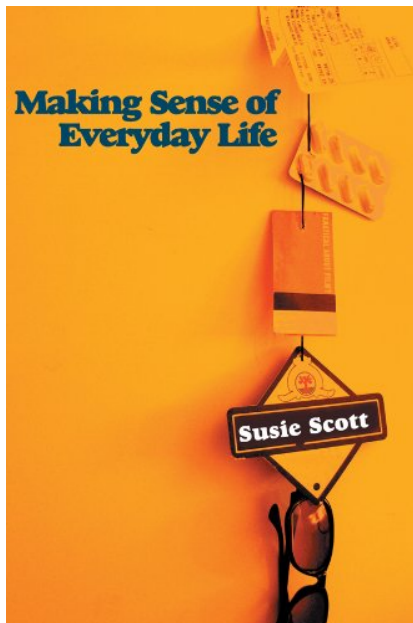




Making Sense of Everyday Life

Scott, Susie
Polity Press, Cambridge
2009
9780745642680 (pb)

Order this book?



Susie Scott's *Making Sense of Everyday Life* is a useful, manageably-sized, paperback that would be well suited as an introductory textbook on this increasingly noted field of enquiry. The book is sensibly laid out in ten chapters commencing with "What is Everyday Life?" and "Theorizing the Mundane". The balance of the chapters take the reader through "Emotions", "Home" and "Time" to "Eating and Drinking", "Health, Illness and Disability", "Shopping" and "Leisure". After whetting the reader's appetite, a final capstone chapter is dedicated specifically to "Researching Everyday Life" which includes more detail on a variety of suggested methodologies and their practice. While the study of "everyday life" is enjoying current popularity this book includes not only contemporary material, but also a good deal of historical examples and studies providing a context for our contemporary life as well as a solid theoretical grounding for the discipline. The wide-ranging collection of approaches draws together the most notable theoretical developments in many fields associated with the social sciences, psychology, cultural studies and anthropology and demonstrates the advances and applications of key theories to the understanding of how we live and make sense of the world. There are discussions on early twentieth-century advertising, for example, as well as a variety of early studies of interest. A dramaturgical analysis of the theatrics employed by salespeople in the art of persuading their audience (the customer) to a purchase is one such example. Shoe-shopping

is theorised in this manner and draws upon studies dating back to the 1930s to provide insights. In some ways, including references from 1904 through the 1930s et cetera shows the history of the discipline, indicating that the study of everyday life has itself developed and built upon regimentations that are often held firm.

The chapter on 'Researching Everyday Life' takes the reader through a variety of methodologies and possible sources. Here the reader learns more about useful resources such as the Mass Observation archive and various methodologies. Scott's explanation of ethnomethodology as involving observation, analysis and testing "of taken-for-granted assumptions on which a particular group of individuals rely" is germane to the flavour of the book generally, in that it encourages critical thinking about normative practices for the sake of understanding and shows a pleasure that may be found in study. This final chapter also includes a discussion of ethics and politics as they apply to this kind of research and suggestions for designing your own research.

Making Sense of Everyday Life demonstrates the richness and importance of this field of enquiry and would clearly be of interest to many disciplines such as social science, cultural studies, anthropology and social psychology; but it may also benefit students engaged in studying the cultural industries such as journalism, marketing, public relations and creative writing. Through demonstrating the application of theory to daily life this appealing book may encourage a wider readership to think twice about apparently mundane activities that serve to reproduce meaning and create structure in societies. Theory, after all, is an attempt to understand and explain the world and here Scott demonstrates its value in examining familiar features of everyday life and the importance of studying them.

In summary, this is a wide-ranging and accessible book that does not skimp on theory and remains engaging and interesting to read. It is ideally suited as a textbook, or for any reader with an interest in how people operate socially and how we make sense of the world.

Andrew Mason

