

Everyday Life & Utopian Underwater Cities [November & January sessions]

- Utopia?

Happy place :) / no place

- Cities?

Meant more broadly as spaces where humans live – this could also be a small town, a village, cottages in the countryside, and related spaces, like gardens.

- Everyday life?

An important starting point for thinking about utopias is thinking about the places where you actually live – your everyday life is important! Today, you will be able to get to know each other and where you come from better, and also see that a lot of poetry is rooted in day-to-day-experience. Based on this, in January, you'll get to think about new underwater worlds...



Today! :)

(1) introduction to some ideas about everyday life & environment
(Lisa),

(2) exchange & discussion about where you live (small groups),

(3) read some poems together (large group),

(4) writing time for poems (individually).

Everyday Life & the Environment – Three Concepts

1) “The right to the city” = a human right (Henri Lefebvre)

→ Do you feel like you can *participate* in the places where you live?

→ Are there parks / squares / skate parks / basketball courts / youth centres / public spaces where you can hang out without paying money?

→ Is there public transport or do you rely on your parents to drive you to places?

→ Can you go to places by bike?

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2) “Rhythmanalysis” (Henri Lefebvre)

- Interest in everyday rhythms in different parts of the world.
- Work/school/leisure time.
- Traffic/noise.

3) “Environmental Justice”

- Environmental issues aren’t “just” about nature, they are also about how people live and live well together – i.e. a question of justice.
- For instance, if traffic is mainly car-friendly, pedestrians (= people walking on foot) breathe in a lot of car fumes; if it’s more bike-friendly, they could live healthier lives.
- Often, population groups in the third world are most affected by environmental issues that are caused in the global north.

Questions for Discussion: Everyday Life Where You Live

1) Place (Home and School)

Where do you live and where do you go to school?

Do you live in a village/town/city? Do you go to school in the place you live?

2) Transport

How do you move around in your daily life? Mainly by bike/moped/public transport/car? Do you feel like you can get everywhere you want to get to easily?

3) Sound Environment

When you sit in your room, what kind of sounds do you hear from within or outside your flat/house? Is it generally quite noisy or very quiet?

4) Free Time

Where do you meet friends and spend your free time? E.g. parks, skate parks, youth centres, school, friends' houses, clubs, going for walks in nature.

5) What do you like about where you live / what would you like to be different?

E.g. more frequent buses; more football fields, etc.

Frank O'Hara, "A Step Away from Them" (1956)

It's my lunch hour, so I go
for a walk among the hum-colored
cabs. First, down the sidewalk
where laborers feed their dirty
glistening torsos sandwiches
and Coca-Cola, with yellow helmets
on. They protect them from falling
bricks, I guess. Then onto the
avenue where skirts are flipping
above heels and blow up over
grates. The sun is hot, but the
cabs stir up the air. I look
at bargains in wristwatches. There
are cats playing in the sawdust.

Audre Lorde, “A Trip On The Staten Island Ferry” (1973)

Dear Jonno
there are pigeons who nest
on the Staten Island Ferry
and raise their young
between the moving decks
and never touch
ashore.

Every voyage is a journey.

Cherish this city
left you by default
include it in your daydreams
there are still
secrets
in the streets
even I have not discovered
who knows
if the old men
who shine shoes on the Staten Island Ferry
carry their world
in a box slung across their shoulders
if they share their lunch
with birds
flying back and forth
upon an endless journey
if they ever find their way
back home.

Inger Christensen, *alphabet* (1981), trans. by Susanna Nied

1

apricot trees exist, apricot trees exist

2

bracken exists; and blackberries, blackberries;
bromine exists; and hydrogen, hydrogen

3

cicadas exist; chicory, chromium,
citrus trees; cicadas exist;
cicadas, cedars, cypresses, the cerebellum

4

doves exist, dreamers, and dolls;
killers exist, and doves, and doves;
haze, dioxin, and days; days
exist, days and death; and poems
exist; poems, days, death

5

early fall exists; aftertaste, afterthought;

Poems of the everyday (3)

Robert Creeley, “Histoire de Florida” (1996)

Another day. Drove to beach,
parked the car on the edge of the road
and walked up on the wooden ramp provided,
then stopped just before the steps down to the sand
and looked out at the long edge of the surf, the sun glitter,
the backdrop of various condominiums and cottages,
the usual collective of people, cars, dogs and birds.
It was sweet to see company,
And I was included.

Bernardine Evaristo, *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019)

Amma

is walking along the promenade of the waterway that bisects her city, a few early morning barges cruise slowly by

to her left is the nautical-themed footbridge with its deck-like walkway and sailing mast pylons

to her right is the bend in the river as it heads east past Waterloo Bridge towards the dome of St Paul's

she feels the sun begin to rise, the air is still breezy before the city clogs up with heat and fumes

a violinist plays something suitably uplifting further along the promenade

Amma's play, *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*, opens at the National tonight

Task: Write a poem about yourself in an everyday situation / in your everyday environment.

You're free to write about what you like, but if you're unsure how to start, imagine a specific situation, for example:

→ Waking up in the morning and the routines you go through. (Start your poem by writing down the sound your alarm clock makes!)

OR

→ Your most recent lunch hour at school. (What noises do you hear? What do you eat? What do you talk about with your friends?)

OR

→ Looking out of the window on your bus ride from school. (What do you see? Make a mental map / an alphabetical list.)

OR

→ Think about what you've missed most during the lockdown. (*Dear ... usually I would now go out to play football with my friends...*)

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