

2-2015

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The role of culture in comics of the quotidian

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Studies of the quotidian often start from a social sciences perspective that daily life is made up of routine practices and ingrained assumptions. This is also found in studies of literature, art and economics. The premise of the quotidian, however, must be examined through a lens of culture. This essay explores how the notion of the quotidian in comics rests on culture, which in turn comprises various nexus of practice. Drawing evidence from *Exit Wounds* (by Rut11 Modan) and *Questionable Content* (by Jeph Jacques), the essay extends the notion of the quotidian from a specific reference to 'slice of life comics' to a broader assumption that all comics articulate a vision of the quotidian. The analysis points to the conclusion that the culture of the world inside comics must be accounted for in most any attempt to understand the quotidian in comics.

Keywords: quotidian; slice of life; culture; comics; conversation analysis; discourse analysis; nexus of practice

Introduction

When comics artists and writers create comics, they make worlds that are instantiated by social practices. Comics characters engage with each other through a wide variety of activities, and readers recognise this engagement largely because what we see in comics can reflect what happens in the world of the reader. In many cases, comics illustrate the everyday lives of characters, relying on social practice to communicate the cultural fabric of the comic's universe. Folded integrally into social practices is the use of language to communicate information, attitudes, needs and emotions, among others. Discourse practices, then, especially everyday conversation, are foundational in the creation of social relationships; and conversation analysts have taken up the task of investigating how speakers use language to create and maintain relationships, as well as institutions (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974; ten Have 2007). Further, discourse scholars have built on the notion of performativity (Butler 1990) and now maintain that both individual and community identities are constructed through discourse and that linguistic forms often signal membership in communities (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). Many comics scholars explore the construct of social identity in comics (e.g. Rivera 2007; Schott 2010), and the notion that linguistic performance signals identity has been extended into comics studies (e.g. Bramlett 2010; Bramlett 2012; Breidenbach 2012; Walshe 2012; Whitted 2014).¹

One important and popular type of comics explores the way that characters live their everyday lives. Sometimes called 'slice of life' comics, they focus a great deal on the regular and the predictable, the details of how characters in comics live day by day.

Examples of these comics can be found in newspapers, strips like: *Blondie*; *Boondocks*; *Gasoline Alley*; *Li! Abner*; *Funky Winkerbean*; and *Mary Worth*. Some comics dwell in the centre of everyday predictability, like *Dilbert* and the soul-crushing grind of US corporate culture. Other comics, like *Calvin and Hobbes*, use the notion of the everyday as a touchstone to propel characters into flights of fancy, as when Calvin imagines himself as a space explorer. Comics of the everyday exist outside the newspaper, of course. In discussing Harvey Pekar's comics, Charles Hatfield (2005) finds a special autobiographical quotidian in *American Splendor*, something readers may also find in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*. Many web comics revolve around the everyday lives of characters, like *Capitol Hillbillies*, *Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal* and *Amazing Super Powers*.

Scholars who write about this notion of the everyday - what I call the 'quotidian' - work in a variety of disciplines, like sociology, anthropology and culture studies, among others, and they look at 'real world' scenarios as well as fictional or constructed worlds. The framework for this essay is the relationship between the quotidian and culture as mediated through language. Comics illustrate the quotidian to a

high degree; in fact, the everydayness of social actions and the culture of any given comic exist in a reflexive relationship, each supporting the other and inextricably bound up in the presentation of characters, dialogues, settings and narratives. In other words, although comics readers can readily identify 'slice of life comics', this essay argues that the notion of the everyday in comics must be extended in order to account for elements of everyday practice that appear in the majority of all comics.

The relationship between culture and the quotidian

The term 'culture' refers to the social webs of meaning that people use to organise subjectivities of meaningful social action (Vaisey 2008). Put another way, culture arises through the interrelationship of symbols and social actions that people use to create meaning in their lives. In a review essay exploring theoretical approaches to the understanding of culture, Ann Swirlier (1986, 273) helps set the current definition with this explanation: 'culture consists of such symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, rut forms, and ceremonies, as well as cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life'.

One very productive way of scrutinising how culture gets created is through the concept of nexus of practice (Scollon 2001). In its simplest formulation, a nexus of practice is a web of interwoven actions. What we think of as a single practice is often made up of smaller micropractices, sometimes at a level below consciousness. Small-scale practices aggregate into larger-scale practices. Ron Scollan argues that it is better not to think of occurrences like gift exchange or buying a cup of coffee as practices in and of themselves. Instead, they should be thought of as being made of up other practices, like 'handing'. We hand books to each other, we hand pillows, we hand babies, and we hand money.²

When we go to a coffee shop to buy coffee, we often use a number of predictable actions or behaviours to achieve that goal. For instance, we stand in line or queue up. We might read the menu, or exchange greetings with the barista, or finger some of the tchotchkes for sale at the counter. During these other practices, we order some kind of beverage, and we end up paying with cash or credit, which may or may not involve handing money, handing change, and/or handing a receipt (Manning 2008). As Scollon (2001) demonstrates, the social practice of getting coffee comprises myriad other practices.

It is easy to see the connection between nexus of practice and culture. Getting coffee is a nexus of practice that has taken on a symbolic identity in many countries around the world. It is part of the culture, especially in urban and suburban contexts. In other words, it is a social practice that people use as a meaningful event. When we agree to 'get coffee' with someone, it is a sign of something else, of making a new friend, or getting caught up with an old friend, or initiating a business deal, or studying for an important exam. Getting coffee is a nexus of practice, a web of social practice that signals a meaningful characteristic of the culture of people who engage in that practice.

Social practices that have meaning or that provide a fabric upon which to project meaning add up to culture, and many of those social practices are considered quotidian. The quotidian consists both of routine practices, which include actions and behaviours, and ingrained assumptions, which include beliefs and expectations about the world (Borland and Sutton 2007). Sociologists and discourse analysts have long known that a great deal of our lives comprise routine: we do the same things over and over again. Of course, this fact is inflected by the realities of communities. Different communities may have their own ways of doing things (actions and behaviours), but those ways of doing things are often routine and are most certainly underpinned by ingrained assumptions (beliefs and expectations).

Ben Highmore (2002, 1) argues that the term 'everyday life' as it is used in culture studies is ambivalent because

it points (without judging) to those most repeated actions, those most travelled journeys, those most inhabited spaces that make up, literally, the day to day. But with this quantifiable meaning creeps another, never far behind: the everyday as value and quality - everydayness.

However, I would argue that whether we buy a cup of coffee every day is not the point. Instead, the point is that in many communities, getting a cup of coffee at a coffee shop is such a common occurrence that it is usually unremarkable. What makes getting a cup of coffee quotidian is how it is bound up in everyday experiences, actions and expectations of the communities in which the practice exists.

For each community, then, the shared sense of the everyday - the general understanding of the quotidian - is built upon routine practices and ingrained assumptions. The routine practices of the quotidian are best understood as nexus of practices, that is, they are aggregations of micropractices that are often construed as single social events. In turn, those nexus of practices that take on meaning, that take on symbolic value in the communities that exercise them, are the very foundation of those communities' culture.

What this means for comics is that any nexus of practice may also rely at least in part on the use of linguistic discourse strategies. For example, comics characters engage in conversation to build and maintain relationships with each other, and conversations are social practices that often involve routine behaviours and ingrained assumptions. Conversation analysis assumes that everyday talk is structured and is regulated in the very moment of the talk by the speakers who engage in it; this is called local, interactional management (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974, 725). Participants know how to begin conversations, how to maintain them and how to end them. Participants know how to ask and answer questions, how to make requests and how to provide information. They know how to greet friends or co-workers, how to participate in business meetings and how to say goodbye at the end of the day. With exceptions like 'silent comics', comics characters engage in conversation practices, too, and their everyday conversations help construct the culture of the comic, the nexus of practice in which the quotidian is constructed and maintained.

How nexus of practice build a culture of the quotidian in comics

Questionable Content is a webcomic by Jeph Jacques that presents the lives of 20-somethings in an urban area where coffee house culture thrives. The characters are mostly university student types; some work at the coffee house itself, while some work at the library. The coffee shop, called Coffee of Doom, is the location of most of the action, with some scenes taking place at the library or at characters' residences. All of the characters are friends and sometimes romantic partners, and all of them are trying to make their own adult identities. *Questionable Content* launched in 2003 and, with few exceptions, is updated Monday to Friday each week.

The social practices in *Questionable Content* run the gamut of what we might expect from a daily strip focusing on humorous exchange: friendship (friendly interactions); employer/employee interactions; co-worker interactions; barista/customer interactions. These interactions are founded upon linguistic and non-linguistic practices alike, and evidence of them can be identified in the language of the comic, found to a large degree in speech balloons.

For this essay, I have extracted language from speech balloons and rendered it in a style based on conversation analysis. Of course, the level of detail that we find in conversation analysis transcriptions is ordinarily very high, so a transcription of dialogue from a comic strip will seem underspecified by comparison. For instance, speech balloons mostly indicate turn-taking, length of turn and details of emphasis (like stress or volume). In this vein, I have maintained all typographical features like bold or italics, with the exception of ALL CAPS. Scholars who are familiar with conversation analysis should note that this essay borrows from it some tools and concepts, but the intent of the study is not to produce a strict conversation analysis of dialogue in comics. Instead, the intention is to blend concepts from a number of fields to help contribute to comics scholarship. In this way, I follow proponents of blended approaches who argue that a robust analysis of some kinds of interaction must 'range further than the limits' that conversation analysis alone allows (Wetherell 1998, 388). Admittedly, there is an ongoing scholarly debate about the value and productivity of various approaches in discourse studies (e.g. Wooffitt 2005), but those arguments are not rehearsed in this essay.

Table 1 shows a dialogue between two women, Dora and Faye, who are working at the coffee shop. Dora is the owner and Faye is a long-term employee, so they have a standing professional employer-employee relationship. However, they are friends, too, and both of these roles are often quite evident in their interaction. In this strip, Faye begins the conversation by asking a rather serious question about the way her life is going. The action in panel 1 is that Faye stands at the espresso machine, making a coffee drink. Other elements of this panel include pastries and baked goods in a display case by the espresso machine. On the wall in the background hangs a picture of the Statue of Liberty saying 'LOL'. Dora stands holding some kind of notebook. In the bottom right corner is the edge of the cash register. Although the setting is the Coffee shop shown from the employees' perspective, it is not clear whether Faye asks this question in her role as employee or in her role as friend. In panels 2 and 3, the reader learns what motivates Faye's question, and it is based on a question her boyfriend asked her. Faye feels comfortable asking her boss/ friend Dora questions about these matters in the workplace.

By panel 4, the reader notices that the espresso cup is gone, meaning that Faye has finished that particular work-related task. She has perhaps handed the cup to a customer, an inference the reader may make in the gutter. In panel 5, Dora (in her role as friend) comforts Faye with her words and also by a one-armed embrace, a non-linguistic practice.

From a linguistic perspective, these characters engage in a typical kind of everyday conversation. For example, one speaker asks a question, and another speaker answers it. Specifically, Dora responds to Faye's question with a question of her own (a clarification). (For more on questions and answers as quotidian practice, see the discussion of *Exit Wounds* below.) They take turns; some turns are very long and some are short. This conversational exchange has the feel of being holistic, primarily because the two speakers stay on topic and explore Faye's concerns together. What we see in this strip, though, is that the linguistic production does not make reference to the work that the women are engaged in. Faye is talking to Dora about personal issues; she does not ask about coffee, about prices, about espresso machine repair, or any one of hundreds of topics that employer and employee could discuss at a coffee shop. Faye's non-linguistic practices (making espresso) and her linguistic practices (speaking about personal issues at work) point to a culture of the comic. The nexus of practice in this strip accommodates both work-related discourse practices and friendship-based discourse practices.

In many ways, this particular strip evinces the everyday culture of the coffee shop as it is represented almost every week on the *Questionable Content* website. The characters freely blend their social roles as friends and employers, both linguistically and in nonlinguistic practices, like hugs. In conversation, the characters freely share personal opinion and engage in disagreements about a wide range of topics. At times, though, the social roles that the characters inhabit come into conflict. In the dialogue shown in Table 2, Dora (the owner of the coffee shop) is giving a lecture to two new employees. In few instances, the characters in *Questionable Content* overtly inflect their ordinarily quotidian interactions with explicit references to social roles, particularly the employer-employee interaction of the coffee shop. In this strip, however, Dora stands apart from the new employees, giving them what turns out to be a lecture about her expectations for their behaviour at work.

If we ignore the content of the speech balloons, we notice that this is an absolutely ordinary, unremarkable scene. It looks like a group of friends talking, but if we consider the language, this nexus might be widely recognisable as something like 'new employee orientation'. What becomes important is that the two new employees do not take a turn at all, even with a minimal response like 'Okay' or 'Uh-huh'. This discourse event, then, seems to be clearly tied to the social roles of boss-employee because it is the boss (Dora) who gets to take as much lime as she wants to in order to complete her turn. The business aspect of the coffee-shop culture takes centre stage in this strip, and for the majority of the panels there is no duality in Dora's practices. In other words, she is not trying to be a boss and a friend at the same time. Even though it is different in its content and purpose from the previous example of Dora and Faye's heart-felt conversation, it nevertheless remains at least partly quotidian because Dora's speech relies on expectations of workplace discourse (Mak & Chui 2013). Panel 5 brings about a humorous resolution to Dora's speech, because her linguistic practice 'softens' from stem, unyielding boss to a more understanding, permissive boss. This shift in perspective is emphasised by her posture: her shoulders are slightly more slumped, and her gaze has shifted away from the employees. In addition, Faye undercuts the harshness of Dora's speech and further 'softens' Dora's stance by using self-deprecating humour. Whereas the strip in Table 1 blended employer/employee practice with friendship practices, this strip in Table 2 separates them in the first four panels but combines them in the last panel. The culture of *Questionable Content*, then, is one that arises through the social practices of young adults who navigate their relationships as friends but also, in certain cases, as co-workers or romantic partners. The social practices involved signal membership in a small, close-knit community in which participants orient to a variety of social roles, sometimes multiple roles in a very short time span.

However, an important element in many of the daily strips and the world of *Questionable Content* as a whole is the role of robots, a small number of which play recurring roles, and several of the human characters 'own' or at least 'care for' them. Under normal circumstances, out in the 'real world', most of us do not interact with talking robots; robots do not live with us, talk to us, or throw wild parties when we are away for the weekend. The dialogue in Table 3 shows a conversation between two humans (Marten and Nat) and a robot (Pintsize). The two humans in this strip interact with each other and with the robot in unremarkable ways. Pintsize asks questions, answers questions and generally engages in conversational exchanges that fit the notion of conversation (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974). Examining the tums between Nat and Pintsize, for example in Figure 1, we notice that Nat and Pintsize as if he were a fully functional sexual being, even as she comments that his skills would not be adequate to satisfy her keyboard sexually. Further, Nat refers to Pintsize as a man - a little man, specifically, but a

man nonetheless she addresses Pintsize verbally, her non-linguistic practice supports the verbal exchange. She gazes directly at it/him, and even raises her right hand and points in his direction using her index finger. Notably, Pintsize is infamous in the comic strip for his bad behaviour, his sexist attitudes and all-around boorishness, hence his inappropriate use of the term 'hermaphrodite'. As a result of the commonality of these robots, what Jacques calls 'anthro-PCs', the scope and range of interactions should seem out of the ordinary for most readers. In other words, the everydayness that we find in some *Questionable Content* strips simply does not match the everydayness that we find in the world of the reader. The only way that the world of the comic makes sense is to understand it on its own terms, its own culture, its own nexus of practice.

Thus, in the lives of the *Questionable Content* characters, both inside and outside of Coffee of Doom, we recognise certain social practices as making up the quotidian of their culture. It is clear, however, that we should add to that list. For all the main characters, there is the element of human-robot interaction, which is unremarkable for the characters in the strip. In other words, the quotidian worldview of the characters - their everyday actions and behaviours in addition to their beliefs and expectations - includes interaction with robots: friendship (friendly interactions); employer-employee interactions; coworker interactions; barista-customer interactions; human-robot interactions and robot-robot interactions.

Further, the everydayness of the human-robot interaction yields a culture within the world of the comic strip, resulting from the symbolic meaning that the characters, both human and robot, attach to objects and practices. As Stephen Vaisey (2008) might argue, the culture arises from the interrelationship of the symbols and social practices in the comic, and because these symbols and social practices form the foundation of myriad nexus of practice of everyday relationships in *Questionable Content*, they function as the very fabric of the quotidian.

Revising the quotidian

In sociology, scholars sometimes 'invoke culture to explain continuities in action in the face of structural changes', as when immigrants 'are said to act in culturally determined ways when they preserve traditional habits in new circumstances' (Swidler 1986, 277). Additionally, it is often the case that previously stable actions shift in the face of these structural changes. In such times of social transformation, '*ideologies* ... establish new styles or strategies of action. When people are learning new ways of organizing individual and collective action, practicing unfamiliar habits until they become familiar, then doctrine, symbol, and ritual directly shape action' (278). Elizabeth Borland and Barbara Sutton (2007) explore the effect of the 2002-2003 economic crisis in Argentina and women's activism and their social movements as an example of 'quotidian disruption':

As the crisis disrupted the lives of Argentines, it generated a new milieu of protest, and activism became enmeshed in the lives of more people, either as protesters or witnesses. While the level of protest was extraordinary, at the same time, it became a part of daily life, even becoming expected and routine. (708)

Swidler's notion of 'unsettled' points to a rather neutral idea of social change, and Borland and Sutton cite the less neutral idea of disruption. One very extreme form of change is what Ted Goumelos (2009, 524) describes as trauma:

Trauma theory can allow us to understand those sets of discourses [resulting from instability] as maps guiding us toward, possible locations of cultural agency and change. ... In this sense, cultural studies inquiries can study the formation of the self through its areas of conflict, highlighting the places in which the evolution of social norms, desires, and myths takes place rather than studying the new forms they take.

While Goumelos discusses trauma in film vis-a-vis US capitalism, the point that trauma is transformative is central for understanding the quotidian. The day-to-day lives of characters in comics very often change substantially after a traumatic experience, and frequently that shift is indeed a shift from one constellation of the quotidian to a new one.

In this section of the essay, the analysis concentrates on questions and answers to show that and how dialogue forms an integral part of the quotidian, even in situations contextualised by traumatic events. *Exit Wounds* by Rutu Morlan (2008) illustrates the construct of trauma as quotidian. Set in Israel, it is a comic that explores the ways that people go about living their daily lives despite the threat of bombs. As a preamble to the discussion, it is important to note that the story of *Exit Wounds* takes place in an environment where trauma already exists. The story does not reveal the beginning of the trauma of war; instead, the characters are already living in that environment when readers meet them. Thus, some of the discussion that follows points to interaction that is contextualized, by trauma but also to interaction through which characters discuss the trauma that they themselves go through.

In the dialogue in Table 4, the two main characters are having a discussion about a person who is missing, perhaps because of a recent bombing. In this short excerpt, Numi and Koby meet and discuss the possibility that Koby's father may have been killed in a bombing in Iladera. They sit on a bench in a park. The scene appears to be a beautiful day, perhaps springtime. There is even a dog nearby, sniffing around the base of a tree. If we ignore the content of the speech balloons, then this conversation could be one of the 'most mundane' possible. It is the topic of conversation, though, that interferes with our perception of the dialogue as quotidian.

Evidence from conversation analysis may help us understand how this is a quotidian moment despite the quite serious topic of conversation. One well-researched element of conversations is called an 'adjacency pair': any two utterances (a pair) that typically go together (they are adjacent) because of cultural practice and/or expectation (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974, 711). The 'question/answer adjacency pair' is used as Koby and Numi try to make sense of the situation. In these six panels, Koby asks several questions of Numi, who, because of social expectations, is compelled to provide an answer (or justify why an answer may not be given).

Steven E. Clayman (2001) explores the occurrence of unsatisfactory or evasive answers. In other words, he studies question/answer adjacency pairs to understand why some answers do not function as adequate responses to the question asked. (A significant amount of research on evasion focuses on news interviews and especially the questioning of politicians; however, the adjacency pair is the same in everyday conversation, and because sometimes people are evasive, it seems reasonable to borrow Clayman's research for this analysis.)

In panel 2, Numi's response may be honest, so we could take that not as evasion but simply not knowing on her part. But, in panel 3, Numi's answer does not in fact answer Koby's question directly. This is not necessarily a bad thing, and Koby is willing to give her the benefit of the doubt (see Figure 2). Numi's

next turn, in panel 4, is both very informative and also withholding. Three elements in her hu11 suggest strongly that she does not want to or cannot give Koby all the information he may be searching for:

- (1) 'Let's just say' is a phrase that indicates something is being omitted from the discourse, whether it is a piece of information or even an opinion (e.g. Let's just say that you and I disagree, okay?).
- (2) 'Something' is an indefinite pronoun being used instead of the specific noun. Perhaps Numi knows what the something is, or maybe she does not.
- (3) 'Might' is a modal auxiliary that expresses the attitude of the speaker. In this case, Numi may be orienting to an epistemic usage of the modal to indicate that she is uncertain about her own knowledge.

The narrative of *Exit Wounds* makes it clear that Nunn knows much more than she is telling Koby but also that she does not really have some of the answers he wants. Collectively, Numi's answers take on the characteristic of being partial or incomplete (Clayman 2001, 413). Her evasiveness is both purposeful and unavoidable. However, as Clayman argues, '[a]nswering questions is treated as a basic moral obligation, not only for public figures journalist interviews but also for *interactional participants more generally*' (2001, 405, emphasis added). It is part of the everyday, quotidian nature of questions and answers that interlocutors do their best to provide adequate, accurate answers when they can. (The issue of telling strategic lies in response to questions is perhaps a different topic for a different article.) How this scene might be construed as quotidian depends on the contrast between the linguistic practices and the non-linguistic practices. As Madan has drawn it, this scene communicates the notion of serenity: it is a park, perhaps on a mild day, perhaps sunny. The two speakers sit together on a bench under a tree, and without knowing the words of their conversation, readers might assume an easy, friendly exchange. This contrasts with the content of the speech balloons. They are talking about the possibility of someone's death, but they wrestle with a great deal of uncertainty. Nonetheless, the speakers use conversational interaction to negotiate the difficulty of the situation. In other words, there is a tension between an everydayness of the scene and the conversational interaction on one hand and the very difficult, possibly traumatic topic of conversation on the other.

As the story in *Exit Wounds* progresses, Numi and Koby become friends and allies in the search for Koby's father. In the excerpt in Table 5, they have found information about a woman who was present at the bombing, and they have gone to her home unannounced to talk with her. In the first panel, we witness the woman slamming the door in the faces of Numi and Koby after they explain why they wish to speak with her. In panel 2, we again get questions. This case is quite different though, from the earlier scene in the park. Numi asks a question, which in a normal adjacency pair would demand an answer. However, Koby responds by asking his own question. This example demonstrates that question/answer adjacency pairs do not always appear as we would expect. In this case, Koby's question serves two functions at once. He does not explicitly answer Numi's question, but there is an implied 'Yes, I did see how nervous she got.' Pragmatically, then, a question can in fact function as both a question and an answer. Koby's question, though, gets a direct answer from Numi.

A close look at questions and answers, then, reveals the quotidian nature of dialogue in *Exit Wounds*. The quotidian in *Exit Wounds* contains those everyday elements that readers may expect, but it also addresses trauma, something many of us have never experienced as quotidian. We read the lives of

people whose realities have shifted, initially because of bombings, but additionally because the search for a missing loved one becomes part of their daily lived experience. Together, Koby and Numi find their social practices and their interactions shifting gradually over the course of the story. They come to rely on each other in the search for answers about the bombing. Their relationship is of course influenced by the traumatic events that took place before they met, but they also experience a kind of trauma as they find themselves blocked from finding answers time and time again.

The notion of revising the quotidian plays a central role in understanding comics. An initial explanation of the process may be expressed in the following: (1) the quotidian is threatened; (2) new experiences clash with routines and expectations; (3) over time, actors make adjustments in their routines and expectations; (4) the new quotidian includes trauma. But trauma comes in many guises: 'It is not only the repeated pain and trauma of war, displacement, or physical uncertainty ... that defines quotidian trauma, but also the often slow and quiet violation of a worldview' (Goumelos 2009, 512). Indeed, concepts of trauma include 'repeated rape or incest, PTSD, (post)colonial identity, living under the perceived threat of nuclear attack, [and] long-term exposure' to war (512). Goumelos also cites Holocaust memoirs and studies, stating that trauma becomes not so much a single wound as a new identity' (512). Clearly, a comic like Art Spiegelman's *Maus* fits that category, in which trauma experienced by a set of characters flows out and disrupts the lives of other characters. While *Exit Wounds* is not a Holocaust memoir, it does present day-to-day living under the threat of bombs, meeting Goumelos's criteria of the quotidian.

From the standpoint of nexus of practice, both Numi and Koby experience a shift in the kinds of social practices they engage in, both separately and together. For example, Koby is a taxi driver, and although he continues to work, he also divides up his time so that he and Numi can search for answers about his father. In any case, the two main characters make changes in their lives and orient themselves not just to bombings in general but to a specific bombing, the one in Hadera, the one that may have taken the life of Koby's father. That event takes on great importance in the comic, it becomes a kind of anchor for Koby and Numi's relationship. Further, the linguistic and non-linguistic actions and behaviours, as well as the beliefs and expectations that the characters hold, become frequent, become stable and, even if only for a brief time, become their new quotidian. The search for answers occupies an ever-growing amount of their time and energy, so *Exit Wounds* demonstrates how the quotidian of a world within a comic may change, whether slightly or significantly, allowing for a revision of the quotidian for the characters involved.

Conclusion

This essay has examined two different comics for evidence of the quotidian, to see how nexus of practice comprise the culture of the everyday. In *Questionable Content*, characters live relatively carefree lives, whereas in *Exit Wounds* the possibility of violence takes up a good deal of characters' cognitive and psychological space in the everyday. Evidence drawn from linguistic discourse analysis shows that both of these comics articulate a vision of the quotidian, bound by the sociocultural constraints of the world in which the characters live. What this essay does not claim, however, is that everything in comics is quotidian. Comics like 'In Blackest Night', a Green Lantern story by Alan Moore ([1987] 2006), place everyday routines and expectations in the background in order to highlight what does not happen every day: the extraordinary, rare, or unique.

As Swidler (1986, 284) demonstrates, 'a culture has enduring effects on those who hold it, not by shaping the ends they pursue, but by providing the characteristic repertoire from which they build lines of action'. In other words, people are not ruled by their culture but instead use the tools available in that culture to make their lives. People make changes to their day-to-day living, though, when they feel compelled to do so. In the face of extraordinary change, actors adjust, and their day-to-day practices accommodate the new and bring about a different quotidian.

The discussion in this essay points to four observations that may be helpful in the study of comics.

- Any sense of the quotidian depends on the culture of the participants as it is instantiated by nexus of practice.
- Whether a comic may be called quotidian depends on the world in which the characters live. Readers may have rather different expectations of the quotidian, and those differences between the lived experiences of readers and the world of the comics characters will have an impact on how the comic is experienced during the reading process.
- Even comics that may be construed as less quotidian (exotic, other-worldly) in fact consist substantially of quotidian practices; otherwise, they would be inscrutable.
- An analysis of the quotidian in comics should ordinarily include an examination of the linguistic discourse in the comic (silent comics being a notable exception).

For comics studies, then, it is incumbent upon scholars to shift our approach to understanding the relationship between the special category of 'slice of life' comics on the one hand and the quotidian of comics writ large on the other hand. Those comics that foreground daily practice and background or minimise other elements play an important role, not only in our scholarly understanding of comics but also in our understanding of the human condition. Indeed, scholars may find that we should adjust our understanding of comics genres vis-a-vis a reconsideration of the quotidian. In other words, how does the quotidian enter into our understanding of science fiction comics, horror comics, or superhero comics?

All comics articulate a vision of the culture in which the characters move, meaning that all comics express some perspective on the day-to-day nature of the characters' lived experiences. The nexus of practice found in each comic's world depends at least in part on a notion of the everyday'. Even though not every facet of every comic may help to construct the nexus of everydayness, all comics rely on readers' sense of the everyday, both their own 'real world' quotidian and the recognition that the culture inside the comic rests on various nexus of practice and thus constitute the quotidian.

Acknowledgements

An early version of this essay was presented at the Comics Forum, held 15-16 November, 2012, at the Leeds (UK) Central Library. Thanks to Julie Pelton for pointing me toward Swidler's work on culture. I appreciate the very helpful comments of Nina Mickwitz on notions of the everyday, though any errors remain mine. I am also grateful for research time provided by the Department of English at Stockholm University, where I was a visiting lecturer during the development of this project (2012-14).

Notes

1. A number of scholars in conversation analysis argue differently about the relationship between linguistic performance and identity. See Wooffitt (2005) for a review.
2. Readers familiar with discourse studies may see a resemblance between nexus of practice and other concepts like 'framing' (Goffman 1974; Tannen 1993; Matsumoto 2011) and 'activity type' (Levinson 1992; Bramlett 1999). All three concepts rest on the notion that participants engage in social action and their sense of what is happening relies on their prior experience in similar situations or, in other words, their expectations about the situation they are in.

Notes on contributor

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Table 1. Dialogue from 'Running in Place' (Jacques 2013).

Panel	Speaker	Utterances
1	Faye	Is contentment the same thing as complacency?
	Dora	What do you mean?
2	Faye	Last night Angus asked where I saw myself in 5 years, and I honestly didn't see myself anywhere different from where I am now.
3	Faye	Like, if I wanted to change things or be in a different place, I could totally do that. But I'm happy where I am, y'know?
4	Dora	If you're happy where you are, good. But it's important to have goals and strive to achieve them.
	Faye	Yeah...
5	Dora	Basically, just do the opposite of whatever Marten does and you'll be fine.
	Faye	God bless the boy, but at this rate he's gonna wake up one day and be 40 years old and not know what happened.

Table 2. Dialogue from 'Law Laid Down' (Jacques 2010).

Panel	Speaker	Utterances
1	Dora	Okay ladies, before we start I wanna get one thing straight.
2	Dora	We're friends, but while we're on the clock, you're my employees and I'm your boss. I expect you to follow my directions, treat me with respect, and take it seriously.
3	Dora	You might resent me sometimes. You might think I'm a total bitch. I might BE a total bitch. But this is my BUSINESS. And that means I can't let friendship get in the way of making sure everything operates smoothly.
4	—	—
5	Dora	Oh for Christ's sake, don't look at me like I'm Joseph Fucking Stalin. It's a friggin' coffee shop. Don't show up drunk or high and try not to fuck up too much and you'll be fine.
	Faye	Seriously, how the hell would I still be employed if she were that much of a hardass?

Table 3. Dialogue from 'It's Been a Long Weekend' (Jacques 2006).

Panel	Speaker	Utterances
1	Pintsize	Hey guys! What's up?
	Marten	I'm just grabbin' my guitar and amp so we can go practice.
2	Pintsize	I still think I should be in the band as the drum machine.
	Marten	And I think you'd just try to molest Nat's keyboard.
	Pintsize	Why, is it hot?
3	Nat	My keyboard is way more woman than you could handle, little man.
	Pintsize	You mean it's fat? Or is it one of those vintage Moog synths? I don't go for MILFs.
4	Nat	Wow, I didn't know it was possible to be sexist towards a musical instrument.
	Marten	I dunno, I always figured that guitars resent the whole phallic-symbol association.
	Pintsize	If a guitar is a phallic symbol and keyboards are female, does that mean keytars are hermaphrodites? Hot.

Table 4. Dialogue from *Exit Wounds* (Modan 2008).

Panel	Speaker	Utterances
1	Numi	I'm sorry.
2	Koby	What would my father be doing in Hadera?
	Numi	I don't know.
3	Koby	Is there some reason you think it's him?
	Numi	Look, it's kind of difficult to explain.
	Koby	Why don't you try.
4	Numi	Let's just say there was something at the scene of the bombing that might have belonged to him.
5	Koby	Let me see it.
	Numi	I don't have it. Um...I saw it on TV.
6	Koby	On TV? That's what your theory is based on?
	Numi	So far.



Figure 2. 'Difficult to Explain', from *Exit Wounds* by Rutu Modan. Used by permission of Rutu Modan.

Table 5. Dialogue from *Exit Wounds* (Modan 2008).

Panel	Speaker	Utterances
1	[none]	[sound effect SLAM]
2	Numi	That was weird. You see how nervous she got?
	Koby	But why deny she was there?
3	Numi	Maybe she lost her memory in the blast.
	Koby	Could be.
4	Numi	You just wasted another whole day because of me.
	Koby	Don't worry about it. We knew it was a long shot.

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