Book Review/Compte rendu

Harvie Ferguson, *Self-Identity and Everyday Life*. The New Sociology. New York: Routledge, 2009, 224 pp. $US 34.18 paper (978-0-4153-5508-7), $US 117.00 hardcover (978-0-415-35509-4)

Harvie Ferguson's *Self-Identity and Everyday Life* is a most welcome addition to Routledge's everyday life titles in general and its New Sociology series in particular. Ferguson, a professor of sociology at the University of Glasgow, has crafted a well thought-out and tautly argued piece of scholarship that incorporates everything from personal anecdotes and popular culture to contemporary and classical social theory and philosophy. If one is looking for a fresh interpretation of the relationship between the concepts of self and everyday life, this text would certainly be of interest.

Despite the similarity in their titles, Ferguson's book is by no means a retread of Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Far from simply revisiting past works, Ferguson's text is a substantial and original contribution to the study of everyday life that deserves to be assessed on its own terms. Ferguson is concerned with giving a panoramic view of the messiness of both self-identity and everyday life in the modern world. The unassuming title of Ferguson's book belies the wealth of content on the pages inside. Along with an extensive summary and blend of the literatures on everyday life and self-identity, there is a substantial foray into the different notions of the self in pre-modern, modern, and postmodern times. All the while several key issues in everyday life studies, such as moods (especially boredom), the body, memories, and fashion are given brief, but penetrating analyses. Ferguson's extensive knowledge of Japanese culture is also on display when he contrasts modern Japanese and Western conceptions of self-identity. This is a refreshing change from Eurocentric focus of most of the everyday life literature.

Another interesting feature of the text is the appearance of two unexpected images at its beginning and end: a 'START' button. Anyone familiar with the XP version of Microsoft Office will immediately recognize it. These buttons may appear gimmicky to some readers, but they are consistent with the quirkiness and overall flow of the text, and underscore Ferguson's assertion that "the liveliness of life continually demands another beginning" (p. 194). Such details are strewn through-

out to demonstrate the openness of self-identity more generally. To echo the series editor, this book is certainly stylish. An emphasis on style is a risky maneuver for a serious academic work, but the style and organization of the book does not trump its substance.

The book is organized in six 'interruptions' interspersed with five chapters. Beginning and ending with an interruption, Ferguson is effectively performing his argument. He explains that each interruption, "like everyday life, makes no pretence to systematic or descriptive completeness, but aims, rather, to present a report on the confusion and incoherence as well as the dreamlike clarity of the present" (p. 8). Yet, questions arise. Are these interruptions really interruptions? Do they truly disrupt the flow of the book, considering that it begins with an interruption? What is being interrupted? The first interruption — a succinct story about the author's identity crisis as a teenager.— serves as a nice introduction to the rest of the text instead of a jarring change of direction. The interruptions are part of the book's charm.

The back cover notes the author's "wide-ranging interests," which is a modest way to describe the eclectic mix of sources peppered throughout the text. While retaining sociological literature as its core, Ferguson uses material from scientists, philosophers, novelists, and psychoanalysts, amongst others. The diversity of these sources attests to the complexity of Ferguson's subject matter and adds a great deal to the richness of the text. Additional analysis of pioneers of everyday life studies such as Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Georg Simmel, and Walter Benjamin would have been welcome, although it would have certainly stretched the cohesiveness of Ferguson's book. Such is the difficulty of writing about everyday life. Where does one start and where does one end?

Self-Identity and Everyday Life could be used across the humanities and social sciences, particularly by social theorists and interdisciplinary practitioners interested in self-identity or the much neglected area of everyday life studies. The unconventional layout of the text may inhibit classroom instruction, but a determined instructor would be well served using it in undergraduate or graduate courses. Overall, Harvie Ferguson's book is an enjoyable and illuminating read that will challenge and enlighten those who wish to heed its advice and hit the 'START' button for thinking about the complex concepts of self-identity and everyday life.

Laurentian University Patrick Gamsby

Patrick Gamsby is a Ph.D. candidate in Human Studies at Laurentian University. His research interests include social theory, continental philosophy, everyday life, modernity, and the environment. He is currently completing his dissertation on boredom and everyday life.
px_gamsby@laurentian.ca