HANDBOOK OF
Critical Environmental Politics

Edited by

Luigi Pellizzoni • Emanuele Leonardi
Viviana Asara

ELGAR HANDBOOKS IN ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Handbook of Critical Environmental Politics

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ELGAR HANDBOOKS IN ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

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INTRODUCTION: THE SPACE OF EVERYDAY LIFE IN ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS

At first sight, everyday life might seem a residual theme as we go about thinking about the (contemporary) politics of the environment. It is normally constructed as a private sphere that does not have much to do with the big picture of planetary and geo-political relations. For this reason, its capacity to foster change and transformation on such a scale looks limited. Yet, interest in the role of daily practices in (re)producing and resisting the unsustainability of advanced capitalist societies is increasing (Rau 2018). Why is this so? First, the ecological crisis and ecological concerns more generally compel us to think differently about what we normally construct as private or individual actions. Anything we do in our daily routines necessarily has consequences, which are virtually global since the environments we inhabit are interrelated and interdependent (Adams 2015). A great deal of contemporary ecological devastation is also the direct result of a particular (Western affluent) way of life that is energy- and resource-demanding as well as wasteful. This is usually understood as 'consumer capitalism' (Blühdorn and Welsh 2007), although it is the capitalist system as a whole being called into question by the ecological crisis.

One of the first issues for the (environmental) politics of everyday life is how this apparently private sphere can be in any way political, embodying a tension and intention towards collective transformation. This has been an ongoing interrogation in the field of critical thinking. Lefebvre's (2014; see also Lefebvre 2011) Marxist contribution to the critique of everyday life (spanning from the 1940s to the 1980s) has been seminal in this. The effort was to theorise it as inherently political for two reasons: first, as it is embedded in wider forms of capitalist social organisation; and second, as it is irreducible to those forms and, therefore, a potential space of struggle. De Certeau (2011) highlighted the ways in which everyday life constructs its own politics as a form of constant invention of practices, conducts and meanings that elude those that are hegemonic, and often oppressive. Feminist thought has also been focusing for decades on how the activities that populate daily living, mostly carried out by women and focusing on life reproduction, are inherently political (Bhattacharya and Vogel 2017). Despite their being systematically hidden and devalued as banal, personal, activities of 'getting by', they are central to wider systemic reproduction. However, what is most important, they embody a logic of care that counters exploitative and competitive forms of relations, thus bearing the seeds for novel forms of relationality (Federici 2018, 2020).

Everyday life has become of explicit interest for research on sustainability, ecological crisis and transitions throughout the past decades, and especially with the advent of neoliberalism and the consequent reorganisation of political participation. This new centrality has two facets. The first has to do with the management and governance of daily socio-technical assemblages.

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Currently, institutional politics are very keen to promote changes towards sustainability in everyday life, such as the promotion of recycling, reduction of home waste, energy and water consumption, ecological modes of transportation and the adoption of sustainable diets (Berglund and Matti 2006). These policies have been shaped by different types of knowledge, scientific practice and interventions that will be reviewed in the next section. Their common feature is that they promote top-down change, in which institutions set goals and implement strategies to reach them (Shove and Walker 2010). Alternatively, there are grassroots environmental mobilisations that articulate at the level of everyday life and that embody politics in a bottom-up movement of social subjects (Meyer 2015; Chapter 35 and 36 in this volume). Different forms of academic research and literature correspond to this, which start from the practices, desires and needs of everyday life to reflect on what sustainability is, how it is achievable and in the interests of whom (Chapter 9 in this volume). This is also analysed in the next section, which closes with a reflection on the role of critical thinking in this area of investigation. The third section moves from this exposition to pin down a few contentious issues. I conclude by indicating the opportunities that these debates open and perspectives for future research and practice.

TRACING THE FIELD: APPROACHES, CONCEPTS, FRAMINGS

Policy and the Governance of Transitions

The politics of the environment during the decades immediately after World War II have in large part neglected the sphere of everyday life, since the targets of their policies were macro-level dynamics and actors. Yet, with the advent of neoliberalism and the 'rolling back' of the state, 'soft' policies are preferred to command-and-control policies (Oels 2005; Heynen et al. 2007; Chapter 29 in this volume). These operate through monetary strategies, such as financial incentives and taxation (Tews et al. 2003), technological innovation for efficiency or green production (Herring and Roy 2007) and, finally, through the interpellation of individuals to act in pro-environmental ways (Autio et al. 2009). Everyday life is an important sphere of intervention of neoliberal politics because their methodological individualism implies that individual actions, summed up, have significant impacts on the environment. For instance, by choosing in the market, individuals have the power to stir production processes in desired directions. This has led many policy-makers to believe that if individual behaviours, attitudes and choices could be changed, then visible improvements could take place in our socio-environmental metabolism (Shove 2010). How to make people use a bicycle instead of a car, buy organic instead of non-organic products, and switch off the light when not in use? In this context, the idea of 'ecological citizenship' starts to gain visibility (Jagers et al. 2014): citizens – constructed as rational, ethical and free individuals – should take responsibility for pro-environmental change by engaging in ecologically virtuous behaviours (for example, green consumption, recycling, energy use reduction and efficiency) (Hobson 2013a).

In neoliberal politics of the environment, governance does not disappear but works through subtly operating devices. One device is the moralisation of behaviours, constructed as 'good' or 'bad' on the basis of their (un)sustainability. Thus individuals internalise and reproduce the norms they are supposed to conform to (Butler 2010). Behaviour-change policies, for their part, aim at changing people's (assumedly interior or mental) attitudes towards more

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ecological options, in the hope these will determine more sustainable choices and actions (Hargreaves 2011). 'Nudge' strategies push behaviours in established directions by designing specific architectures of choice (Thaler and Sunstein 2009). Information provision and awareness-raising have also been employed, in the conviction that by knowing the consequences of their actions, people would act in a moral way, that is, do what is 'best' for the environment (Heiskanen and Laasko 2019). Yet these strategies have proven ineffective and have been variously criticised (Hobson 2013b).

Their individualising tendencies, for instance, are evident and troubling on a number of levels (Hobson 2002). First, the idea of a sovereign subject whose behaviours linearly derive from interiorly held ideas and values, rational evaluations and free choices is idealistic. This is the main critique proposed by scholars drawing on social practice theory (see Schatzki 2008): people live in material and symbolic cultures that direct actions, set what is socially (un)accepted, are structured around embodied and affective habits. Available choices within a given setting are in large part determined, so behaviour change and sacrifice towards sustainability cannot be adequate responses (Hargreaves 2011). Interpellation of individuals is thus politically problematic; it seeks to govern sustainable transitions by targeting largely insignificant acts while obscuring the need for systemic change in the way resources are distributed, social expectations produced, and infrastructure systems created and maintained. This leaves the system and the interests that move it largely untouched (Shove and Walker 2010). In a more psycho-social and interpretive vein, other researchers add that also intersubjective commitments, affects, desires, attachments and unconscious investments contribute to make everyday behaviours and practices significant and enduring. Hence, interventions that do not address these aspects of everyday 'texturing' will not be effective and might also produce reactive and counter-productive responses (Randall 2009; Thomas et al. 2017).

The multi-level perspective (MLP) on sustainable transitions holds, in response, that governance should take a more holistic view of systems' transformation: socio-technical innovations promoted by institutional and private actors on the macro scale (for example, systems of energy provision) should go hand in hand with a change in everyday practices so that they can be accepted by social actors; processes of technological innovation should themselves see the active involvement of these actors so that they are tailored to needs and therefore welcomed (Geels 2010). The effort is to operate bearing in mind a more complex and nuanced vision of society and the way actors interact to produce or hinder change. Yet, the question remains whether the governance of transitions within current institutional and socio-economic organisation can be an effective and sufficient response to sustainability challenges. It does not question the whole 'imperial' (Brand and Wissen 2017) organisation of life within late capitalist societies, and in particular the everyday organisation of time, space and habit, its imaginaries, values and forms of subjectivity. For these reasons, it is important to investigate movements of change 'from below', that is, emerging within and from everyday life.

Political Consumerism?

Since the final decades of the twentieth century, participation in the public sphere and formal organisations diminished while the economy took centre stage in holding the social fabric. Consumption in the market became increasingly important as a means of self-expression, identity but also political demands and activism (Micheletti 2003; Forno 2019). The intentional and active choice of consumer behaviours, such as boycotting, buycotting and exerting

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pressures on big firms, inaugurated a way of conceiving purchases no longer in merely instrumental terms but as a way of fostering change, hence the concept of 'political consumerism' (Stolle and Micheletti 2013). In the wake of the ecological crisis, responsible, green or sustainable consumption has been seen as one of the instruments that the citizen, or better 'citizen-consumer', has at hand for pro-environmental change. If ecological problems and degradation are mainly caused by unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, the effort is to orchestrate consumption behaviours (for example, boycotting larger carbon dioxide producers) so that these anti-ecological dynamics are disrupted (Johnston 2008; Spaargaren and Oosterveer 2010).

The historical fate of movements centred on political consumerism evolved together with reflections on their practices to profoundly critique this way of doing (environmental) politics. Capitalism was able to absorb critiques and demands, transforming them into further commodities to be sold on the market for profit; its greening did not yield significant results in respect of environmental sustainability and socio-economic equality (Hobson 2013b). Changes in everyday consumption choices (for example, buying green or fairtrade commodities) without a wider system's change appear to be insufficient (Barr et al. 2011). In light of these issues, sustainable consumption has taken more radical forms, such as 'anti-consumption' (for example, reusing, recycling/upcycling, making things last and reducing consumption) (Black and Cherrier 2010). In this instance, the aim is not simply to change the content and form of commodities in the market, but also to disrupt the processes of valorisation that push our economies to increasingly unsustainable patterns of energy, resource use and waste. By questioning the role and place of consumption, anti-consumption practices challenge an economic system that, seeking infinite growth via commodification, is responsible for the ecological crisis.

However, these efforts, if they only remain aggregates of politicised individual choices, continue to seem partial, limited and necessarily confronted with a wider socio-material organisation of life in which the opportunities for operating sustainable choices and practices are limited (Shove 2010). Think, just for example, of the time that some anti-consumption practices, such as upcycling, mending or do-it-yourself (DIY), require: within an increasingly precarious and stringent labour organisation, this becomes increasingly scarce. The instruments and resources to (re)produce life outside of the circuits of the capitalist market are not available to the vast majority of people (Kallis et al. 2020). But if we step out of a binary vision that distinguishes everyday from collective life, then we can see a transformative potential that transcends the isolation of individuals' choices in the market. This applies to forms of organised consumption, where groups gather around everyday life issues to build material and socially sustainable assemblages that produce flows of matter, energy and information, alternatives to those that are unsustainable and capitalist (for example, alternative food networks, AFNs, for the procurement of food, and energy cooperatives) (Dal Gobbo and Forno 2020).

In these examples, in activism and in academic research, we move to a conception of everyday mobilisations involving the construction of a different organisation of life instead of being only enacted within the given options provided by the system. The reconfiguration of material and symbolic flows through collective practice allows, for instance, new forms of valuation to emerge (Centemeri 2018). Within the capitalist economy, value is that process through which life as a whole becomes exchangeable and functional to accumulation. Alternative practices of sociality, 'doing together', knowledge, time and resources-sharing, solidarity, and so on are based on forms of valuation that are emplaced, qualitative, and responsive to the singular needs of communities and individuals (Centemeri 2019). Participation in alternatives for

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meeting life needs, such as food consumption, also facilitates processes of politicisation; that is, everyday practices and subjectivities change as people change their views, understanding and stances towards mainstream forms of consumption (Forno et al. 2015). This materialises in everyday sustainable transitions. Yet, these forms of political consumerism tend to remain limited to some practices, which they only partially satisfy. Furthermore, they are difficult to sustain in the wider organisation of contemporary life since they are demanding of time and energy. Hence, they seem to remain niche innovations that coexist with mainstream systems of production, consumption and exchange (Signori and Forno 2019).

Everyday Sustainable Materialisms and Prefiguration

A step further in the becoming-collective of everyday engagements with sustainability and the environment are the enactments of 'sustainable materialisms' on the part of social movements and activists (Schlosberg 2019). In view of the ecological crisis and of the increasingly evident incapacity of institutions to tackle it, there is expanding interest in the constitution of movements that are able to respond to the basic necessities of life reproduction (for example, food, clothes, energy, housing and transport) in sustainable ways and outside of mainstream channels. The logic at the core of these mobilisations is not very different from that informing most radical forms of political consumerism considered previously. The main aim is that of collectively creating the preconditions for making basic life reproduction autonomous from the flows of the capitalist market, distancing from its escalating dynamics of production–consumption–waste and environmental degradation (Schlosberg and Coles 2016). Yet the material and symbolic critique of systemic unsustainability is deeper.

For activists involved in everyday sustainable materialism movements the aim is a wider change in the overall organisation of existence that involves radical economic, sociocultural and subjective transformations towards sustainability (understood in its widest, not only environmental, meaning). Materially, these movements seek to promote parsimony, non-waste, endurance, creative reuse of objects, as well as a convivial mode of life that reinforces the importance of collective creativity, sharing, and control over the conditions of life reproduction (Meyer 2015). The purpose is not to convince individuals to engage in virtuous actions for the environment; the effort is of a collective type, for together it is possible to overcome those barriers that necessarily restrict the transformative capacity of individual actions set against systemic constraints (Schlosberg 2019). Socioculturally, sustainable materialisms seek to reconfigure the meanings and values around what is the 'good life' and of what 'living well' means. This reflection ultimately invests the sphere of subjectivity, as even the most apparently private enjoyments and pleasures can be rethought and recast, for instance, through the cultivation of 'alternative hedonisms' that are not harmful to the environment and other human beings (Soper 2004, 2008).

Constructing alternative and richer ways of meeting basic life needs outside, or on the fringes, of capitalist production, exchange and consumption requires also recasting the conception of what life is and how it should be organised. For instance, this type of mobilisation contests the strict division between production and reproduction, and work and leisure. The two are no longer relegated to dichotomous spheres of action, such as alienated salaried labour and equally alienated consumption. Ultimately, life can be lived, at least partially, outside of the money nexus. It can involve care, reparation and co-beingness (Litfin 2016). In this, everyday sustainable materialisms can already be seen as 'prefigurative': they start to imagine

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and practice feasible alternatives to capitalist socio-ecological organisation (Asara 2020). This is sought, even more radically, within movements that establish communities (for example, ecovillages and permaculture) whose explicit aim is building relations of reproduction that are more radically independent from the capitalist organisation of labour and everyday life (Monticelli 2018). These 'ecotopias' build 'moral economies grounded in forms of discourse other than dominant Western economic rationality and guided by the compass of justice and sustainability' (Lockyer and Veteto 2013, p. 20), as well as more-than-human projects of cohabitation (Centemeri 2019).

Although this is not completely accomplished, the tension is towards building the socio-material conditions for the whole of life to be free from ecologically and socially damaging forms of interaction with local and global environments (Anderson 2012). Individuals' lives are embedded within more-than-human communities out of which they find living resources. This is often understood in respect of autonomy and sufficiency: the necessities of reproduction – such as food, housing, energy, education and health – are met in socio-ecological collectives that respond to communitarian logics, are not based on private property, individualism, competitiveness and oppression, and especially seek balance by respecting ecological limits (Anderson 2007). The relevance of these movements has been contested since they seem difficult to scale up and spread. Nonetheless, this is not necessarily their intent: there is an almost bespoke will not to do so and to remain a niche experience, often even lacking an openly political position. This might be seen as a form of retreatism, ultimately unhelpful for a more generalised transition towards a sustainable organisation of life. However, the significance of these movements is in their capacity to preserve, rediscover and generate forms of knowledge, political organisation and ecological practices that tend to be silenced and hidden from mainstream society, and thus to cultivate the seeds for alternative forms of life beyond capitalism (Litfin 2014). Furthermore, those who take part in these movements largely accept that a completely sustainable life is ultimately impossible to articulate in contemporary societies; yet, positively managing this tension is also a way forward to make 'ecotopia' permeate the daily socio-ecological dealings also of people 'outside' these niches (Anderson 2012; Groves et al. 2016).

CONTENTIOUS ISSUES

By now it should be evident that the sustainability of everyday life is far from being an uncontentious field. Is it the individual's responsibility to enact change even in the face of the apparent futility of such an act? What is and should be the role of institutions in the transition to sustainability? What are the opportunities for collective articulation of resistance and alternatives to the unsustainability of contemporary capitalism? Are such alternatives ultimately doomed to being either 'absorbed' by mainstream society or else remain niche practices that live alongside ecologically (and socially) destructive systems? This section is dedicated to shedding light on some of these tensions, starting from key concepts in the politics of everyday life.

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Responsibility

This concept is riddled with many contradictory and complex meanings, nuances and political implications; it sits on that problematic node where individual and collective, public and private, social and personal intersect and produce tensions in thinking sustainable transformations and green politics. The subject of modern liberal politics is expected or interpellated to act rationally and ethically, to be responsible for his or her own actions and therefore act so as not to damage – or reduce the damage to – other beings (humans and non-humans). As this subject is criticised by highlighting the non-rational, relational and contextual character of existence, then also the notion of individual agency and responsibility necessarily change. 'Freedom of choice' is restricted to the sociocultural, economic and material conditions in which we are born and live. Everyday practices comprise non-rational and non-deliberate aspects: routines, habit, desires, practices of care and libidinal attachments. Choices, in so far as they remain individual, tend to remain within the boundaries of an existing socio-ecological organisation, hence individuals' capability to produce change is only limited.

Should we conclude that assuming responsibility for ecological change through everyday micro-practices is but a way of denying ourselves that we are incapable of transformation, actually reinforcing the status quo and leaving it unaltered (Žižek 2011)? Should the responsibility for sustainable transitions be held by governments and institutions alone? The latter position assumes that there is a distinction between the social fabric and the institutions that represent it, producing an unhelpful splitting of agency. In its dichotomy, the individual is seen in its disempowered role and the state as the subject capable of making policies for transition. Within this framework, the governance of transitions on the part of institutions will be necessarily also a governance of everyday life, in which subjects are made to passively comply with socially accepted behaviours, deemed environmentally 'good'. This encourages a technocratic and disempowering management of life and daily existence, in a form of biopower where discourses, political practices and the employment of dispositives of power/knowledge seek to shape everyday life and discipline it to established ends. This approach depoliticises the debate around what these ends are and obscures the more structural determinants of unsustainability (Shove and Walker 2010).

More fruitful might then be re-thinking responsibility itself. Instead of something that pertains either to the individual or to some type of abstract political entity, we might introduce a relational view that sees transformative capacities as pertaining to more-than-human collectives, or assemblages (Alaimo 2012). Here, it is 'response-ability' – being able to respond to the other – that can be a first step towards an engagement with our environments that is cognisant of the limits of human action, giving the opportunity for reparation, creation and invention of new socio-ecologies (Haraway 2016). Everyday actions are always already political, collective and ecological. In this perspective, in order to actualise their transformative potential, it is important to expand connections, generating a shared aim and sense of belonging.

Knowledge

Related to questions about responsibility are questions concerned with the status and role of knowledge. If we assume that rational and ethical subjects act on the basis of the knowledge they have of a particular situation, then it is important to offer information on environmental issues and possible solutions, so that individuals develop awareness and capacity of choice.

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According to this view, knowledge on unsustainable practices changes attitudes and, as a result, also behaviours change (Stern 2000). Yet information provision alone, without structural changes to the material, semiotic and temporal cultures in which individuals are embedded, is not enough for them to practice what they learn to be a 'good' or 'right' behaviour – even if they are willing to do so. For instance, adopting sustainable behaviours might be expensive in money and time, so people need to accommodate their desire for ethical and sustainable daily choices to contextual constraints (Shove 2010). Having a great deal of information might even be counterproductive as the feeling of our inadequacy to change gives way to feelings of guilt and, ultimately, a nihilistic anything-goes attitude (Randall 2009).

Perhaps more importantly, there remains the question of what and whose knowledge can be of help in making everyday life more ecological. There is a strong push for a top-down definition of environmental risk and adaptation that comes from institutions, and is backed up by official scientific discourse. Although this is an important source of knowledge, it becomes problematic in the moment it is deployed as a master-narrative that seeks to hegemonise the local and lived knowledges that inform socio-ecological dealings in concrete territories and histories. The hierarchisation of knowledge obscures those forms of local human non-human relationalities that have always sustained life reproduction, and which are able to come to terms with the concrete characters of ecological assemblages in order to preserve their vitality (Martínez-Alier 2002; Frandy and Cederström 2017). Everyday life politics might then also be about rediscovering different forms of knowledge, related to care and regeneration. These are not to be considered inferior to scientific understandings but as coexisting with them on the same plane and, possibly, providing the opportunity to rethink science as an embedded practice of resilience, r-existence and creation (Salleh 2017).

Socio-Technical Innovations or Social Inventiveness?

Part of the current unsustainability of everyday life is believed to depend on the systems of provision, infrastructures, materials and habits that embed everyday life and sustain its practices (Chapters 11 and 15 in this volume). These have been designed according to the affordances of fossil resources, such as carbon, oil and gas, which are now becoming scarce but, most importantly, are proving extremely ecologically problematic. Hence, one of the crucial steps in operating a transition to more sustainable livelihoods is that of devising new ways of living, of (re)producing life, without the side effects that fossil fuel economies imply. This change has often been thought in respect of socio-technical innovation (Geels 2010). The term 'socio-technical innovation' implies that transitions cannot be simply a top-down process in which new technologies are devised by experts who then impose them on the populace. In order for the new technologies to be politically acceptable and technically functioning, innovative systems of provision need to go hand in hand with changes in social organisation, practices, habits and ways of intending the world. For instance, the use of green-powered grids not only involves the implementation of complex technological assemblages ranging from solar panels to information and communication technology (ICT) software (Chapter 38 in this volume), but also demands that social subjects are capable and ready to change habits and routines (for example, using energy-demanding devices at different times), become literate with digital technologies, accept to have a different kind of control over the energy availability in their houses.

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Who is to decide and shape this process of transition? For many, it is sufficient that practices of research and development (R&D) become participatory and include a sample of subjects who are prospectively to acquire the innovations in order to adjust the transformation process to their needs, desires, bodies and voices. For others, though, this is not so straightforward (Grinbaum and Groves 2013). Those who opt to see a sustainable transition as a matter of everyday-life mobilisation aimed at the construction of completely different modes of life problematise expert and institutionally led approaches as but another instance of technocratic and ultimately faulty way of managing transitions. By remaining within the ideological and practical coordinates of current modes of living, this would at best manage to improve energy efficiency and partially diminish emissions, but it might also show side effects in the long run. For instance, while electric cars and solar panels are seen as green alternative technologies that might promote everyday life sustainability, they also pose issues regarding the energy- and resource-intensive production and disposal of their components.

Changing, Reducing and Transforming 'Consumption'

We now encounter another, related, crucial node of the debate; that is, the role of consumption practices for sustainability. Is it sufficient to change the ways people consume in their every-day life (and, as a consequence, the ways in which commodities and utilities are produced), or is a more radical change in the whole socio-ecological organisation of life on the planet needed, including a profound reshaping of the ways we produce, exchange and use things? In between these poles, there are more nuanced positions such as those proposing that consump-tion can be made more sustainable if it shifts to non-material commodities, or that we can reduce consumption while leaving generally intact contemporary life formations. The answer depends on where different streams of thought locate the problem of unsustainability. Is it fossil-fuel? Is it consumerist societies? Is capitalist organisation of life, labour and human–non-human relationality to be held responsible? According to the different positions, solutions proposed range from a greening of consumption and production, to a need to put limits to consumption and thus growth, to a complete rethinking of what it means to (re)produce life on earth (Hobson 2013b).

Labour and Autonomy

To some extent, concerns about labour seem external to everyday life, the latter often being defined as what labour is not: reproduction and care versus production, personal relations versus contractual, paid, relations, and so on. However, looking more radically at everyday life sustainability leads us to also problematise these dichotomies and rethink the status of these terms (Chapter 41 in this volume). Ecofeminist literature (for example, Mies 2001; Salleh 2017; Chapter 3 in this volume), for instance, highlights that the unsustainability of contem-porary capitalist patriarchal societies has at least part of its roots in this strict division of the two spheres: the everyday 'private' sphere that pertains to women, and that of salaried labour, where males sell their time to produce commodities. The latter activity, on the one hand, is subjected to the need for increasing (value) production and therefore the destructive dynamics of capital accumulation, but on the other, it presupposes the unpaid feminine labour of care and reproduction. In advanced capitalist societies, reproduction is more directly integrated into the formal capitalist economy; in order to sustain growth and accumulation, it starts to

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be based on an escalating consumption of commodities, itself becoming an environmentally damaging activity (Mies 2001). In this process, the 'negentropic' potential of reproductive labour, that is, its capacity to counterbalance the degradation of matter and energy that is involved in production processes (see Leff 2015; Leonardi 2019), is strongly limited and with it the opportunities of embodying different, less violent, relationships with living beings. The knowledge, sensitivity, habits and material cultures that foreground sustainable life reproduction are erased as this sphere is commodified (Chapter 4 in this volume). Hence, partially in line with Fraser's (2016) observations on the contradiction between capital and care, we notice that capital systematically undermines the bases of social reproduction, generating a crisis to which it is incapable of responding.

Ecofeminists hence propose that the non-appropriative and careful forms of daily engagement with other beings that women (as a result of their social positioning) constantly experience might be a first step towards re-embedding economies in the felt needs of specific, emplaced and concrete communities. Following the idea that human activities are to be directed to 'living well' instead of to growth and development imperatives, they propose an economy of autonomy and sufficiency that overcomes the distinction between productive and reproductive labour. Everyday life becomes the broader space of existence where exchanges with the rest of nature (action, knowledge and technology) can be reshaped towards an organic and purposeful reconnection; it is where needs and desires are embodied in their concrete, finite, forms, and happiness is sought in sufficiency: flourishing with the rest of nature, not through mastering it (Salleh 2017).

Is Environmentalism for the Rich or for the Poor?

These considerations bring me to one, final, contentious issue for the environmental politics of everyday life; namely, the debate that sees environmentalism as a bourgeois or middle-class preoccupation as opposed to the idea that the poor are those who most embody and recognise the need for sustainability. The 'postmaterialist' thesis (Inglehart 2007) is that environmental preoccupations in everyday life emerge after basic needs are satisfied and a particular degree of material well-being and affluence is attained. Environmental protection comes after socio-economic development, since the values foregrounding preservation of ecological balances are seen as secondary to preoccupations over material conditions. For instance, a consumer might start buying green commodities only after he or she does not need to penny pinch to get to the end of the month; given social groups mobilise for the environment only in the absence of more pressing problems, such as housing or feeding. Yet this view is problematic on a number of grounds (Meyer 2015). First, it dichotomises material and non-material aspects of existence, downplaying their interconnectedness. Second, it does not problematise the model and ideological construction of modern development and that it was in large part responsible for environmental degradation in the first place. Finally, it seems to suggest that it is the world's poor who pollute more than the rich because they are not concerned with, and cannot afford, green lifestyles.

On the contrary, ecological impact does not correlate with green values, conscience or ideals but with income and in the opposite direction: the richer you are, the more you pollute. This is owing to the habit(us) and affordances of a rich life being intrinsically more energy demanding and wasteful (for example, flights, more cars changed and rebound effects) (Meyer and Kersten 2016). Secondly, but even more importantly, taking a global perspective

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we see that it has been the rich that, in order to produce profit or sustain their everyday life standards, have created ecological devastation worldwide. It is the world's poor who, in many instances, engage in reparative and preserving practices for ecosystems that would otherwise be destroyed (Martínez-Alier 2002). Finally, as the new mobilisations around everyday sustainable materialisms suggest, social subjects tend to invent and make-do different, more sustainable and autonomous ways of life at those times when (capitalist) development fails. For instance, in moments of crisis and impoverishment, participation in mainstream consumption practices becomes more difficult and people experiment with reduction, creative reuse, self-production, and so on. Everyday life shows its capacity to produce sustainable alternatives to the dominant, ecologically damaging, forms of life (Bertell 2017; Schlosberg 2019).

OPEN QUESTIONS: WHAT ROLE FOR EVERYDAY LIFE IN RESHAPING SOCIO-ECOLOGIES?

In this brief overview we have seen everyday life in its ambiguous and yet productive position as regards sustainability, the politics of the environment and transformative ecological practices. On the one hand, individual-based strategies for change at 'micro' level are destined to be ineffective and possibly counterproductive; on the other, not even macro-level changes in themselves will be enough, particularly if they are understood as top-down infrastructural interventions that aim at making more ecological the assemblages of everyday life (for example, energy, mobility and consumption). What seems to emerge from the discussion developed in this chapter is that everyday politics of the environment, if they are to be effective, ought to involve a profound transformation of the fabric of daily existence, at least in Western societies. This would require changes at systemic and subjective levels: in the way wider flows of energy, material and symbols circulate in society but also in how existence is experienced, interpreted and sensed.

An open question in this regard is how much this change is to correspond with a complete systemic transformation: is it enough, for instance, that greening the means of (re)production goes hand in hand with changed environmental sensitivities and deeper responsibility for the non-human; or is it the case that sustainability needs a radical critique of socio-economic, socio-ecologic, organisation – such as questioning not only current capitalist economy but instead capitalism *tout court*? In any event, how is it possible to engage the everyday in processes of change and transformation? According to what answer one gives to each of these questions the levels of engagement will vary. A 'shallower' approach to sustainable transitions would see institutions collaborating with citizens in reshaping everyday practices, accommodating novel systems of provision to their needs and desires, meanwhile counting on awareness-raising and environmental information and education. Other forms of engagement can occur through consumption, as consumer-citizens make their preferences heard in the market, now representing the public sphere. More radically, we might hope to start from everyday needs and demands, building from there environmental mobilisations and forces of transformation.

If environmental politics in times of crisis are brought to radical conclusions, the constitution of everyday life as ambiguous but independent private sphere of reproduction might be challenged. In the perspective of a re-embedding human productivity within concrete ecological assemblages in post-capitalist societies, there might not be the space for an economy

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distinct from those needs, demands and desires emerging from embodied and concrete experience. How human subjects go about their everyday existence would then be totally reshaped as a practice of common care for close and not-so-close living beings and ecological aliveness. Subjectivity is thus a key category of radical engagements for the everyday. As researchers, we should be attentive to this dimension since, as we strive to build new socio-ecologies, it is its joys and sorrows, repetitions and differences, that indicate systemic impasses and the need for transformation (Dal Gobbo 2020).

This is not sufficient. Everyday experiences offer glimpses of change, sometimes evanescent events suggesting new political directions; they take place within contrasting systems of values and organisation, so they are contradictory; they differ widely according to biographical trajectories, geographical location and social context. The question of how to make everyday movements and needs a significant collective force remains open. Numerous grassroots movements have emerged that condense these demands. Yet, a wider politicisation of everyday life might be required if wider, stronger, oppositions to systemic unsustainability are to concretise (de Moor et al. 2021). Environmental justice movements and the global feminist movements are currently positing reproduction at the core of their critique and political practice. They might become important interlocutors and allies in articulating the implicit awareness of everyday life, that living always implies an effort to 'live well' with, not against, other beings. Whether we lay the premises for this depends on the socio-political forms that ecological communities build on an ongoing basis.

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