

INTRODUCTION: (RE)THINKING ABOUT EVERYDAY LIFE AND ACTIVISM

In a contemporary context, the sustainability agendas of governments, activists and ordinary people inevitably involve the production of new relationships between the material and sensory environments and activities that constitute the everyday. In this book I explore how concepts of place and practice can be engaged to further our understandings of the environments and activities of everyday life through an exploration of domestic consumption, sustainability and activism. The theoretical tools of practice and place, I argue, are particularly important for this task – since together they provide us with analytical routes to understanding both human activity and the environment. Indeed in seeking to understand how we might work towards achieving environmental sustainability, the questions of how practices and places are constituted, how they change and shift over time, or how they are maintained are pertinent for scholars and applied researchers across different sectors and academic disciplines.

Situating Everyday Life examines how processes of renewal and change are lived, experienced and represented through a series of everyday and mediated research contexts. I examine questions relating to why and how we live in ways that sometimes unnecessarily consume energy and other resources and how some people are seeking to make changes that will make the everyday worlds they live in more environmentally sustainable. To do this I draw on a series of different ethnographic and digital research projects undertaken during the past decade or so to examine progressively how domestic lives, local community projects, urban identities and digital media and web platforms are bound up with the flows and movements through which change happens.

For this task an approach that is inevitably interdisciplinary is needed. This is in part because the existing literatures that focus on everyday life,

the theoretical approaches to practice and place, and the contexts in which these understandings have potential practical applications, span a number of disciplines. For example, while interest in the study of everyday life originated in the social sciences, arts and humanities, its relevance is now far more wide-ranging. It is increasingly being recognised that social science understandings of the everyday practices and places where technologies are used, change happens and resources are consumed are important for other fields of science. Design and engineering interventions that focus on questions of sustainability, climate change, creating environments for wellbeing, and more, also require understandings of everyday contexts and lives. Moreover, areas of sustainability and climate change are precisely where the concerns of activists, governments and academics are tending to coincide. The approach I take here is interdisciplinary in that it attends to the ways that everyday life research has emerged from different scholarly traditions. It moreover draws from existing arguments developed in philosophy, anthropology, sociology and geography to respond to three contemporary theoretical strands that have been referred to as the ‘sensorial turn’ (Howes 2003: xii) or ‘sensory turn’ (Edwards et al. 2006: 11), the ‘practice turn’ (Schatzki et al. 2001) and the ‘spatial turn’ (see Hubbard et al. 2004: 2). I propose that by bringing together these approaches an understanding that is sensitive to both the politics and phenomenology of everyday realities and processes of change is possible.

PRACTICES AND PLACES

Given that the interest in everyday life and activism as sites for change and routes to transformation is interdisciplinary and crosses scholarly and applied research, there is all the more need for a coherent and encompassing route to both researching and theorising them. Because everyday life and activism are implicated in wider processes we need to account for the relationship between the activities and environments in which they are played out. We moreover need to recognise that our activities as researchers are likewise a part of these same environments. Chapters 2 and 3 of this book undertake this task by proposing a theoretical and methodological agenda for understanding everyday life, activist and research processes through a set of theoretical principles that are underpinned by an understanding of the relationship of practices and places as mutually constituting. In Chapter 2, I undertake a critical exploration of existing theories of practice and place. Practice, I argue – whether one is concerned with the practices of domestic cleaning, community gardening, creating a public activist event or posting on Facebook – is essentially

neither resistant nor normative. Rather, it needs to be understood as open to being a source of potential for the production of change, for maintaining things apparently as they are or for simultaneously doing both in different ways. Moreover, practices cannot be understood as being performed in isolation from the wider environments of which they are a part. Therefore I propose that a theory of place is needed, that can offer us a way of understanding how the diverse components that constitute the contingency of any environment in which everyday and activist practices are actually lived and experienced. Here, following recent developments in theorising place in geography and anthropology, I argue that place should be understood as an abstract concept and as distinct from locality. Yet, as I show, we also need to attend to the ways in which people create and experience a 'sense of place' in relation to material localities. In Chapter 3, I reflect on how one might go about learning about everyday life and activism as they are lived out in practice and in place. Insisting on theoretical coherence between the way we understand research practice and findings, I explore how theoretical understandings of place and practice lead us to an appreciation of how human action is always situated in relation to specific environmental, material, sensory, social and discursive configurations, and how we might comprehend representations from this perspective.

This book is written in the context of an increasing focus on the senses in contemporary scholarship, whereby it has been acknowledged that attention to the senses is central to the analysis of practice (e.g. Ingold 2000, Sutton 2006, Grasseni 2007, Marchand 2007) and place (e.g. Feld and Basso 1996, Pink 2009a). Indeed, the senses have long since figured in the work of twentieth-century scholars of everyday life (Gardiner 2000), including Benjamin, Lefebvre and de Certeau (Highmore 2002), anthropologists (e.g. Stoller 1989, Howes 1991, Seremetakis 1994) and geographers (e.g. Tuan 1993, Rodaway 1994). Yet contemporary theoretical developments also imply new ways of understanding sensory perception. The approach to the senses in this book unites an understanding of the multisensoriality of methodological process (Pink 2009a) with an understanding of empirical contexts. This involves departing from the modern Western understanding of the five-sense sensorium whereby our common sense tells us we simply smell through our noses, hear through our ears and see through our eyes. Rather, building on both the phenomenology of perception and neurological studies, the senses can be understood as interconnected, and at the level of perception inseparable. Ingold (2000) has effectively brought the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the ecological psychology of James Gibson together to emphasise the inseparability of these sensory categories in processes of perception. This assumes that the way we know

the world is not dominated by any one sense (see also Ingold 2000) but involves a much less clearly defined mixture of sense experience that is classified into cultural categories. Indeed ethnographic research has demonstrated that the range and types of sensory categories used to describe multisensory embodied experiences may vary in different contexts. Outside modern Western contexts, it has been most clearly noticeable that the five-sense sensorium is culturally constructed and not a universal classificatory system (see, for example, Geurts 2002 for a discussion of this). Equally, recent work by neurologists suggests that understandings based on the idea of differentially sensing modalities attached to specific sense organs should be replaced by understandings of the senses as interconnected in human perception – in that ‘the five senses do not travel along separate channels, but interact to a degree few scientists would have believed only a decade ago’ (Cytowic 2010: 46, see also discussion of this in Pink 2009a). These developments not only call on researchers to attend to the senses when seeking to understand how other people live and act in the world. They also invite us to attend to the multisensory and embodied ways in which environments are experienced and the unspoken, the tacit and the ways of knowing and communicating in everyday life and activist practice that are not verbalised. As I show in the following chapters, attention to multisensoriality has theoretical and methodological implications, leading us on new routes to understanding the practices and places of everyday life and activism.

EVERYDAY LIFE AND ACTIVISM: ESTABLISHING CONTINUITIES

Everyday life and activism are often studied in isolation from each other. The everyday has tended to be associated with the mundane, the routine and the hidden or at least unnoticed. Activism in contrast has been linked to the public, explicit, explosive and sometimes even glamorous elements of political life. The contrast is even starker when we consider how everyday domestic life has in the past often been framed as a site of women’s oppression coupled with hidden forms of resistance, while activism is associated with explicit power relations, public campaigns and protest such as direct action. Yet while the fact that these types of power relations are indeed experienced in some contexts, such dichotomies are increasingly being revealed as irrelevant – in both theory and experience. This is particularly so in relation to the context I address in this book, characterised by the growth of activist movements and the increasing

number of ordinary people working towards sustainability agendas, often in tandem with governments and businesses. Indeed it is possible to understand everyday life as a site that has equal potential for activist practices as those of a global political arena. Although of course these practices and the places of which they are part will be different. Further continuities between the sites and practices of activism and everyday life are also established through contemporary developments in what has been called Web 2.0, social media web platforms and their potential for communications and campaigning. These questions and connections are addressed as we move through Chapters 4 to 8. Yet there is significant background to the study of both everyday life and activism across the social sciences and humanities.

The endless unfolding of everyday life, its aesthetics, emotions, experiences, environments and politics has long since fascinated scholars, writers and artists. It is the domain of activity that the interventions of many policy makers, designers and engineers seek to reach. It is where we make our worlds and where our worlds make us. Therefore everyday life is a context of human creativity, innovation and change, and a site where processes towards a sustainable future might be initiated and nurtured. It is moreover, subsequently a locus from which and in which contemporary concerns about environment and sustainability might be addressed. Likewise the study of activism, social movements and political leaders has been a part of the history of the social sciences. It also involves sets of practices and processes that are inevitably both experiential at a personal level, embodied and social as well as political and intended to lead to forms of change. Environmental activism is moreover a starting point from which some movements are seeking to work towards a sustainable future, in ways that implicate both policy and everyday life practices. 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. Existing understandings emerging from everyday life studies often comprehend the everyday as a site for resistance. If we refigure this focus on resistance as a starting point for understanding the everyday as a site for change and for activism, the politics of the everyday might be recast. The activist practices of both social movement campaigners and the innovations of everyday life practitioners are situated within the context of local and global flows, and are part of wider material, sensory, social and mediated environments, or ecologies of things, media, processes, discourses and biographies.

In this book, building on and departing from existing trends in researching everyday life through paradigms of practice, materiality

and text, and researching activism through paradigms of network, I propose a shift towards understanding both everyday life and activism in terms of practices and places. The novelty of this approach is that it combines three key principles: it allows a focus on how the detail of everyday life and activism are enacted and experienced, thus moving away from the study of everyday life and activism as involving sets of practices to a focus on the phenomenology of everyday life and activism *in practice*; it understands everyday life and activism both as always part of and co-constitutive of specific environmental configurations, thus suggesting that neither actually happen *in places* but rather that everyday life and activism are implicated in the making of places in unique combination with other processes; and it understands the persons, representations and material culture of everyday life and of activism as always being in movement. While the study of the phenomenology, politics and representations of everyday life and activist practices and places are not in themselves new, these approaches tend to have been developed in different disciplines and for different purposes.

In the following two sections of this introduction I situate the contribution of this book in relation to some key relevant strands in the study of everyday life and activism and the issues they raise. In doing so I suggest that attending more closely to questions emerging at the interrelationship between practice and place may bring new insights to both fields of scholarship.

EVERYDAY LIFE STUDIES AND THE STUDY OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Various layers of historical and contemporary scholarship and arts practice exist around everyday life. A number of contemporary scholars, such as Michael Gardiner (2000, 2009), Ben Highmore (2002) and Michael Sheringham (2006) critically discuss and synthesise the work of twentieth-century theorists and artists of everyday life. Collectively their discussions already imply the interdisciplinarity of twentieth-century everyday life studies, for example through the sociology of Georg Simmel, the anthropology of Michel de Certeau, the philosophy of Henri Lefebvre, and their interest in surrealist art. Yet, these existing approaches to interdisciplinarity are largely historical rather than pursuing the implications of the themes they identify through to contemporary disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary trajectories to consider how geographers, sociologists or anthropologists have since understood

everyday life through ethnographic research. There subsequently seems to be something of a gulf between cultural studies and other social science and humanities approaches to everyday life. For example in cultural studies, Highmore has suggested that the everyday life theory he discusses is ‘an invitation to start thinking about an area of life that manages, for the most part to avoid scrutiny’ (2002: vii) and Joe Moran has announced that his own book ‘aims to show that the spaces and practice of modern daily life were not always boring or routine’ (2005: 26). Taking into consideration the increasing number of publications that approach everyday life from a theoretical or cultural studies perspective already cited above, since Highmore’s (2002) comments, it could be said that the point is already out of date. Yet, casting the interdisciplinary net wider it becomes clear that the everyday simply does not ‘avoid scrutiny’ (Highmore 2002: iv). For example, for over a century social anthropologists have researched the detail of other people’s lives in developing countries and for much of this period have also focused similar attention on modern Western contexts. As ethnographers they have systematically learned to live with and learn from other people precisely by sharing aspects of their everyday lives. Scholars in European ethnology have even focused on some of the very same issues and questions that preoccupy cultural studies scholars of everyday life. For example, in British cultural studies Moran (2005) focuses on waiting and commuting, while in Sweden, ethnologists Orvar Löfgren and Billy Ehn (2010) focus on waiting, routines and daydreaming and Tom O’Dell (2010) works on spas and commuting. Sociologists (e.g. Casey and Martens 2007, Shove et al. 2007, 2009) have also engaged through qualitative research in the detail of other people’s everyday experiences – in a number of public and domestic domains. The deficiency is therefore not that everyday life was not already a key area of research – indeed internationally. Rather it is that there has been little joining up of these bodies of work theoretically or empirically. The study of the theory of everyday life and of its representations in literature and art are often undertaken in isolation from the ethnographic and qualitative literature on everyday life. One of the tasks of this book is to seek to make connections between these approaches.

This absence of connection is reflected further in that in the work of ethnographers the term everyday life often tends to refer to an assumed or uninterrogated category. For many contemporary anthropologists and sociologists, everyday life is a given; it is not a neglected domain of practice that needs to be brought to the fore, or a category that needs to be defined. Rather it is part of the substantive focus that they seek to understand when they research other people’s lives and develop their analyses in relation to alternative theoretical paradigms. For example,

take three recent texts which relate to themes that are pertinent to this book and have the term everyday life in their titles. My own monograph about gender and the sensory home is titled *Home Truths: Gender, Domestic Objects and Everyday Life* (2004). There I use the notion of everyday life as a category for referring to the way life is lived out in the home on an everyday basis in the form of practices of home decoration and housework, and my ethnographic concerns were precisely with the question of how and why everyday life is lived as it is and the details of the sensory and affective experiences of home. My theoretical concerns were with developing the notion of the sensory home and to explore changing gender performances and identities within this framework – rather than an engagement with theories of everyday life. In their book *The Design of Everyday Life* (2007), Elizabeth Shove, Matthew Watson, Martin Hand and Jack Ingram refer to the ‘vast amount of scholarship’ that sociologists and anthropologists have paid to the materiality of everyday life (2007: 2) and moreover make a systematic attempt to analyse and understand ‘the ongoing dynamics of everyday life’ (2007: 11). Yet theoretically their analysis is rooted in sociological approaches to consumption, the practice theory of Theodore Schatzki and Bruno Latour’s ideas concerning materiality. Therefore, while its authors undoubtedly engage with questions about the practices of everyday life, *The Design of Everyday Life* makes connections and critical interventions across disciplinary fields by developing a theoretical and practical agenda that links with design studies. Finally, Gerard Goggin’s *Cell Phone Culture: Mobile Technology in Everyday Life* (2006) draws on two key theoretical strands. The first is the cultural studies notion of the ‘circuit of culture’ (2006: 6), through which he suggests that ‘It is fitting then that we study the cell phone to understand the modernities in which we are placed now’ (2006: 8). The second is Latour’s actor network theory, drawing from which he proposes that ‘In appreciating the development and histories of cell phones, we will need to attend to the many people and things these devices have enlisted and to follow these actors as these technologies unfold’ (Goggin 2006: 12). Goggin is certainly interested in what people do with cell phones [mobile phones], and it is easy to move from the mention of everyday life in the subtitle of his book to surmise that indeed everyday life practices are the stuff of ‘cell phone culture’. Yet again we see the study of everyday life moving in a new theoretical direction. These points invite a question: has the *concept* of ‘everyday life’, or its interrogation for its own sake, become redundant to qualitative sociologists, anthropologists, human geographers and media scholars? While, in contrast, for cultural studies scholars focusing instead on representations of everyday life culture (e.g. Highmore 2002, Moran 2005), the concept itself remains central.

Scholars who are actually researching and/or writing about the practices, technologies and localities through which life is lived and indeed through which culture is produced are tending to reconceptualise everyday life through alternative theoretical approaches, while also accounting for its relevance to specific substantive themes and questions. In the following chapters I follow this trend, by arguing that everyday life is appropriately understood through a theory of practice and place.

INDIRECT ACTIVISM, THE URBAN AND THE EVERYDAY

The study of activism is, like everyday life scholarship, a field of interdisciplinary concern. Most relevant for the discussion in this book are recent contributions from geography, sociology and anthropology, with particular emphasis on questions of urban activism. Indeed, in recent years, urban social movements and academic approaches to them have changed since the initial surge of scholarship in this area in the 1970s and 1980s in ways that make them very relevant both for the field of everyday life studies and for understanding the relationship of activist practices to particular environments. Moreover, more recently as digital and social media activism takes on new significance, it is increasingly becoming a key field for analysis at the intersections between these disciplines and media studies.

There is a general sense in which urban social movements are becoming more integrated in existing social structures, and it is this aspect of the development of contemporary activism that I am concerned with in this book. For instance, Lila Leontidou highlights how among urban social movements increasingly legalised and officially recognised uses of urban spaces are now emerging (Leontidou 2006) and Margit Mayer notes a tendency for 'state programmes [to] ... now partner with movement organisations even as the latter seek to implement their own visions of a social economy, empowerment, sustainable neighbourhoods, etc.' (2006: 203). This contemporary approach to urban activism invites us to consider how through ideologically informed appropriations of urban localities activists generate the conditions for particular everyday life experiences and practices. The processes of legalisation and state recognition of urban social movements also invite us to rethink how activism can be implicated in processes of change. It is not necessarily the state as a total institution that such urban social movements resist, but certain flows of, for instance, global corporate capitalism. Thus urban social movements are increasingly connected to, influenced by

and indeed *influential in* state and government bodies. In this book I focus on this type of activism as it is developed in towns and through digital media. The Cittaslow (slow city) movement, discussed in Chapters 6–8, is characteristic of these changes. Cittaslow (although sometimes precariously) becomes embedded in town councils and has also attracted the interest of regional councils (Pink 2009b). It offers an example of how a very contemporary style of activism for a sustainability agenda is played out. Such forms of activism are also particularly interesting because they cannot be studied in ways that are separated from the study of everyday life. This is because Cittaslow and similar movements impact on the material and sensory environments of towns, and extend the potentials these hold for practices that local people might engage in. They are inevitably concerned with everyday life as a site for change and thus have implications for domestic consumption practices.

At the same time, attending to forms of activism that are produced by internationally networked movements and concerned with global change reminds us that attention to context also implies a global and political domain. The sociologist Manuel Castells has identified the global-local nexus as essential to the capacity of urban social movements to engender change. Indeed he cautions that by ‘enclosing themselves in their communities, urban social movements may contribute to further spatial fragmentation, ultimately to the breakdown of society’ (Castells 2002 [2000]: 396). But, conversely ‘by reaching out to the cultural transformation of urban life as proposed by ecological thinkers and activists ... urban social movements can transcend their limits of localism’ (Castells 2002 [2000]: 396). This global-local nexus is crucial for the example of Cittaslow activism and its analysis enables us to understand how local practices and configurations of place are implicated in wider processes of change. Interpreted through a theory of ‘place beyond place’ (Massey 2007) the activist and everyday practices that Cittaslow engenders can be seen as being simultaneously local and global. Therefore the localities where activist projects are created become both the intersections of complex sets of power relations and frame the experienced realities where people live out their everyday lives. In my existing work I have stressed the sensory socialities of activism (Pink 2008b) and how activist practices can create a phenomenology of place that offers alternative sensory embodied experiences (Pink 2009a). In Chapters 6–8 I develop these themes by progressively focusing on a series of interconnected domains to analyse: how a neighbourhood project is created by local people but within an activist frame, how urban environments are constituted through activist practices and the ways that mediated activism is practised on the Internet.

CONTEXTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

In this book the concept of sustainability is broadly conceived, in that I am concerned with sets of issues and practices including those that work towards, for example, using less fossil fuel energy, reducing carbon emissions in domestic homes and in towns, the distribution and consumption of local produce, creating green spaces, and adherence to Local Agenda 21.

Each chapter focuses on a different environment ranging from the kitchen, the home, the neighbourhood, the town to the Internet, all of which are contexts through which sustainability agendas may be pursued. These examples have been selected to progressively show how the theoretical tools of practice and place enable us to understand how innovation, change and activism develop across a range of different contexts. Each chapter also takes a different focus to bring to the fore a specific element of the ways in which we might understand everyday life through theories of practice and place. Therefore, Chapter 4 focuses on the detail of how individual performances of kitchen practices are contingent on configurations of place and individual biographies and identities. This analysis, I suggest, can enable us to understand how individual practitioners are implicated in the innovative processes through which energy-consuming practices come about, and moreover demonstrates the importance of situating these performances as part of specific environments. Chapter 5 foregrounds the question of how the movements and flows of things and persons implicated in a particular practice is involved in creating and responds to the sensory aesthetics and social relations of the domestic environment. Here I show how by following people and things in movement, we are able to learn about the intersections between things that both create the 'feel' of the home, and are simultaneously influential in determining how domestic energy is consumed. In Chapter 6, the focus moves on to a new context – the neighbourhood. Here my focus is on the development of a community garden project, which is framed by the work of the Cittaslow movement. In this example the interrelations between the practices of local people – of imagining, gardening and walking – intersect with global flows including the global principles of an urban social movement and donations from global businesses. The chapter shows how by focusing on flows and practices that extend through the garden, we are able to understand how an everyday place and the experiences that local residents have of it are transformed in a sustainable way. Chapter 7 focuses more directly on the work of the Cittaslow movement as I shift the analysis to the level of the town. Here I am concerned with the ways in which a sustainable urban environment is

created through the projects of activists through town council policies and festive events. As I show, an analysis of how activist practices constitute particular types of urban environments (some longer term than others) enables us to see how new possibilities for everyday life activities, experiences and routines that respond to a sustainability agenda are made for local residents. Finally, in Chapter 8, I examine how the Internet can be understood as an environment that is both part of everyday life and integral to the work of sustainability activism. Here I move the analytical emphasis further towards a focus on how a theory of place can be applied to understanding the mediated environments that form part of the everyday lives of many people. I analyse the website and the Cittaslow international blog, YouTube channel, photography and news and events items to argue that these configurations of genres and media can be understood as potential constituents of place.

As should be clear by now, the aim of this book is to make an argument and to demonstrate an analytical route through which we might come to understand how individuals and environments influence the possibilities for sustainable everyday living. Each chapter presents an example that works with the same theoretical approaches of practice and place, yet offers a different entry point into the analysis. As such this book is not intended to present a holistic empirical report that demonstrates through a single case study how sustainability might be achieved and why it is sometimes not. Rather it is an analysis of interrelated examples that have been selected precisely to show how different activities and environments might be comprehended and thus studied as part of sustainability research.

FOR A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON EVERYDAY LIFE AND ACTIVISM: TO CONCLUDE

In sum, it is my hope that the reader of this book will start to re-think the everyday and activism as sites with the potential for change, from a perspective that attends to the environments and activities through which life is lived, and with the recognition that she or he is also right in the middle of this world. As I outline in the next two chapters, this means theorising and researching everyday life as something we are inevitably *in*. By this I mean we are both in the flow of everyday life, of being and doing, and we are in and part of the very environments of everyday life. To understand everyday life as both a source of activism and change, as well as a domain where sustainability might be achieved,

I argue that we need to comprehend it from within – rather than by seeking to extract data about it to analyse somewhere else, to read it as if it were text or to try to read it from texts. It is through a theory of practice and place that we can comprehend the material, social, sensory and mediated environments of which everyday life, activism and thus processes through which sustainability might be achieved, all form a part.