly speaking consumption, but in other cases concerning production. 'Lifestyle' politics, for example, a concept exclusively studied in the global North, is framed as about consumption choices or collectives united by their alternative practices (Micheletti, 2003; Wahlen and Laamanen, 2015; de Moor, 2017). The varieties of everyday politics analysed in the context of repressive regimes, meanwhile, also concern access to resources, but are often undertaken in the course of employment (for example, Kerkvliet, 2005). These, incidentally, have similarities to the 'everyday misbehaviour' literature which tends to focus on *production* identities in the global North but which has not been connected to lifestyle politics arguments (see also de Certeau, 1984; Edwards, 2014). Everyday politics, then, is claimed to be associated with distinctive agendas which are actually highly diverse, including consumption, identity claims, environmental concerns and everyday resistance in workplaces, suggesting a hypothesis that everyday politics might be as polyvalent in its themes, claims and grievances as politics that is not 'everyday', and that the literature currently attends disproportionately to certain themes and claims. It raises the question of what other political issues are challenged in everyday contexts or lives.

Understanding everyday life as an orientation, a way of seeing, might offer a counter-weight or alternative approach to this trend of understanding everyday politics as about particular themes. It might also draw our attention to the *processes around* politics, novel *forms* of political expression, the politicisation of *new themes* which

might emerge initially in the everyday, or which might find their final expression in the everyday through the political outcomes of contention. Everyday politics is often a way of contextualising and better understanding non-everyday political repertoires, making the everyday not only the stage and object of political struggle, but also a perspective on it (Pink, 2012).

Resources: how do inequalities shape changes in everyday life, and who engages in everyday processes and repertoires of politics?

The extant literature on everyday life, as covered in this article, has an interesting and ambivalent relationship to the question of resources. Differential resources were central to early work on subcultural consumption and to the way that feminists saw power in relation to patriarchy – with experiences of daily life and expressions of identity and style being shaped by one’s class or gender. Differences in resources are often missing in the literature on everyday consumption practices, on the other hand, which tends to frame the shift in what is understood as ‘normal’ and escalation of resource consumption in these lifestyles as somehow universal, although Brand and Wissen (2021) offer a useful corrective to this with their understanding of global North everyday consumption as the ‘imperial mode of living’.

Contrasting assumptions about resources also underpin work on the politics of everyday life. James Scott (1987) and other writers working on resistance, and in different ways those working on feminism (for example, Stall and Stoecker, 1998), suggest that less-collective and less-confrontational forms of politics such as those conducted in everyday life are something that people who are socially and politically disadvantaged resort to. Disproportionately, this argument is made about political action in repressive regimes, whether global South or North (Johnston, 1991; Bayat, 2010). Everyday forms of collective action are quite widely understood to be something that is done when the opportunities of political action are constrained. Yet, repression and inequality, as well as inequalities in levels and forms of repression, exist in pluralist democracies too, and there is only mixed evidence suggesting that everyday politics is the main outcome (see, for example, Piven and Cloward, 1977), suggesting that the link between constraint and everyday forms of action should be further investigated.

Indeed, in contrast with the idea that everyday political issues are tied to disempowerment and lack of resources, arguments about postmaterialism and new social movements inspired a range of authors to suggest that everyday life politics they observe are actually a feature of affluent populations (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1997; Haenfler et al, 2012). Where subsistence demands and labour disputes have subsided, concerns are now based around ‘the politicisation of citizens’ everyday life choices’ (de Moor, 2017). For some new social movement scholars, this also signalled a shift from working-class to middle-class protagonists (for example, Offe, 1985), suggesting that when enough citizens are affluent enough, their political interests also shift too (Streeck, 2012). The extent to which everyday politics in the global North is about post-materialist values remains controversial (Schlosberg and Coles, 2016). Yet the suggestion in much of the literature making claims about everyday politics being ‘new’ is that everyday politics, whether oriented around identity, resource consumption, spirituality or other elements of the ‘good life’,

are waged only by those in societies who can afford to have transcended the more fundamental necessities.

For the first set of authors, everyday politics is what people do when they have insufficient resources or the costs of participation are too high; for the second set of authors, everyday politics is by contrast a feature of affluent people and societies. The apparent paradox suggests that the relationship between the ‘politics of everyday life’ and resources needs further attention. That might mean looking for, and at, forms of contention in contexts of low resources but little direct repression, and everyday forms of political action in the global North that are not elite (see [Johansson and Vinthagen, 2014](#)).

Again, using everyday life as an orientation might also suggest that these contradictions might be addressed by dialogue across different academic traditions which focus on different kinds of political action; and asking what latent forms of politics exist both alongside those that are visible, and among groups not being studied. The everyday as a concept might sensitise analysts to the gaps between official and respectable forms of everyday politics, in the same way that examining everyday cultural participation highlights the ‘official’ framework of cultural value and the things that do not fit into it ([Miles and Gibson, 2016](#)).

Objects of study: how, when and at what level should everyday life and social change processes be analysed?

The core claims about practice theories, rehearsed in section 2, suggested practices as an alternative social scientific approach to structures or the agency of individuals. In sections 2 and 3 it was suggested that a Schatzkian or Foucauldian approach to power could sharpen perspectives on everyday consumption practices.

Tensions around objects of study are also evident in work on everyday politics. Everyday politics is regularly framed as being non-collective, or somehow less collective than other practices. Michele Micheletti captured this in her original understanding of the consumer activism as ‘individualised collective action’ (2003: 25). Yet although such lifestyles as veganism, zero waste living or ‘straight-edge’ are pursued by individuals, they are also either established practices, or subcultures. This means they are not only shared in the sense of similar practices, but they mostly also have institutional support, distinctive modes of interaction around key practices, and they relate to other processes of social and political expression ([Lorenzen, 2012](#)). Practices are not simply important because lots of people do them. Work on resistance regularly explores the same tension. Resistance practices are disparate and often conducted alone, having aggregative effects: ‘their sheer cumulative numbers turn them into an eventual social force’ ([Bayat, 2010: 48](#)); but they are also sites of interaction and mutual recognition and identification which may lead to groupings or organisations which subsequently act collectively ([Welch and Yates, 2018](#), and final sub-section). [Diana Fu \(2017\)](#), writing in the context of contemporary China, similarly explores the tensions between individual and collective in her account of ‘micro-collective action’, where workers are coached to ‘frame their individual grievances as part of a broader struggle for worker rights’ (175). Organisers promote wider solidarity and worker confidence through ‘atomised action’ where individuals are helped to claim legal rights through public threats of more dramatic action in order to secure practical

pay-offs vis-à-vis local state officials who want to avoid open conflict in order to maintain their own positions.

Even beyond the question of individual or collective activity, objects of study vary. For some authors, everyday politics is another 'new' wave of social movements. Schlosberg and Coleman's (2016) 'new environmentalism of everyday life' suggests that farmers markets, DIY and repair shops and sustainable lifestyles are framed as 'new movements', and Haenfler et al (2012) suggest that veganism, green living and Christian groups espousing various approaches to family planning are something between contentious politics and lifestyles, 'lifestyle movements'; while Francesca Forno and Graziano (2014) coin the term 'sustainable community movements'. Others, especially those looking at prefigurative 'alternative' practices or institutions, place the emphasis on projects or initiatives. Finally, the political participation literature emphasises forms of political participation which tend to focus on the individual. Joost de Moor's (2017) definition of lifestyle politics as 'the politicisation of citizens' everyday life choices' is typical (cf Wahlen and Laamanen, 2015). There are advantages and disadvantages to these different objects of study. Proposing that everyday politics is expressed in movements can reify a group that does not identify collectively, and it may obscure the roles that everyday politics plays in relation to other collectives, for example sustainable lifestyles are often part of and related to environmental movements, through recruitment, resources and exemplification of alternative forms of living. Looking at individual forms of participation may also make it harder to understand relationships between contexts, interactions and performances of everyday politics. If everyday life is viewed as a social scientific orientation, then objects of study might need to depend on the research question. Following Nicolini (2012), it might be that 'zooming in and out' to appreciate different types of phenomena may be fruitful.

Finally, studies of social movements suggest some hypotheses for thinking about *when* everyday politics might 'matter'. In social movement studies, everyday dynamics are generally considered insignificant except when there is nothing more dramatic happening (Baumgarten et al, 2014). Nevertheless, at least four hypotheses suggest the times in which everyday lives matter. The first is that the important everyday political dynamics *alternate with other forms of participation*, between protest waves for example, where spaces, scenes and subcultures might sustain movements in abeyance (Staggenborg and Taylor, 2005). Melucci's (1996) concepts of latency and visibility seems to support this hypothesis where he describes them as 'phases' (130). At other times, his argument suggests that latency and visibility are 'reciprocally correlated', suggesting that in contrast to the notion of abeyance, everyday political dynamics and open contention *rise and fall together* (Melucci, 1985: 829). A third claim is that everyday life matters in that it *precedes* political activity in an important way: the notion of everyday politics or resistance 'leading to' other repertoires or recruiting participants to a particular frame (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013). A fourth is that significant political work takes place *after* the typical arc of a social movement and in institutions, for example in Frank Dobbin's (2009) depiction of how human resources departments 'invented' equal opportunity in operationalising legislation in firms and institutions. A fifth perspective is that the important dynamics of everyday politics are taking place all the time (for example, Boyte, 2005). More work could be done to test and further explore the temporalities of the everyday in relation to political action (see also Johannson and Vinthagen, 2014; Wagner-Pacifici and

Ruggero, 2019). It seems likely that different kinds of everyday political processes are taking place in relation to open or traditional forms of political contention in different places and times.

Consequences and modes of transformation: how does everyday life matter, and how do its consequences play out?

Arguments that everyday politics ‘matters’ take two main forms, which echo the difference highlighted in sections 1 and 2 about whether the everyday matters in itself or through the sheer number of people doing everyday practices; or because of economic and political processes. Arguments through which everyday dynamics are argued to matter directly and in themselves in the area of politics, like with everyday consumption, also take two broad forms.

Sometimes the effects of everyday politics are about numbers of people doing the same thing together and directly affecting a target. Boycotts may be partly successful in changing the direction of a company or even a state (Beck, 1997). Forms of refusal, mass complaining, foot-dragging and non-compliance can make it impossible for a government policy to succeed, and non-cooperation and desertion can alter the course of military conflicts (Scott, 1987; Kerkvliet, 2005; 2009). Work that is done around questions of equality within institutions, following a protest wave, for example in human resources, can have very wide consequences for establishing new societal norms (for example, Dobbin, 2009). These are all arguments about the direct impact of collective activity. In some ways these arguments are similar whether the processes are seen to be political or not – Bayat’s (2010) discussion of the ‘quiet encroachment of the ordinary’ echoes processes of change described by studies of consumption practices (Welch and Yates, 2018).

There are also many arguments about everyday politics being significant through political processes and other less direct processes. Many authors discuss how collective everyday activity is important for explaining the processes and circumstances in which overt defiance, political organising, revolution and sustained social movement activity come about. This is Hank Johnston’s (1991) central claim in his account of the ‘subculture of opposition’ in Catalonia during the Spanish dictatorship. Without understanding everyday dynamics, he argues, discussing the collective identities and interactions around cultural activism relating to Catalan literature, songs and dance, hiking clubs, elements of the Catholic Church, and universities, one could not understand the formation of collectives and pressures which led to the transition to democracy. Welch and Yates (2018), using examples from the environmental or political impacts of large numbers engaged in similar practices, suggest that shared practices of ‘dispersed collective activity’ (which usually have some ‘direct’ consequences), might be the basis of collective identities or bureaucratic organisations. Micheletti (2003) suggests that consumption lifestyles might also become significant voting blocs (2003).

Arguments about political or indirect impacts of everyday dynamics, despite these examples and many more, are controversial because of anxieties that everyday politics may replace other forms of politics that are more effective (Yates, 2021). These debates are too often are waged around metaphors: everyday politics is often framed as a ‘safety valve’ or a ‘gateway drug’. Perhaps signing e-petitions, grumbling, refusing to eat meat, deliberately working slowly, and other forms of resistance,

mean that frustrations and anger dissipate gradually, and present no challenge to the system, releasing pressure. An influential claim reflecting this position is that everyday politics is 'post-political' – in the sense that it is the expression of a shift away from agonistic politics towards the technocratic management of populations (Blühdorn and Deflorian, 2021). On the other hand, the alternative to the safety valve is the claim that everyday politics are *always* significant – as a 'gateway drug', giving people a taste of something from which they might move onto something 'harder', such as contentious politics. Future research could usefully establish the circumstances in which everyday political repertoires appear to undermine or strengthen political strategies to change the world.

In spite of some detractors, therefore, evidence shows that everyday dynamics have political relevance both directly in terms of accumulated practices, but also politically – in the form of the reproduction of civil society, limited forms of mobilisation and critical debate about coordinating or planning resistance (for example, Johnston, 1991; Tuğal, 2009), or affecting subsequent processes of political activity, from boycotts to voting blocs to revolutions. The obvious conclusions are that these processes matter in many, if not all contexts, and should be studied more widely. The examples also highlight areas for the study of implications of everyday life for transformation that are around collective identity, group formation and political emergence; what activists do together oriented towards the future, whether in the form of conventional protest repertoires or not; and the plans, imaginative work and emotional orientations which coordinate this activity. These could be combined in future work with practice theoretical insights about transformation such as those of Shove et al (2012) about direct effects of changing everyday practices, and with approaches towards collective action such as theories of fields (for example, Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). An everyday orientation towards change might appreciate both different forms of change and different theoretical angles and lenses for studying them.

Conclusion

This article discusses the ways in which everyday life is seen as significant for understandings of social change, through recent turns to everyday consumption, contemporary perspectives on power, and everyday politics. The argument advocates drawing together the debates that can be seen as common in the literature. They include debates around different *issues and themes* animating everyday life – whether there are specific 'everyday' realms or not; the relationship between *resources* and everyday experiences, consumption and political action; the question of the most appropriate *objects of study* in analysing everyday life and transformation; and the central question of the article, how and through what processes everyday dynamics have *consequences* in terms of social change. The argument distinguishes between direct arguments for the significance of everyday life for social change, such as those identified in theories of practice and everyday resistance, and more indirect or political arguments, which note the role of everyday processes in other forms of transformation, particularly around struggle and political conflict. The article argues that these both should be recognised as valid, and the relationships between them are also pivotal. These debates are also part of the wider question of how the politics of everyday life can

be located historically and its ‘newness’ contextualised, where epochal theoretical claims have not always been convincing.

For researching both political and consumer culture, everyday life may most usefully be understood as an *orientation*, a way of making links between structures and lived experience, the articulation of economies and politics in relationships, interactions and practices. Everyday life ‘matters’ through its potential to shed light on particular facets and dynamics. These facets might be of personal daily life, but they might also be facets of the emergence, expression and outcomes of conflict; the ways through which transformative actors hold, exert and experience power; and the importance of economic ‘alternatives’ and forms of resistance. An everyday orientation also attunes researchers to how the social world is directly experienced. Work examining the economy and politics might consider an everyday orientation as a starting point to identifying original phenomena worthy of study, or shedding new light on traditional themes and issues. Everyday life, everyday consumption and everyday politics cannot continue to be plausibly claimed as new empirical or theoretical terrains that counterbalance structure or abstract theory, nor as the sole authentic epistemological site. More realistically and usefully, perhaps, the concept can be posed as one of several hinges of the social scientific imagination: as indicating the places, moments and processes through which personal, routine and material dynamics intersect with economy, power and politics.

Notes

¹ Dictionary definitions of *everyday* refer to phenomena ‘that can be encountered every day; common, ordinary’ or as an element of a person’s behaviour or attitude being ‘natural, ordinary, normal’ or, sometimes, ‘mediocre, inferior’ (OED Online, 2022).

² For an introduction and debate around the interpretation of word prevalence and cultural change through analysing digitised texts see Michel et al (2011).

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Dan Welch, Camilla Lewis, the editors of *Consumption and Society*, and to two anonymous reviewers, whose insightful comments and encouragement were important in revising the piece. All errors are my own.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

References

- Back, L. (2015) Why everyday life matters: class, community and making life livable, *Sociology*, 49(5): 820–36. doi: [10.1177/0038038515589292](https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038515589292)
- Barnett, C., Cloke, P., Clarke, N. and Malpass, A. (2010) *Globalizing Responsibility: The Political Rationalities of Ethical Consumption*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Bauman, Z. (1998) *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Baumgarten, B., Daphi, P. and Ullrich, P. (eds) (2014) *Conceptualizing Culture in Social Movement Research*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bayat, A. (2010) *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, 2nd edn, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Beck, U. (1997) Subpolitics: ecology and the disintegration of institutional power, *Organization and Environment*, 10(1): 52–65. doi: [10.1177/0921810697101008](https://doi.org/10.1177/0921810697101008)

- Beveridge, R. and Koch, P. (2019) Urban everyday politics: politicising practices and the transformation of the here and now, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 37(1): 142–57. doi: [10.1177/0263775818805487](https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775818805487)
- Blue, S. and Spurling, N. (2016) Qualities of connective tissue in hospital life: how complexes of practices change over time, in A. Hui, E. Shove and T. Schatzki (eds) *The Nexus of Practices: Connections, Constellations, Practitioners*, London: Routledge, pp 24–37.
- Blühdorn, I. and Deflorian, M. (2021) Politicisation beyond post-politics: new social activism and the reconfiguration of political discourse, *Social Movement Studies*, 20(3): 259–75.
- Boyte, H. (2005) *Everyday Politics: Reconnecting Citizens and Public Life*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Brand, U. and Wissen, M. (2021) *The Imperial Mode of Living: Everyday Life and the Ecological Crisis of Capitalism*, London: Verso.
- Cohen, M.J. and Murphy, J. (eds) (2000) *Exploring Sustainable Consumption: Environmental Policy and the Social Sciences*, Oxford: Elsevier/Pergamon.
- de Certeau, M. (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- de Moor, J. (2017) Lifestyle politics and the concept of political participation, *Acta Politica*, 52(2): 179–97. doi: [10.1057/ap.2015.27](https://doi.org/10.1057/ap.2015.27)
- Dobbin, F. (2009) *Inventing Equal Opportunity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dubuisson-Quellier, S. (2013) *Ethical Consumption*, Black Point: Fernwood Publishing.
- Edwards, G. (2014) *Social Movements and Protest*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eisenstein, Z.R. (1979) *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Featherstone, M. (1987) Lifestyle and consumer culture, *Theory, Culture and Society*, 4(1): 55–70. doi: [10.1177/026327687004001003](https://doi.org/10.1177/026327687004001003)
- Fligstein, N. and McAdam, D. (2012) *A Theory of Fields*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Forno, F. and Graziano, P.R. (2014) Sustainable community movement organisations, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 14(2): 139–57. doi: [10.1177/1469540514526225](https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540514526225)
- Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, London: Penguin.
- Foucault, M. (1979) *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, London: Penguin.
- Foucault, M. (1994 [1982]) The subject and power, in J.D. Faubion (ed) *Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, Volume 3: Power*, London: Penguin.
- Fu, D. (2017) *Mobilizing without the Masses: Control and Contention in China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gardiner, M.E. (2000) *Critiques of Everyday Life*, London: Routledge.
- Giddens, A. (1984) *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Google Books (2022) N-gram viewer 1949–2019: everyday; everyday life; lifestyle; consumption; consumer; practices, (last accessed: 26 May 2022).
- Graeber, D. (2011) Consumption, *Current Anthropology*, 52(4): 489–511. doi: [10.1086/660166](https://doi.org/10.1086/660166)
- Gronow, J. and Warde, A. (2001) *Ordinary Consumption*, London: Routledge.

- Haenfler, R. (2019) Changing the world one virgin at a time: abstinence pledgers, lifestyle movements, and social change, *Social Movement Studies*, 18(4): 425–43, doi: [10.1080/14742837.2019.1590691](https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2019.1590691).
- Haenfler, R., Johnson, B. and Jones, E. (2012) Lifestyle movements: exploring the intersection of lifestyle and social movements, *Social Movement Studies*, 11(1): 1–20. doi: [10.1080/14742837.2012.640535](https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2012.640535)
- Halkier, B. and Holm, L. (2008) Food consumption and political agency: on concerns and practices among Danish consumers, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 32(6): 667–74. doi: [10.1111/j.1470-6431.2008.00695.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1470-6431.2008.00695.x)
- Hall, S. and Jefferson, T. (eds) (1975) *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*, London: Hutchinson.
- Harrison, R., Newholm, T. and Shaw, D. (2005) *The Ethical Consumer*, London: SAGE.
- Heiskanen, E. and Pantzar, M. (1997) Eva Heiskanen and Mika Pantzar toward sustainable consumption: Two new perspectives, *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 20: 409–42. doi: [10.1023/A:1006862631698](https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006862631698)
- Jackson, T. (2009) *Prosperity Without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet*, London and New York: Earthscan.
- Jacobsen, E. and Dulrud, A. (2007) Will consumers save the world? The framing of political consumerism, *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 20(5): 469–82. doi: [10.1007/s10806-007-9043-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-007-9043-z)
- Johansson, A. and Vinthagen, S. (2014) Dimensions of everyday resistance: an analytical framework, *Critical Sociology*, 42(3): 417–35. doi: [10.1177/0896920514524604](https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514524604)
- Johnston, H. (1991) *Tales of Nationalism*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Kerkvliet, B.J.T. (2005) *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Kerkvliet, B.J.T. (2009) Everyday politics in peasant societies (and ours), *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(1): 227–43. doi: [10.1080/03066150902820487](https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150902820487)
- Lefebvre, H. (2014 [1947]) *The Critique of Everyday Life*, London: Verso.
- Lorenzen, J.A. (2012) Going green: the process of lifestyle change, *Sociological Forum*, 27(1): 94–116. doi: [10.1111/j.1573-7861.2011.01303.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2011.01303.x)
- Lukes, S. (1974) *Power: A Radical View*, New York: Macmillan.
- McRobbie, A. (1994) *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, London: Routledge.
- Melucci, A. (1985) The symbolic challenge of contemporary movements, *Social Research*, 52(4): 789–816.
- Melucci, A. (1996) *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Michel, J.B., Kui Shen, Y., Presser Aiden, A., Veres, A., Gray, M.K., Pickett, J.P. et al. (2011) Quantitative analysis of culture using millions of digitized books, *Science*, 331(6014): 176–82. doi: [10.1126/science.1199644](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1199644)
- Micheletti, M. (2003) *Political Virtue and Shopping*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Miles, A. and Gibson, L. (2016) Everyday participation and cultural value, *Cultural Trends*, 25(3): 151–7. doi: [10.1080/09548963.2016.1204043](https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2016.1204043)
- Miller, D. (2012) *Consumption and Its Consequences*, London: Polity.
- Millet, K. (1970) *Sexual Politics*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Nicolini, D. (2012) *Practice Theory, Work and Organization*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Norris, P. (1999) *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- OED Online. (2022) everyday, n. and adj. Oxford University Press, March 2022, www.oed.com/view/Entry/65342, (last accessed: 26 May 2022).
- Offe, C. (1985) New social movements, *Social Research*, 52(4): 817–68.
- Pink, S. (2012) *Situating Everyday Life*, London: SAGE.
- Piven, F.F. and Cloward, R.A. (1977) *Poor People's Movements*, New York: Pantheon.
- Röpke, I. (2009) Theories of practice: new inspiration for ecological economic studies on consumption, *Ecological Economics*, 68(10): 2490–97.
- Sahakian, M. and Wilhite, H. (2014) Making practice theory practicable: towards more sustainable forms of consumption, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 14(1): 25–44, doi: [10.1177/1469540513505607](https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540513505607).
- Sassatelli, R. and Davolio, F. (2010) Consumption, pleasure and politics: slow food and the politico-aesthetic problematization of food, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 10(2): 202–32. doi: [10.1177/1469540510364591](https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540510364591)
- Schatzki, T.R. (1996) *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schatzki, T.R. (2002) *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Schatzki, T. (2016) Keeping track of large phenomena, *Geographische Zeitschrift*, 104(1): 4–24.
- Schlosberg, D. and Coles, R. (2016) The new environmentalism of everyday life: Sustainability, material flows, and movements, *Contemporary Political Theory*, 15(2): 160–81. doi: [10.1057/cpt.2015.34](https://doi.org/10.1057/cpt.2015.34)
- Schor, J.B. (2005) Sustainable consumption and worktime reduction, *Journal of Industrial Ecology*, 9(1–2): 37–50. doi: [10.1162/1088198054084581](https://doi.org/10.1162/1088198054084581)
- Schuster, J. (2017) Why the personal remained political: comparing second and third wave perspectives on everyday feminism, *Social Movement Studies*, 16(6): 647–59. doi: [10.1080/14742837.2017.1285223](https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2017.1285223)
- Scott, J.C. (1987) *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Scott, S. (2009) *Making Sense of Everyday Life*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Shove, E. and Warde, A. (2001) Inconspicuous consumption: The sociology of consumption, lifestyles and the environment, in Dunlap and Riley (eds) *Sociological Theory and the Environment*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, pp 230–52.
- Shove, E., Pantzar, M. and Watson, M. (2012) *The Dynamics of Social Practice*, SAGE.
- Solnit, R. (2021) Big oil coined ‘carbon footprints’ to blame us for their greed: keep them on the hook, *The Guardian*, 23 August, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/aug/23/big-oil-coined-carbon-footprints-to-blame-us-for-their-greed-keep-them-on-the-hook>, (last accessed: 17 March 2022).
- Southerton, D., Chappells, H. and van Vliet, B. (eds) (2004) *Sustainable Consumption: The Implications of Changing Infrastructures of Provision*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Spaargaren, G. (2011) Theories of practices: agency, technology, and culture, *Global Environmental Change*, 21(3): 813–22. doi: [10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2011.03.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2011.03.010)
- Spaargaren, G. and Van Vliet, B. (2000) Lifestyles, consumption and the environment: The ecological modernization of domestic consumption, *Environmental Politics*, 9(1): 50–76. doi: [10.1080/09644010008414512](https://doi.org/10.1080/09644010008414512)
- Staggenborg, S. and Taylor, V. (2005) Whatever happened to the women’s movement?, *Mobilization*, 10(1): 37–52. doi: [10.17813/maiq.10.1.46245r7082613312](https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.10.1.46245r7082613312)

- Stall, S. and Stoecker, R. (1998) Community organising or organising community? Gender and the crafts of empowerment, *Gender and Society*, 12(6): 729–56. doi: [10.1177/089124398012006008](https://doi.org/10.1177/089124398012006008)
- Streeck, W. (2012) Considerations on the new politics of consumption, *New Left Review*, 76: 27–47.
- Sztompka, P. (2008) The focus on everyday life: a new turn in sociology, *European Review*, 16(1): 23–37. doi: [10.1017/S1062798708000045](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798708000045)
- Trentmann, F. (2012) The politics of everyday life, in F. Trentmann (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tuğal, C. (2009) Transforming everyday life: Islamism and social movement theory, *Theory and Society*, 38(5): 423–58.
- Wagner-Pacifci, R. and Ruggero, E.C. (2019) Temporal blindspots in occupy Philadelphia, *Social Movement Studies*, 19(5–6): 675–96. doi: [10.1080/14742837.2018.1474096](https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2018.1474096)
- Wahlen, S. and Laamanen, M. (2015) Consumption, lifestyle and social movements, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 39(5): 397–403. doi: [10.1111/ijcs.12237](https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12237)
- Warde, A. (2005) Consumption and theories of practice, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 5(2): 131–53. doi: [10.1177/1469540505053090](https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540505053090)
- Warde, A. (2010) Introduction, in A. Warde (ed) *Consumption*, Vol I–IV, London: SAGE, vol. 1, pp xxi–l.
- Watson, M. (2016) Placing power in practice theory, in Hui, A., Schatzki, T. and Shove, E. (eds) *The Nexus of Practices: Connections, Constellations, Practitioners*, 169–82, London: Routledge.
- Welch, D. and Yates, L. (2018) The practices of collective action: practice theory, sustainability transitions and social change, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 48(3): 288–305. doi: [10.1111/jtsb.12168](https://doi.org/10.1111/jtsb.12168)
- Whitson, J.R. (2013) Gaming the quantified self, *Surveillance & Society*, 11(1/2): 163–76. doi: [10.24908/ss.v11i1/2.4454](https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v11i1/2.4454)
- Wilhite, H. (2005) Why energy needs anthropology, *Anthropology Today*, 21(3): 1–2. doi: [10.1111/j.0268-540X.2005.00350.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0268-540X.2005.00350.x)
- Wilk, R. (2002) Consumption, human needs, and global environmental change, *Global Environmental Change*, 12(1): 5–13, doi: [10.1016/S0959-3780\(01\)00028-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0959-3780(01)00028-0).
- Yates, L. (2015) Rethinking refiguration: alternatives, micropolitics and goals in social movements, *Social Movement Studies*, 14(1): 1–21. doi: [10.1080/14742837.2013.870883](https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2013.870883)
- Yates, L. (2021) Prefigurative politics and social movement strategy: the roles of refiguration in the reproduction, mobilisation and coordination of movements, *Political Studies*, 69(4): 1033–52. doi: [10.1177/0032321720936046](https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321720936046)