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Everyday Life: On the Problem of the Concept and the Phenomenon

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The article attempts to trace the process of formation of the scientific interest in everyday life, as well as the development of research approaches to its study. The author determines the heuristic significance of the reference to the study of everyday life in the context of the development of the humanities. The article provides the author's understanding of the concept and the phenomenon of everyday life, justifies the prospects of the research of everyday life, mundanity.

Keywords: everyday life, research of everyday life, definition of everyday life, specifics and research potential of everyday life.

How logical is the increase of the interest in everyday life, something usual in the humanities study? To answer this question we need to determine when this interest occurs, how its nature changes – from a simple description, a collection of curiosities to the formation of the scientific interest, involving awareness of the value of the study of everyday life understood as an independent issue that opens up new possibilities in the development of the humanities. It is a complex process based on the principle of the priorities change in understanding of the ordinary, which is largely dependent on the state and degree of maturity of scientific knowledge, the willingness (its occurrence) to know yourself, reality and others. However, starting from antiquity, reference to everyday life can be detected in the historical and geographical writings, even though it was not the subject of the study. It was

always invisibly present on the level of fixation of certain events, practices, customs, etc. This made it possible to make comparisons, correlations, to build hierarchies, sequences, typologies of peoples, cultures, eras, states, etc. Then why does everyday life as an independent issue and subject of scientific study occurs relatively late, while it has been referred to in almost every work, at least through its overcoming (willingness to rise above the mundane and the ordinary)?

Perhaps, the problem lies in the blurring of the boundaries of everyday life and terminological ambiguity in the definition of the everyday, mundane. To begin with, everyday life is a usual natural environment, the relevant “here” and “now”; it is what is always present, what is fixed in language (in the broadest sense of the phenomenon), sounds, images, behaviour motivations, principles of behaviour (social roles).

At the first glance, so many things are weirdly intertwined in everyday life, but this weirdness does not imply a lack of comprehension. In “Everyday life as a melting pot of rationality” B. Waldenfels notes a particular nature of the rationality of everyday life, which is what makes it so difficult to learn. It is both something fundamental (“diffused” throughout a man’s life, society) and something that constantly “slips away” as if it does not exist, since everything usual and customary is hard to see unlike something rare, phenomenal and violating this routine. But therein lies an amazing power of everyday life, it is stable (not conservative, but total), demolition of everyday life is more significant for an individual and society.

Difficulties in determining everyday life (as a concept) lead to ambiguity of approaches to its study and assessments of its value, which is affected by the duality of its nature. It is both a concrete sphere of culture (of society, a man) and a process (way of life) implemented and presented by various mechanisms, including adaptation. Therefore, everyday life cannot be defined only as fixed duration, but also as many-sided understanding and experience of reality that tends to give stability to the existence of a human, society, etc. Everyday life is not just routine and monotony, but also an objective and subjective experience suggesting universalism and singleness of practices and experiences, as well as connection and succession between generations (here attention is drawn to the importance of social institutions that provide the connection between generations or determine the nature of these connections).

It sets methodological problems in the study of everyday life. B. Waldenfels defined the problem quite accurately, concisely, but at the same time in detail, noting that the concept of everyday life and everyday life itself are completely different things, which means that

theory and reality in the context of the study of everyday life practically do not correspond with each other because of the difficulty of defining the boundaries of the mundane.

However, B. Waldenfels offers an option to overcome (solve) the stated problem through the opposition of the “mundane”, “everyday life” and “non-everyday life”, “non-mundane”. Everyday life is a subjective experience (an individual, social group, society, culture can differently perceive the same event on the emotional, sensual and rational levels); typical practical actions (repetition and habit growing out of reality, its development); long rhythms (continuity and recurrency); mobile forms of rationality (the change of reality necessarily implies a change of perception, conceptualization, familiarization). Non-everyday life is the objective structures and processes (something that does not depend on an individual, social group, culture, nor on their will and desire); individual and collective actions (significant accomplishments having the status of the single); single epochal events (something that cannot be characterized as a repetition of the cycle); perfect structures and precise methods (not reality itself, but its model and ways of creating and studying this model that can be a person, social groups, cultures, peoples, eras, regions, civilizations) (2. P. 17 – 18).

It is non-everyday life that usually became a subject of closer attention, and until a certain period of time (20th century) it was the basis of the study of a human and society in a historical, social and other aspects. Meanwhile, the mundane remained beyond comprehension having only fixation on the level of description, and rarely comparison, since it was considered as self-evident and not hiding anything substantial (significant). Not only it is hard just to see what seems to be obvious and appears to be monolithic and monotonous, but also to identify and understand the mechanisms and structures

determining the course of time, system of values, world view that is the way of life.

Thus, everyday life is a very complex subject and a problematic area of research, because one can easily be “lost” in the world of things, actions, ideas and images, especially since they constantly “slip away” – cannot be explained in terms of rules, laws and principles of the “big history” that places the emphasis on changes, transformations and cause-and-effect relations. In everyday life actions and practices are “just” carried out, a lot is taken in stride; it is a particular experience of understanding reality, an order of life with not only the process of cognition; what is no less (and sometimes more) significant is experiences, desires and habits that make everyday life “alive” and irreducible to the models, as it (mundanity) can be demolished, but can hardly be changed.

Despite the fact that everyday life is opposed to anything unique, it is not static, it is “almost immobile structures” that determine the course of time. This seems to be the significance of everyday life, because due to its “slowness” it fills the big history with events, processes, people, and all the significant draws attention of contemporaries thanks to everyday life (as far as they stand out from the usual and ordinary or transform it). Thus, everyday life can be defined as “slow history”, in which, however, there is a place for changes that imply paradigm shifts involving transformations of structures that are considered immutable, self-evident and inconspicuous because of their permanence.

In addition to the above, it should be noted that the world of everyday life cannot be considered as a solid space, it is differentiated according to various criteria and grounds, which are mainly socio-cultural, regional, environmental, economic, and political markers. This world is full of facts, things, practices, etc., that are doubtless, proven by experience (social and individual). In the space of everyday life they become the truth,

determine the nature of existence, form the key points that make human existence meaningful, relying on rules, norms and habits formed in the living environment. Thus, all that needs inculcation, perception and acceptance should be in the world of everyday life. It seems to be one of its most important characteristics – it makes external, alien elements be “its own”. Any fact, idea or view, no matter how fantastic they are, once involved into everyday life become viable and functional, begin to be considered as real, doubtless. It characterizes the space of everyday life as the world of culture realities with prevalent ideas about yourself and others, the internal and the external, the earthly and the sublime, the sacred and the profane, which is reflected in all the structural elements of everyday life (clothing, household, food, leisure, social roles, conceptions of the body, etc.) and points to its powerful differentiating principle and large functional load. The functional aspect of everyday life is difficult to overestimate. In this aspect a man fulfils himself in various socio-cultural roles “consuming” the outside world in safe and familiar doses and forms. It makes the world clear and proportionate to a man. Meanwhile, everyday life sets clear limits and borders using the universal mechanism of differentiation (we – they, our own – someone else’s, here – there).

All of the above says for the research value of addressing everyday life, but only in the second half of the 20th century it becomes an independent problem. The gradual emergence of interest in everyday life is shown in the work of V.D. Leleko titled “Cultural study of everyday life: formation and current state”. He took the second half of the 19th century as a starting point represented by descriptive historical works. They did not have anything about everyday life itself (the term itself was not used), the emphasis was on life, entertainment, private and public life, and this trend continued

in the early 20th century as well. Therefore, the works of A. Tereshchenko, N.I. Kostomarov, I.E. Zabelin, E.E. Viollet-le-Duc, P. Guiraud, E. Fuchs cited by V.D. Leleko can be considered as a new twist in historical knowledge that laid the actual (empirical) foundation of historical and cultural studies, and subsequently studies of everyday life, as the elements described by the above authors later came to be regarded as the structures of culture of everyday life (4. P. 377). In this connection, data of the work cannot be considered as the studies of everyday life itself, not least because the authors did not set out such problems, and the purpose of their work was to make an attempt at reconstruction of a particular era by turning to the subject and corporeal world. First of all, this is the material for the study of everyday life, but not problematization of everyday life, nor the methodological and heuristic justification of a new research field of the humanities study.

The next phase of emergence of the interest in everyday life, not just as a way of life, activities limited to fixation and description of the data, but in the context of justification of the study of everyday life, as an area that can form a new perspective on the development of society and culture, is linked by V.D. Leleko to the research of J. Huizinga and the “Annales” school (4. 1920 – 1980) (4. P. 378). Yet these studies are more relevant to the development of historical knowledge, in particular to the establishment of “history of everyday life” (4. P. 378), while everyday life did not receive the status of an independent problem. That is, the study of everyday life, its structures that were usually determined randomly was to favour the historical and cultural research where the problems of mentality, peculiarities of thinking, perception of the world were higher priority. These are the problems of microhistory and archetypes in historical knowledge (4. P. 378).

In the last third of the 20th century, the interest in everyday life, more precisely in the opportunities that it discovers in the study of a man, society, culture, becomes more diverse: the connection of macro- and microhistory, history of culture and the way of life, semiotics and aesthetics of everyday life, sociology of everyday life, phenomenological aspects of everyday life, the mundane in culture (4. P. 379 – 385).

Starting from the 1990s V.D. Leleko finds a new understanding of everyday life within the framework of “cultural studies of everyday life” involving the change of approaches to the study of the mundane. A little earlier, in the 1970s – 80s, the methodological works occur, however, they are not directly related to the study of the problems of everyday life, but allow taking a fresh look at the study of culture in general and history of culture in particular. These are the works of A. Gurevich that address the methodology of cultural history and construction of “cultural models”; the works of U. Eco who defined everyday life as a sign system that includes a cultural code of individual socio-cultural, economic and political structures; studies of B. Waldenfels.

However, the institution of everyday life has not gained its final status, which drew attention of V.D. Leleko when he analyzed the most famous works on culture of everyday life, including educational literature. In particular, he mentions works of M.S. Neklyudova, T.S. Georgieva (4. P. 384); the works of B.V. Markov, L.V. Belovinskiy can also be included here. They are distinguished by a chronologically factual approach consistent with the traditional study of history of culture with an emphasis on household. But in fact, that does not add anything new to the understanding of everyday life as an independent research problem. V.D. Leleko offers the principle of allocating the most significant characteristics of everyday life, which determines through their universality.

Namely these are the categories of time, space, things, and “subjects of everyday activity” (P. 385 – 389). This approach significantly shifts the emphases by placing everyday life at the centre of the research, but it does not provide answers to questions about what everyday life is and what new opportunities are opening in socio-cultural and historical studies with reference to everyday life, determination of its significance, status, functioning, etc.

In order to answer this question, first of all we should note that the reference to the world of everyday life greatly expands the boundaries of the study of culture (in spite of the fact that originally it was interpreted in the framework of microhistory, its “continuance” and “fundamentality” turned out to be wider than a specific fact and helped to overcome the narrowness of the empirical approach). In everyday life what is important is the fact’s involvement in the whole space rather than the individual fact itself.

With the reference to everyday life the mechanisms of differentiation of various cultures carried out according to different features and grounds, as well as a common cultural space into separate components become more obvious; at the same time everyday life becomes a unifying backdrop of the structural elements of culture, the principle of the connection and operation of which may be determined by this very mundanity. This allows the researcher to include the aspects related to the functioning of the structural elements of culture in their subject (material) and sign (symbolic) implementations.

With the reference to everyday life we get the new opportunities for learning the basics of the formation of the world view, the semantic settings with the mechanisms for the formation of stereotypes, mental settings and the world outlook in general.

In addition, the world of everyday life contributes to the reconstruction of the

real (alive) image of culture in general, the cultural worlds of different social groups, the principles of their interaction in the framework of a common cultural space, the formation of ideas about each other and oneself. Everyday life clearly demonstrates the general and the particular in cultures, indicating the main nodes of controversies connected with the tendencies, on the one hand, towards unification and levelling of individual cultures, and, on the other hand, towards emphasizing the uniqueness and diversity of cultural experience. At the same time, not only everyday life just states and demonstrates otherness or community, but it also shows why, for what reasons another or common (similar) socio-cultural space is formed, since everyday life always appeals to a particular experience evolving and functioning for a long time. This contributes to the formation of understanding mechanisms, adequate perception, acceptance of another culture, another reality, because it is everyday life that puts different cultural experiences on equal terms and provides the possibility for existence of multiplicity of cultural worlds.

Thus, everyday life is an actively functioning sign system (understood as a reality that exists independently of the will of the researcher) that carries out a specific cultural model (constructed reality). In the theoretical and methodological aspects the reference to everyday life helps to “revive” the research construction of a historical, social, ethnographic, anthropological character. But if in the humanities everyday life (its study) significantly helps to solve the problem of discrepancies between theoretical models and the studied reality, then in respect of everyday life itself this contradiction is not solved completely, which makes the study of everyday life promising and important in the context of development of the humanities.

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Повседневность:

к проблеме определения понятия и явления

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В статье предпринята попытка проследить процесс становления научного интереса к повседневности, формирования исследовательских подходов к ее изучению. Автором определяется эвристическая значимость обращения к изучению повседневности в контексте развития гуманитарного знания. Предлагается авторское понимание содержания понятия и явления повседневности, обосновывается перспективность исследований в области повседневного, обыденного.

Ключевые слова: повседневность, исследования повседневности, определение повседневности, специфика и исследовательский потенциал изучения повседневности.
