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Out of the ordinary: Everyday life and the "carnival of Mussolini"

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Abstract

Ordinary life is in many ways the quintessential object of anthropological analysis. Yet little attention has been paid to contexts in which it is important to people themselves that they and their actions are seen to be ordinary and to the work that goes into making something or someone appear ordinary. An exploration of ordinary life in Predappio, Italy, birthplace and grave of Benito Mussolini and premier site of neofascist tourism, reveals just how much effort has to go into producing a scaled sense of ordinariness in this extraordinary place. In this way, ordinary life is exposed as the object, not the site, of such work. This suggests the need to reconsider our usage of ordinary life in order to attend to situations in which the category itself—not just its particular contents—has ethnographic relevance.

KEYWORDS
ordinary life, everyday life, Italy, Fascism, scale, Wittgenstein

Resumen

La vida cotidiana es de muchas maneras el objeto por excelencia del análisis antropológico. Sin embargo, se le ha prestado poca atención a los contextos en los cuales es importante para las personas en sí mismas, que ellas y sus acciones se vean como cotidianas y el trabajo que implica hacer algo o a alguien parecer común. Una exploración de la vida cotidiana en Predappio, Italia, lugar de nacimiento y tumba de Benito Mussolini y sitio principal del turismo neofascista, revela exactamente cuánto esfuerzo tiene que hacerse para producir un sentido a escala de lo cotidiano en este lugar extraordinario. De esta manera, la vida cotidiana está expuesta como el objeto, no el sitio, de tal trabajo. Esto sugiere la necesidad de reconsiderar nuestro uso de la vida cotidiana para atender a situaciones en las cuales la categoría en sí misma –no sólo sus contenidos particulares– tiene relevancia etnográfica. [vida cotidiana, vida diaria, Italia, fascismo, escala, Wittgenstein]

INTRODUCTION

On a cloudy Sunday morning at the end of October 2018, in a café on the main square of a very small Italian town in the region of Emilia-Romagna, Marco—a 35-year-old agricultural worker with whom I am having breakfast—shoulders his way to the bar and orders an espresso.

This is more or less how Marco himself, and many other inhabitants of this town, would describe his actions, a description that in its banality and sparsity of context could apply to millions of Italians, on any given morning, engaging in the ritual of drinking a coffee. In fact, there was something quite pointedly, insistently ordinary about Marco's action, for the café was extraordinarily busy that morning, and to get to the bar he had to use his bulk to push and shove his way through crowds of people to do something he would usually accomplish with much greater ease. Moreover, the crowd was loud, bursts of laughter and shouting coming from various corners of the room, and at the bar a group of men had broken into song; so, to perform successfully that quintessentially everyday Italian ritual of having a morning coffee, Marco had to make his voice heard above the singing, which he did, causing the song to falter for a moment or two before picking back up.

No outsider at this scene would describe this particular act of coffee ordering as ordinary. That is because this very small Italian town happens to be Predappio, the birthplace and burial site of Benito Mussolini, the founder of Italian Fascism and, between 1922 and 1943, dictator of Italy. The raucous crowd in the café were black-shirted neo-Fascists who had come to Predappio to pay tribute at their leader's graveside.

The presence of Mussolini's body in the town cemetery means that today Predappio is Italy's premier site of neo-Fascist tourism. Furthermore, the particular day I have been describing was not just any Sunday in October, but the Sunday immediately following October 28, the anniversary of the "March on Rome" in which Mussolini took power, and one of three key anniversary dates on which thousands of neo-Fascists come to parade through the streets of town and genuflect at his grave. For most Italians who have heard of Predappio, the town is synonymous with the man it gave birth to back in 1883 and the movement he led. As one local intellectual put it to me, "the whole town is the Duce's tomb" (Figure 1).

So, the crowd Marco had to push through that morning was composed largely of men with beards and shaven heads, wearing motorcycle leather or pseudo-military uniforms. All of them were dressed in black, and the group Marco's coffee order interrupted were singing "Giovinezza," the official hymn of the Italian National Fascist Party, at the top of their voices. But beyond making his coffee order heard, Marco paid them absolutely no attention, and neither did other Predappiesi in the bar that day.

By this point I had been doing fieldwork in Predappio for several years. I had come there to examine how Predappiesi dealt with life in the shadow of its Fascist heritage and their home's emblematic status for contemporary neo-Fascists. Given this emblematic status and the historical imbrication of the town with its most famous son, I had arrived in Predappio expecting to find strongly expressed feelings on the subject of Fascism—one way or the other.

That night, Marco and I had dinner with two of his relatives, Silvana and Roberto, at the farm in which he works, up the steep road that runs out from town on the way to Mussolini's old summer residence above Predappio, the Rocca delle Caminate. We talked about Marco's cousin, who had

FIGURE 1 A crowd at the anniversary of the "March on Rome." (Photograph by author) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

just found a job in a nearby town and moved away from Predappio, and was thinking about marrying his long-term girlfriend; about the farm yields that year; about the hunting season Roberto was expecting to have; and, as one often does at dinner with friends, about how we had passed our day. Silvana and Roberto had been to church at a nearby village. Marco mentioned that he and I had seen Gianni, a well-known local artist, at breakfast in the bar that morning.

I waited, as I often did in Predappio, to see if anyone would mention the presence in the village of thousands of visiting neo-Fascists, through whom Marco had had to push his way to order his breakfast at the same bar at which we had seen Gianni. As was often the case, I waited in vain.

What could be more ordinary or everyday an action in Italy than ordering a morning coffee? It would be difficult to imagine a better example of an Italian version of that quintessential anthropological object, "ordinary life," than having an espresso in the local bar. At the same time, of course, there is much that is very far from ordinary about doing so on a day in which your local bar has been temporarily invaded by men in black shirts singing Fascist anthems.

As I noted, though, Marco's actions themselves were almost studied in their nonchalance and apparent lack of interest in the men he had to push past to get to the bar. Later, neither he nor his fellow citizens included them in their narration of the day's events, which instead focused on the "ordinary" character of those events: in Marco's retelling of his morning, it is more notable to him to mention that we bumped into Gianni—in a town the size of Predappio, one could bump into Gianni every week without difficulty, and doing so would be as "ordinary" as ordering a coffee—than it is to mention that the bar we were in was full of neo-Fascist anniversary marchers.

In this article, I explore the place of ordinariness in Predappio not as a particular domain, site, or scale of life or existence but as a project, something it takes work to pursue (Heywood, 2021), work of the sort Marco is engaged in with his pointed lack of interest in an event he well knows would be of interest to others who encountered it (including his anthropologist companion). Moreover, I suggest this work takes on a particular inflection in Predappio, a place that to those who know it is far from ordinary, indeed.

Like many ethnographic accounts, this article is a description of ordinary life in a particular place. Where it is somewhat distinctive is that in this particular place, the notion of "ordinary life" has itself come to take on a marked and salient status. In illustrating this, I point to the importance of examining the category of ordinariness ethnographically—looking at when and why certain people and phenomena become important not in spite of but precisely *because* of the fact that they are perceived to be ordinary.

THE ORDINARY LIFE OF "ORDINARY LIFE"

"Ordinary" and "everyday" can probably lay claim to being two of anthropology's favorite adjectives (perhaps trumped only by "cultural" and "social," both the subject of recent and extended reflexive critique). Yet ordinariness has appeared in anthropology in different guises, not all of which are isomorphic with one another.

Take, for example, one of our discipline's foundational monographs, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, which famously includes Malinowski's (1922, 17) injunction to examine the "imponderabilia of actual life," "the even flow of everyday events, the occasional ripples of excitement over a feast or a ceremony, or some singular occurrence." Despite the enduring fame of his remark about the "imponderabilia of actual life" (and the fact that it is frequently misquoted to refer to "everyday life"), Malinowski only uses the words "everyday" or "ordinary" on five occasions each throughout the entire six hundred or so pages of *Argonauts*. Most of such usage is fairly straightforwardly adjectival: a certain ornament is "everyday," particular occupations are "ordinary," as are some forms of sorcery and magic.

Fast-forward half a century to another great canonical text, Clifford Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures*, and things are different. Not only do both words appear with a great deal more frequency (29 for "everyday" and 33 for "ordinary") but the grammar of their usage has also changed. They are no longer exclusively adjectival. In the most famous essay of the book, "Thick Description," Geertz (1973, 14) describes the task of anthropology as "looking at the ordinary." The rest of the book is similarly filled with references to "everyday life" and "ordinary experience" not as descriptions of a particular kind of life in a specific place—the wearing of a certain ornament, or the preparation of particular foods, say, as in Malinowski—but as abstract nouns (despite the fact that they are often invoked to point precisely at the concrete, situated nature of this life).

Something changed, in other words, in the conceptual landscape of anthropology in the space of that half-century between Malinowski and Geertz. In truth, many things changed, of course, and it is far from my intention to imply I could provide anything resembling a historical account here, but one important such change was that "ordinary" and "everyday" went from qualifying certain phenomena to becoming phenomena in their own right; they earned definite articles ("the ordinary"), becoming, as Geertz puts it several times, a "world" or a "context" instead of simply marking a specific activity or object as a matter of routine or normality. As a concept, in other words, "ordinary life" has had its own ordinary life, in the sense that its meaning has not been fixed or determined but has emerged in various ways as the product of particular intellectual and historical circumstances. With shifts in such circumstances, there have been shifts in meaning.

One potential source for such a shift in the meaning of ordinariness is the influence of Wittgenstein on anthropology. Geertz, for instance, famously drew on Wittgenstein and his disciple, Ryle, in making the arguments of "Thick Description," and several scholars have pointed to the substantial influence Wittgenstein had on him in this regard, with one suggesting that Geertz's central ambition was to become the "Wittgenstein of anthropology" (Rosaldo, 1997; Shweder, 2007; Springs, 2008). Like Malinowski when he invoked "the imponderabilia of actual life," Geertz objected

to "bare-bones" or "skeletal" accounts of life, but unlike Malinowski he had a philosophical idiom in which to articulate an alternative. "The ordinary" was no longer imponderable.

The influence of Wittgenstein on anthropological conceptions of ordinariness is even clearer in the recent turn to "ordinary ethics" in the discipline, in which Wittgenstein is often explicitly invoked. In his introduction to the groundbreaking volume *Ordinary Ethics*, itself a diverse collection that showcases the multifarious ways in which ordinariness may be understood, Michael Lambek (2010, 2) notes that its title "echoes arguments of Wittgenstein and Austin with respect to 'ordinary language.'" Veena Das's work is still more explicit in its acknowledgment of a debt to Wittgenstein and especially to Stanley Cavell, and her recent book *Textures of the Ordinary* (Das, 2020), is subtitled "Doing Anthropology after Wittgenstein." In its introduction, she declares she is interested in "the everyday,"

> As the site on which the life of the other is engaged but this Other is not the radical Other of either philosophy or anthropology. As an anthropologist I am attuned to concrete others, even daring to suggest that it is in following concrete relations, quotidian turns of events, the waxing and waning of intensities, that we learn to be in the world. I have taken inspiration from Wittgenstein's idea that the task is to lead words back from the metaphysical to the ordinary and to make do with what words we have in hand. (Das 2020, 10; see also 2007)

This is a compelling vision of anthropology, but in its first two sentences we find juxtaposed both of the senses in which I have described ordinariness being invoked in anthropology: on the one hand, "concreteness," the idea that what is ordinary is simply what we find around ourselves (or "in hand"), like certain ornaments in the Trobriands; on the other, while the subjects of such ordinariness are concrete and quotidian, they exist in an ordinary metaphorized as "the site," singular, spatio-temporal, and specific. Ordinariness comes thus to seem both quintessentially particular—it is whatever happens to be at hand—and at the same time abstract: as a scale, prefixed with a definite article ("the ordinary"), it encompasses all such particularity (cf. Fadil and Fernando, 2015; Laidlaw and Mair 2019; Lempert, 2013; Summerson Carr and Lempert 2016). Wherever we may find it and whatever concreteness it contains, it will always be "the ordinary."

Several survey works describe this intractability of the term "ordinary": the way in which it seems designed to slip out of one's grasp. Anything designated as "ordinary" instantly becomes, by virtue of that designation, something special and worthy of note (e.g., Das, 2020; Highmore, 2002; Sayeau, 2016; Sheringham, 2006). My suggestion here is that this is not a consequence of a mystical quality of ordinariness but of the grammar (to use Wittgenstein's words) of our contemporary usage of it. Ordinariness is, like the notion of culture, as Geertz (1973) and others have pointed out (see Strathern, 1995, 159), functioning as both a generic category ("*the* ordinary") and as its particular contents.

My aim in pointing this out is not simply to highlight a paradox but to make the claim that—much as in the case of "culture" before Roy Wagner and Marilyn Strathern—while anthropologists are extremely good at describing the particular contents of "ordinary life" in its various guises, we have not tended to note the fact that the categories of "ordinary life" and "ordinariness" have, as it were, their own ordinary life: that it is sometimes important to people—anthropologists, as well as those we study—that these categories have a particular shape or form, that they include some things and people and exclude others, that they be opposed to certain other categories, and, importantly, that breathing life into a particular vision of "ordinary life" as a category requires work and effort.

Harvey Sacks (1985, 414) makes this point brilliantly in a 1970 lecture on "doing being ordinary":

> Whatever you may think about what it is to be an ordinary person in the world, an initial shift is not [to] think of "an ordinary person" as some person, but as somebody having as one's job, one's constant preoccupation, doing "being ordinary." It is not that somebody *is* ordinary; it is perhaps that that is what one's business is, and it takes work, as any other business does.

Sacks's point in the piece is how much of ordinary (if you like) communicative labor and practice involve rendering life as "ordinary," "normal," "usual." The job of being an ordinary person involves "attending [to] the world, yourself, others, objects, so as to see how it is that it is a usual scene. And when offering what transpired, you present it in its usual fashion: 'Nothing much' and whatever variants of banal characterizations you might happen to use" (417).

Crucially, Sacks adds, speaking generally, "The scene does not in the first instance simply present itself, define itself, as insufferably usual, nothing to be said about it" (417). In other words, things are not "intrinsically" ordinary; ordinariness is not a site in which only certain sorts of things (washing dishes, having minor domestic disputes, offering someone a glass of water) happen (Lempert, 2013). Rather, situations are rendered ordinary, "ordinarified," in their narrativization and pragmatics.

Furthermore, and to return us to Predappio, Sacks argues that we do such work on what might otherwise appear to be the most extraordinary of situations. Sacks cites the ways in which airplane hijackings are subsequently related by passengers, but we might well return to Marco's "willful disattention" (Goffman, 1974, 202–5) to the goings on about him as he ordered his morning coffee and their subsequent omission from his narrative of his day; he preferred instead to remark on our encounter with Gianni, a man we might meet in the streets of Predappio on any ordinary given day.

But the Sunday following October 28 is not any ordinary given day in Predappio. It is, as everyone in Predappio knows, the day on which thousands of neo-Fascists come to march through town to honor a man many Predappiesi, like many other Italians, detest.

Moreover, as I describe at greater length elsewhere (Heywood, 2021) and below, "any ordinary given day" in Predappio is not in and of itself very ordinary at all. Of course, Predappiesi have things to do that are ordinary that other people in other places do, too. They go shopping, cook, clean, go to work, have an ice cream or a coffee at the local bar, and in these respects are just like Italians all over the country and people all over the world. But they do these things in a context that they recognize others would see as utterly and extraordinarily unlike most of the comparable contexts in which people do these things.

AN ISLAND OF HISTORY

"We're just a normal town" (*siamo un paese normale*) is a common refrain in Predappio. This is how its former mayor, Giorgio Frassinetti, characterized it in 2018 to the *Corriere di Bologna*, a week before the anniversary at which Marco and I were present, in response to questions about how the town would cope with another anniversary march (*Corriere di Bologna*, 2018).

Yet there is an element of obvious defiance to such claims to normality, and nobody outside of Predappio would lend them much credence. Indeed, a common response from outsiders (on Twitter, for example) to news of yet another display of neo-Fascist pride in the town is precisely to doubt such claims: "Don't pretend to live in a normal town" (*Non fate finta di vivere in un paese normale*) ran one commentary on the marches in 2021.

If you were to stand in the main square of Predappio on any ordinary given day, you might well notice an older woman step gingerly from a doorway. Valentina does her shopping twice a week. To get to the Conad supermarket on Via Matteotti, she must take the stairs down to the ground floor of her apartment block, a descent that can take some time, as she is nearly 90 years old. She has lived in Predappio since she was born. She can remember its reconstruction in the 1930s, a visit by the king of Italy, the large public funeral of Mussolini's son Bruno, and the hunger and pain of the Second World War, which left her with lasting injuries that make it even more difficult to climb down her staircase.

As she leaves her apartment block, Valentina will pass the grandiose church of St. Anthony, whose foundation ceremony she watched as a child. Its date of completion is marked in large letters on its façade in the Christian calendar. Next to this, the year is also given in the "E.F.," or "*era fascista*," as year 13. Valentina will pay no attention to this, having seen the same inscription every day of her life since 1934 (Figure 2).

She will cross the square to the opposite side of the church, where she will step onto the pavement in front of the largest building in Predappio. It is shaped like a huge arrow pointing into the square and topped with a bell tower that rises higher than the spire of the church. It is the former headquarters building of the National Fascist Party (PNF), the Casa del Fascio. Now the panes of glass in its large doors are broken and pigeons roost in the bell tower. It has been largely empty since the war ended, and Valentina will pay it as little attention as she paid the inscription on the church (Figure 3).

She will walk past the post office and the *carabinieri* barracks, whose construction in the 1930s she can remember, too, along with the large apartment blocks built next to them. On her way down Via Matteotti—she can remember when it was named after Mussolini, instead of his regime's most famous victim—she may well be stopped by a lone tourist or a family of visitors. They will ask for directions to the cemetery, which she will be able to provide, as she goes there to tend the graves of her own relatives as often as she can. She will not ask why they want to go to the cemetery, nor make any further comment. Neither will she make any comment if they are wearing black, though if they are dressed in some sort of uniform, she confesses she may feel "annoyed" at the obligation to remember a war that left her with lasting scars. Otherwise, she thinks, they can come and be gone in an hour or so without bothering people. "They're only coming to visit a dead person, like I do when I go to the cemetery," she says.

Further down the street, she will pass a shop, outside of which there will likely be a few more tourists looking in the window, and more still inside talking to the proprietor. Italian flags fly outside the shop, and a large stone eagle sits on the pavement by the door. In the window are more eagles, more flags, busts of Mussolini in various sizes, wartime medals, and keyrings with Fascist or Nazi symbols attached to them. Sometimes there are stickers with anti-Semitic slogans attached to the glass pane of the door. Unless the owner is outside tending to his displays and they exchange a hello, she will walk on past the shop with no further thought. "The shops annoy me a little because they have those eagles, the statues… . I don't really pay any attention to them though, even it would be better if they weren't there. It's all rubbish anyway, nothing special, just something they do to make money" (Figure 4).

After this shop, she will pass another public square, though this one is shaped as a semicircle. If she looks to her left at this point—which she will not do unless she has a particular reason—she will see, at the precise midpoint of the semicircle, the nondescript, ordinary-looking nineteenth-century house in which Mussolini was born.

A few more tourists might be climbing the small hill toward it, but it is off her route, and she will carry on toward the supermarket. She will do her shopping at the Conad, a hundred meters or so farther on, and return home via the same route. She will do the same thing a few days later, just as she always has, every few days, throughout her life.

Valentina knows that cooking is ordinary, but that the apartment in which she does so is not. She knows that going shopping is ordinary, but she knows that most people do not do it in a supermarket next door to Mussolini's house. She knows that giving directions is an everyday activity—indeed, she has to do it almost every day—but that most people are not giving directions to the tomb of a Fascist dictator. She knows that tending to the graves of her relatives is an ordinary thing to do, but that it is unusual to do so surrounded by men in black, marching around with their arms raised in the Roman salute. Marco, too, knows that most people do not order their morning coffees in a bar filled with the same men, singing Fascist anthems.

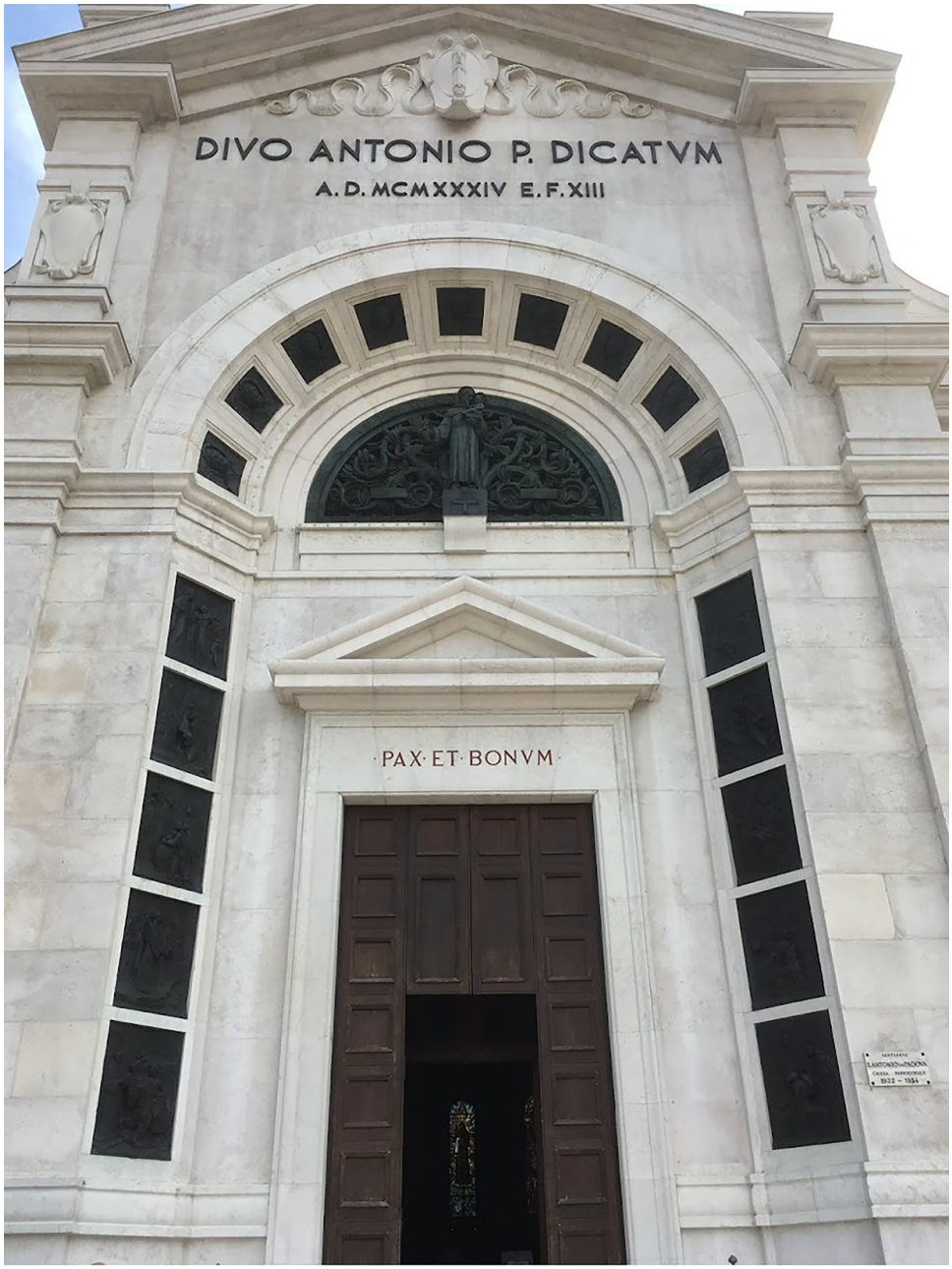

FIGURE 2 The façade of the church of St. Anthony. (Photograph by Hannah Malone) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

Perhaps if Valentina or Marco were talking on the telephone about their daily lives to an alien who knew absolutely nothing about Predappio, they could successfully "do being ordinary" in Sacks's sense, by cutting away all this context. In a way, that is what they and other Predappiesi have often done, by lying to outsiders about where they are from whenever they are away from home. In the same way, in Marco's own description of his breakfast on the Fascist anniversary, he simply omits precisely those details that would appear most extraordinary to an outsider. This is also what Valentina does when she ignores contextual cues that would (and do) leave many outsiders open-mouthed, like the *fasces* outside her building, the "E.F." on the church, or the monumental ruins of the Casa del Fascio. But as soon as this context encroaches, then "ordinariness" becomes a lot more difficult to do, though it is attempted, as, for instance, in Marco's insistent coffee order and his apparent but quite cultivated obliviousness to the scene around him, or in Valentina's descriptions of parts of her situation that she knows will surprise others: tourists, black-shirted or not, are "visiting a dead person, like I do." She avoids paying attention to the "souvenir shops" but insists they are "nothing special," just another way in which people try to make money.

What I am suggesting is that if Sacks and others are correct in arguing that all situations require some degree of work to render them ordinary, some situations may yet require comparatively more of such work than others, as implied in Sacks's airplane-hijacking narratives. With respect to

FIGURE 3 The former Casa del Fascio in Predappio. (Photograph by Hannah Malone) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

FIGURE 4 One of Predappio's "souvenir" shops. (Photograph by Hannah Malone) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

the expectations Predappiesi and others around them have of what "ordinary life" is like, it takes significantly more work to make life in Predappio look ordinary than in any of its neighboring towns and villages.

Partly for that reason, and partly for historical reasons related to Predappio's construction as an exemplar of Mussolini's own "ordinary" origins (Heywood, 2021), "ordinariness" as a category has become a marked object in Predappio, in a manner somewhat akin to the way in which I have described it becoming such a marked object in anthropology. That is, it is not the particular concrete, quotidian rituals of day-to-day existence that happen to be ordinary in Predappio that people there valorize, because they know that day-to-day existence in Predappio is not really very "ordinary" at all; it is rather the quality of ordinariness in and of itself that matters.

That is true on any given day, but it is especially true on the days of the anniversary marches, when Predappio is swamped by thousands of neo-Fascists, splashed across the pages of local, national, and even international newspapers, and filmed by news and documentary TV crews. These are the days on which the work of "ordinarification" is both the most difficult and the most necessary.

THE CARNIVAL OF MUSSOLINI

Today, the Sunday that falls nearest to October 28 is one of three key dates for neo-Fascist pilgrims who visit Predappio every year. October 28 is by far the most significant of the three and is usually the occasion for thousands of people to march from Piazza Sant'Antonio to the cemetery in which Mussolini is buried.

These marches are in many ways the most notorious aspects of Predappio's heritage (cf. Heywood, 2019). Every year, photos of them are splashed across the pages of national and international newspapers, and journalists and television crews from around the world attend. As I have noted, it is practically impossible for Predappiesi to forget their home's history, thanks to its urban fabric, the souvenir shops on its streets, and the regular flow of "dark tourism" (Lennon and Foley, 2000). But on these three days it becomes even harder than usual to pretend that Predappio is just an ordinary Italian town.

No one I have ever met in Predappio has anything positive to say of the Fascist ritual marches or attends them, regardless of their political leanings. Valentina, whom we met earlier, is offended by their use of Christian symbols: "They come with wooden crosses, but it was him [Mussolini] who put us on the cross! It makes the blood boil in my veins." Elena, a local schoolteacher, along with many others, dislikes the ways in which they behave in the cemetery: "Three days each year they come and cause chaos in the cemetery, among the dead who should be respected." Many object to the presence of uniforms or overt Fascist paraphernalia. Angelo, a middle-aged man who owns a small café in the town, remembers tanks and soldiers in the streets every weekend during the heightened political tensions in Italy of the 1970s and being kept at home by his parents: "My parents would say, 'Stay home, the bad people are coming again,' because we lived near the cemetery too. And I just wanted to go out and play. They should have just made his [Mussolini's] body disappear."

Despite the economic benefits he might accrue from tourism as a café owner, he retains his disgust at those who come for the marches:

> I try not to look at them because it makes me angry. One of the ritual days I was sat with some friends outside my café, and this man arrives. He's a dwarf, and old, over 60, and he's dressed in the uniform of the Balilla [Fascist Youth Organization], shorts and all! And he gives the Roman salute to everyone, and clicks his heels, and says "We will be back!" Normally I'm very respectful to the elderly and disabled but that time I couldn't contain myself. I said, "You should be grateful they're gone, what do you think they would have done to you? You'd have been the first to die, and where would you have come back from then?"

The most characteristic Predappiesi response to the marches is simply to ignore them as far as is possible. This is true for most of the year, in which they are not discussed, even in the run-up to the anniversaries, when the press is, in any year, full of speculation about what outrage to public decency will take place in the town.

Predappiesi are prepared, of course, for questions from outsiders like myself, and naturally unsurprised to find the marches are an object of extreme curiosity. As I have noted, Predappiesi are fully aware of the extraordinary status of their home, as far as the rest of Italy is concerned. In response to such questions, they will likely express some sense of disapproval or dislike of the continued existence of the marches. But the typical Predappiesi response to the marches is to treat them as a joke and a minor inconvenience, at worst, as if an English village were temporarily occupied by an army of Morris Dancers.

Angelo's story of the dwarf in the Balilla uniform is characteristic. Even more so is the idea that the ritual marches constitute a sort of "carnival," a typical feature of life in Italian towns and villages. "Folkloric" is a ubiquitous term locals use to describe the neo-Fascist marches. Gianni, the well-known local artist in Predappio whom Marco and I bumped into over breakfast, put it like this: "It's just like Carnival: instead of being in the Carnival of Viareggio [an event in the adjacent region of Tuscany], we're in the Carnival of Mussolini. Let them be and they'll just go home afterwards. They're ridiculous: 40-year-old kids dressed up as senior Fascist officers" (cf. Heywood, 2019).

Carnival is a particularly apt notion with which to discuss the relationship between the ritual marches and "ordinary life" in Predappio, given its extensive role in social scientific debates about "everyday life."[1] Perhaps its most well-known invocation is in Bakhtin's (1984) work on Rabelais, but

it has also been employed by other theorists writing on "the everyday," such as Henri Lefebvre ([1947] 2014) and Georges Bataille ([1949] 1991), among others. The point such writers often make about the carnival is that it is an inversion, or subversion, of "everyday life": the world turned upside-down, a time for a king of fools instead of a king, and of potlatch and excess instead of hunger and want. Though in Lefebvre's ([1947] 2014) use, carnival is supposed to be in some sense both external to but also arising from "the everyday," it is nevertheless a moment of radical promise, of hope for those alienated by the normal rhythms of capitalist life. For that promise to be fulfilled, the carnival must become more than just a moment and itself become integrated into "everyday life." Bakhtin (1984, 255) is more insistent on a distinction, arguing that the carnivalesque "is outside of and contrary to all existing forms of the coercive socioeconomic and political organisation, which is suspended for the time of the festivity." In any case, "carnival" is invoked in this literature as a special form of human action, a kind of willed and ephemeral escape from the strictures of an "everyday life" that by contrast is simply there, with all the weight of oppressive regularity.

In Predappio, however, the situation is exactly the other way around: it is the "carnival of Mussolini" that weighs on its inhabitants, and it is in a cultivated sense of "ordinariness" that Predappiesi find respite.[2]

"We don't let it bother us," Silvana says of her and her husband Marco's relatives. "Sure, in the old days we would lock ourselves in, but now it's just a day like any other day. I'm not going to stop doing my shopping because of them!" Andrea, an office worker whose parents live in a hamlet a few kilometers on from the cemetery, and who visits them every Sunday, makes a point of sitting in his car waiting for the police to allow traffic to pass when the march is finished: "Why should I not see my parents on this Sunday, like any other Sunday? So I have to wait for a bit while they waste their time on this stuff, I don't care."

The same attitude is visible in the cemetery. Elena visits her father's grave, despite her strong disapproval of the behavior of the marchers in the cemetery. I have seen her push her way through a crowd gathered on the cemetery steps to listen to speeches, seemingly oblivious to the fact that she stands out in a floral dress instead of black. Valentina also goes to visit her parents' graves. As we have seen, she dislikes the ritual marchers, with their uniforms, their speeches, and their singing. But that will not stop her from doing her regular duty to her parents, even though their graves are only steps away from the Mussolini family tomb.

On the days of the ritual marches, the café on Piazza Sant'Antonio is open for business; it is packed with men in black, standing or sitting in groups, eating and drinking, waiting for the march to begin. Yet amid this mass of black sit the café's regular Predappiesi customers, quietly talking among themselves, reading newspapers, and generally behaving as if there is nothing unusual going on at all by avoiding interaction and exchange with the outsiders, while nevertheless pursuing their normal routines. It was on one such occasion that Marco got up from his chair, walked calmly up to the bar until he was standing next to the group singing "Giovinezza," and ordered an espresso at a volume calculated to supersede that of the singing. Beyond making his coffee order heard, Marco paid absolutely no attention to the group next to him.

Implicit in such reactions to the "carnival of Mussolini" is a vision of what an ordinary Sunday in a small Italian town should look like ("a day like any other day," in Silvana's words; "like any other Sunday," in Andrea's). One should go to the bar and have one's coffee and breakfast; one should see one's relatives, go to church, visit the cemetery. Yet there is an obviously defiant element to the claim that this is "a day like any other day," or "any other Sunday" it is patently not, and Silvana and Andrea and other Predappiesi are well aware that it is not. So it is not just that they choose to do certain things that, of course, they may wish to do in any case (Marco wanted a cup of coffee, not just to order it while ignoring some neo-Fascists); it is that at least in part they do such things knowing that those things are what one does on an "ordinary Sunday," and that is what they wish this day to be.

OTHER ORDINARY LIVES

Predappiesi are not the only people to whom the marked quality of ordinariness is important. Romantics, Marxists, Vitalists, Surrealists, Wittgensteinian philosophers, and, indeed, Fascists—all of these and more have employed the concept in varying ways and to varying ends, and in opposition to varying threats.

Charles Taylor (1989), for instance, has famously described the "transvaluation of values" by means of which "the locus of the good life" shifted "from some special range of higher activities" and came to be placed "within 'life' itself." Taylor locates the origins of what he calls "the affirmation of ordinary life" in the Reformation and its opposition to any form of mediation between God and worshipper.

Similarly, historian Claire Langhammer (2018) has noted the emergence of ordinariness as an important political category in postwar British politics. The trope of "ordinary people" began to appear in films, on the radio, in churches, in the Queen's Christmas Day message, in Enoch Powell's infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech, in psychoanalysis, and in sociological Mass Observation studies.

Meanwhile, the vital role notions of ordinary or everyday life have played in twentieth-century French literature and theory has been documented in fantastic detail by Michael Sheringham (2006), who traces the development of such notions from Baudelaire through to anthropologist Marc Augé.

In France today, political scientist Catherine Neveu (2015) has shown that invocations of ordinariness can serve both depoliticizing and politicizing ends, often distinguishing "normal people" from the "dirtiness" of institutional politics and valorizing them for standing apart.

Elsewhere I have described at greater length some of the ways in which a similar concern for "ordinariness" of a particular form also inflected the history of Fascism in ways that dovetail with its contemporary importance in Predappio: the town was in fact reconstructed in part as a monument to Mussolini's early life as a humble member of the proletariat, an ordinary Italian (Heywood, 2021). Like some of the visions of ordinariness above, Fascism's vitalist and populist version of "ordinariness" was of course designed to be restrictive and exclusionary insofar as those not fitting its particular vision of an ordinary Italian could not belong. But social scientific visions of the ordinary have often been exclusive, too. Various invocations of it make it "the peculiar preserve of the subordinate, the weak, or 'the people': 'Dominant groups,' it seems, do not inhabit everyday worlds" (Crook, 1998, 536). As Crook points out, there are in fact a number of affinities between early and reactionary vitalists, such as Oswald Spengler, and later radical theorists of "the everyday," such as De Certeau, Bakhtin, Giddens, and Beck:

> The privileging of the everyday proceeds through the construction of dualisms in which one side of the duality is assigned to established and pathological power while the other is assigned to resistant subordinates. This is so for Habermas's distinction between system and lifeworld, for Bakhtin's distinction between unitary language and heteroglossia, and for de Certeau's distinction between strategy and tactics. (Crook, 1998, 536)

The political valence is reversed in the vitalism of Spengler and others like Georges Sorel, of course: "While Spengler directly celebrates the life-force embodied in the strong individual, de Certeau and Fiske celebrate the cunning of the life-force through which the individually weak achieve a collective strength" (Crook, 1998, 536).

Spengler, incidentally, was a significant influence on Wittgenstein as he was developing what would become his "late" views on ordinary life (Monk, 1991). Wittgenstein shared Spengler's pessimism and belief that Western European culture was atrophied, no longer a "living organism" but "a dead, mechanical, structure" (698). Monk argues that Spengler's work is crucial to understanding the connection between this pessimism on Wittgenstein's part and his later philosophy (705). It was partly from Spengler that Wittgenstein derived his antipathy to "law" and "theory," classic antitheses to "the ordinary," which Spengler associates with "dead," "mechanical" civilization (as opposed to "history, poetry, and life") (705).

As well as animating historical Fascism, a concern for ordinariness continues to animate contemporary Fascist movements, which, as Douglas Holmes (2019) has pointed out, possess their own "illiberal anthropology":

> From the motifs and metaphors of diverse folkloric traditions to the countless genres of popular culture, fascism acquires and assimilates new meanings and affective predispositions foregrounding fascism's capacities to merge, fuse, and synthesize what would otherwise be considered incompatible elements not merely those drawn from the Right and the Left. (83)

"Fascism at eye level," as Holmes puts it, is for its followers "manifest in the predicaments of everyday life" (63), a point reinforced by Maddalena Gretel Cammelli's (2017) work on CasaPound, a prominent Italian neo-Fascist group. For these contemporary neo-Fascists,

> the political program as such gives way to what activists feel is more important: lived experience, the emotional stance of a shared identity, community. Third-millennium fascism is lived as a prerational experience, described as a style of life capable of grasping people's inner reason and meeting their need for identity. (98; see also Pasieka, 2022)

Meanwhile, marchers in Predappio on October 28, 2022, celebrated not just the centenary of Mussolini's march on Rome but also the accession to government of a direct descendant of his Fascist party for the first time in postwar Italian history. This achievement on the part of the Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia) comes, as many commentators have noted, at least in part as a result of a successful campaign to recast policies that would have once looked extremist—if not Fascist—as simple common sense, espoused by "ordinary Italians" (Newth, 2022). Like Predappiesi in some ways, albeit with very different aims, the party leader, Giorgia Meloni, simply sidesteps the entire question of Fascism, decreeing it "history" while famously asserting her simple status as "Giorgia, a woman, a mother, an Italian, a Christian."

In all of these cases, what matters to people is not just something or some set of things that "are" (by nature or by virtue of an analyst's judgment) ordinary but *the claim that* some things are ordinary. It matters that "ordinary life" or persons like "ordinary people" exist and that they denote a specific kind of content, different in each case.

As I have suggested, there is a sense in which in anthropology, too, "ordinary life" has come to take on a life of its own, carving out a particular kind of site or object ("*the* ordinary") that is nevertheless to be found wherever we go, much as with the concepts of culture and society for most of the discipline's history. My point is not that this is problematical per se, but that it risks becoming so if it obscures the fact that other people do this work, too, and that our specific, often Wittgenstein-inflected vision of "ordinariness" as a quality is not the only one. Just as it turned out that a concern with culture was not the unique preserve of anthropology and our understanding of it not the only one (e.g., Wagner, 1975; Viveiros de Castro, 1998), so I suggest with ordinary life as a marked category.

CONCLUSION

As I have shown in this article, the category of ordinariness itself—not just the things in it—has come to take on a special and particular salience through Predappio's remarkable history and relationship to Fascism, just as it has in anthropology and the domains noted above. I have shown that the category of "ordinary life" has required work to shape, create, and pursue, and that it is this pursuit of ordinariness as a marked characteristic that underlies the attitude of Marco, Valentina, and other Predappiesi to their extraordinary home.

Because everything about Predappio's relationship to Fascism is so patently extraordinary in a manner that Predappiesi understand perfectly well—because Mussolini was born there, because he is buried there, because it was built by the regime in its favored architectural style, because it was mythologized by the regime and tourists were brought there to wonder at the Duce's humble origins, because neo-Fascists have come on pilgrimage to it ever since Mussolini's body was returned, because a Google Images search for Predappio returns shop windows with busts of Hitler in them among its first results—to be ordinary is a means of escape from all of this. Nobody in their right mind believes that seeing an elderly dwarf dressed in the uniform of the Fascist youth movement is "ordinary." But when such things are in fact a part of the particular fabric of your everyday life, then "being ordinary" in opposition to such occurrences takes "doing," as Sacks put it.

Of course, my point is not that every time Valentina, for instance, leaves her house to do her shopping she is doing so in order to live up to an ideal of ordinariness. It is instead that there is nothing per se ordinary about doing one's shopping—that the quality of ordinariness itself may be as contextual, situational, and specific as are other phenomena whose contextual, situated, and specific nature we often seek to render in anthropology precisely by calling them "ordinary" (as in "ordinary ethics"); and it is that in the case of Predappio the quality of ordinariness has come to signify a sort of willful disattention to the Fascist heritage that saturates the town so completely.[3] So, to do one's shopping "ordinarily" in Predappio is to pay as little attention as possible to those aspects of going shopping that Valentina and other Predappiesi know very well are not an ordinary part of that activity for most Italians.

Moreover, there are some occasions on which acting ordinarily may be to some extent an end in and of itself: it takes effort to make ordering a coffee look normal when people next to you are singing a Fascist hymn; you have to consciously decide to visit your parents, even if it means sitting in your car watching black-shirted marchers stream past you, or to tend the graves of your relatives on the same day their cemetery is turned into a parade ground. It is not intuitively obvious that one would choose to do these things on the day of the "carnival of Mussolini,"' and many Predappiesi remember the 1960s and 1970s, when hardly anyone would have done them; some, like Angelo, will still not do them, because there are other, more obviously political values to which they are committed than that of ordinariness. But for others, doing these things matters not just because of the things themselves but at least partly because they are perceived to be ordinary things—more ordinary than an acknowledgment of or involvement in what surrounds them. The "practices of ordinary life" here are not simply "ordinary" because they are practiced in daily life, but at least in some cases practiced in daily life precisely because they are seen as ordinary.

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ENDNOTES

[1] It is also apt given that Italian far-right politics has long displayed an affinity with the carnivalesque, from the highly stylized, gestural, and ritualized politics of Mussolini's Fascism (e.g., Gentile, 1996)—epitomized with condescension by A. J. P. Taylor's (1964) description of him as "a malicious clown"—to the verbal buffoonery of the Northern League's Umberto Bossi (see Dematteo, 2007; and on Predappio, see Heywood, 2019)

[2] Given more space, there is a great deal more that might be said here in relation to carnival and the everyday. Not all carnivals are opposed to the everyday: for instance, Maurizio Bertolotti's (1991) *Carnevale di Massa 1950* describes the case of a communist-organized carnival in the Mantuan village of Governolo, in which elements of the traditional Italian village carnival were fused with popular political images and ideas (see also Boarelli, 1993; De Clementi, 1993; Raggio, 1993), and much of the anthropological literature on carnival in Europe notes that it is of course often highly formalized (e.g., Fabre, 1992). One might also wish to read the Predappiesi response to the "carnival of Mussolini" as a sort of public ritual itself a kind of "event-that-re-presents" (of which carnival is the classic form in Handelman, 1990) insofar as it stages a vision of the way life ought to be, rather than is. For masterly reviews of the extensive literature on festivals and carnival in Europe, see Testa (2014, 2020).

[3] This attitude of disattention is somewhat akin to Thomas Malaby's (2003, 20) description of the stance of "instrumental nonchalance" in Greek gambling, where a performance of "seamless unflappability" is thought to be both virtuous and efficacious.

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