Special Subject L: The transformation of everyday life in Britain, 1945-1990

Lucy Delap

This Special examines the changes in British society and culture that emerged between 1945 and 1990, through the optic of ‘everyday life’. The broad themes examined include the changing norms around the need to conform to the expectations of others within families, neighbourhoods and wider society; the transformations to British experiences of greater mobility, including the growing presence of ethnic and religious minorities, the rise of the car, and growing internal migration; changes in diet, the built environment, working lives, childhood and adolescence; the new visibility of sexual politics, sexual minorities and the disabled in culture, politics and society; changing cultures of class, new habits and spaces of leisure, and reconfigurations of urban/rural relations.

‘The Transformation of Everyday Life’ spans the divide between social, cultural and political history, by interweaving the study of families and communities with a sense of the politicisation of a range of ‘everyday’ practices and settings, in relation to reproduction, domestic violence and domestic labour, adolescence, the (built) environment and consumption. Both left and right - political elites and social movements - reshaped politics in the post 1945 era by becoming attentive to quotidian questions of welfare, justice and resource distribution within families and communities. The sources will range widely, across novels, radio, television, periodical and newspaper publications, Mass Observation, social surveys (including their unpublished field notes), photographs, postcards and memoirs. A major strand of the course relates to the rise of different kinds of social and ‘psy’ sciences – sociology, cultural studies, anthropology and psychology. We examine the ‘footprint’ of these new disciplins in postwar Britain, and assess the value of their outputs for historical analysis.

Teaching

An introductory 2 hour seminar will discuss why there has been an increasing interest in ‘the everyday’, and explore theoretical bases (De Certeau, Bourdieu etc.) influential among historians. Ten further 2 hour seminars will discuss the major themes of the course (7 in Michaelmas, 3 in Lent). These seminars will be structured around student presentations, with topics assigned early in Michaelmas, and will be supplemented by a planned field trip (to the Kite/Grafton Centre area in Cambridge). This seminar work will be supported by 8 one hour classes (Michaelmas and Lent) examining historical approaches to different kinds of source material that might illustrate quotidian change. These will be based on class discussion of set texts and some additional short student presentations. Four further one hour classes in Lent will encourage students to think across the topics already examined through detailed case studies of trends and cultural resources (e.g. diet, clothing, drink, comedy). A one hour class in Lent, and 2 seminars in Easter will focus on clarifying what is expected in the long essay paper and the gobbet/source exam paper.

Indicative reading
Tony Bennett and Diane Watson (eds), *Understanding Everyday Life* (2002)


Mike Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940* (2010)


Jon Lawrence, ‘Class, “Affluence” and the study of everyday life in Britain, c.1930-64’, *Cultural and Social History* 10, 2 (2013), 273-299
1. Introduction: theories and practices of ‘everyday life’ [2 hour seminar],

2. Making Homes [2 hour seminar]; Class 1 [1 hour]: Mass Observation

3. Place and Belonging [seminar]; Field trip [10am-12noon]: Reshaping the Built Environment

4. Physical and social mobilities [seminar]; Class 2: Fieldtrip report back

5. Community Studies and Cultural Studies [seminar]; Class 3: Published Social Surveys and Secondary Analysis of Survey Fieldwork

6. Consumption, Leisure and Material Culture [seminar]; Class 4: Periodicals and the press

7. Work, Employment and Unemployment [seminar]; Class 5: Audio-visual sources: Cinema, radio and television

8. The Body and (Dis)ability [seminar]; Class: Gobbets Q&A

   Film Screening (week 9)

   **Lent Term**

   1. Sexuality and the Self [seminar]; Class 6: Postcards & letters

   2. Families, parenthood and childhood [seminar] Class 7: Visual Culture

   3. Class 8: Diaries and autobiography[ (1 hr) and gobbets practice (1 hr)]

   **Supplementary Classes [1 hour]:**

   4. Changing Diets: Food in post-war Britain

   5. Drinking cultures

   6. Clothing

   7. Comedy

   8. Long essay and gobbets

   **Easter Term**

   Week 1: Revision session [1 hour] – long essays

   Week 3: Revision session [2 hours] – gobbets
Indicative questions:

How far did the ‘everyday life’ of a Londoner resemble that of other Britons in EITHER the 1960s or the 1980s?

Why and to what effect did Britain see the rise of the ‘sex shop’ from the 1970s?

‘The study of ‘everyday life’ is profoundly political’. Discuss

When, if ever, did the personal become political in post-war Britain?

‘Everyday life weighs heaviest on women’ [Henri Lefebvre]. Does it?

How significant was the introduction of the freezer in transforming British diets and eating habits?

How, and how far, did religion inform everyday life in post-war Britain?

When, for whom and to what effect did the home become a financial asset in post-war Britain?

‘Unemployment changed surprisingly little about the lives of the unemployed.’ Discuss.

Why was television so controversial in Britain in the three decades after 1952?