***The Extinct Scene: Late Modernism and Everyday Life*. By Thomas S. Davis. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. 328 pp.**

If there is one truism that has dominated the study of late modernism, it is that British literature experienced an "outward turn" during the 1930s. Compared to the stream-of-consciousness narration and linguistic experimentation that characterized *Ulysses*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and other high modernist masterpieces, late modernism's literary style has always seemed much more grounded in a discernible social world. Between the deprivations of the slump, the rise of fascism, and the impending threat of another world war, late modernists, so the story goes, had found it necessary to "turn the reader's and writer's attention outwards from himself to the world," as Stephen Spender (1935: 205) observed.

Thomas S. Davis's *Extinct Scene* does not seek to contest the received understanding that late modernism was turning outward, but it does propose examining more closely what late modernists were turning toward. After all, merely agreeing that there was a new preoccupation with mass politics does not show how it operated in practice. "The question [for late modernism] is not if 'great change' will occur," writes Davis, "but if—and how—we shall see it" (2). How do "agitations at the level of everyday life correspond to 'great change'—that is, the large scale of war, systemic change, and historical events" (2)? More important, "what form of attention to the everyday"—that is, what sort of artistic style—"is required to establish that correspondence" (2)?

These questions resonate with recent works by Rebecca Walkowitz (2006) and Jessica Berman (2011), among others, which have rehabilitated the ethics of modernist formalism by linking its experiments to styles of thinking and feeling. To this formidable body of scholarship Davis adds a theoretical exploration of what he, following Henri Lefebvre (2005), calls "everyday life." According to Davis, late modernism was unique in its preference for externality over interiority, habit over singularity, and the geopolitical over the personal. While the British world-system was entering a "terminal transition"—with international law fraying, the security state expanding, and citizenship being redefined on a global scale—writers found geopolitical realities most legible in the lived environment of the everyday. From Mass Observation's use of surrealist techniques to Christopher Isherwood's vaunted camera-eye narration, late modernism was shaped by the pointed insistence that "macro-level" historical processes are best mediated by "micro-level" details (15). This choice seems partly a matter of convenience: as Georg Lukács and Fredric Jameson have pointed out, no onlooker can ever see the world-system as a whole, and in the end micro-level details are all we ever have to work

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with. But during the 1930s and 1940s the whole permeated the everyday in a new way as war, the security state, and a racialized system of political belonging all became normalized.

Of particular interest to readers will be Davis's argument that the late modernist enchantment with the everyday effectively undermines the familiar critical distinction between realism and modernism. As Davis explains, realism originally staked its claims to verisimilitude on its ability to register "the seemingly insignificant details of daily life" and to make "ordinary people and experiences the central subject matter of literature" (11). Yet in the 1930s there was not simply a return to a more "realist" aesthetic, as many critics have argued, but a new realism that internalized some of modernism's methods while discarding others. As Davis shows, late modernism's descriptive techniques borrowed formal features from high modernism, which it then used to develop a more normative, less subjective vision of daily life. For example, new mass-cultural forms like the documentary translated modernist styles into an arena where they could be consumed by a much larger audience. The resulting productions deployed "the aesthetic resources of modernism"—montage, disjunctures between sound and image, and other avant-garde techniques—in the service of "the epistemological claims of realism" (12). In doing so, they troubled that distinction, so common to the Cold War era and beyond, that pitted realism and modernism against one another as rival aesthetics rather than as supplemental discourses.

Situated at the point of intersection between realism and modernism, Davis's everyday emerges as a shifting category whose meaning can change from author to author. The concept is a broad one, and the book's five chapters apply it to formal styles and political projects that would seem, on the surface, to have little in common: documentary film and Mass Observation (chap. 1), the historical novels of Virginia Woolf and Isherwood (chap. 2), the travel writing of Isherwood, W. H. Auden, and George Orwell (chap. 3), the gothicism of Henry Moore and Elizabeth Bowen (chap. 4), and the vernacular fictions of Sam Selvon, Vic Reid, and Colin MacInnes (chap. 5).

A term capacious enough to include so many genres obviously risks a dilution of force. For Davis, though, the everyday is not some stable object to be found in texts; it is more a methodological tool that can be used for analyzing literary and visual culture. In the spirit of Lefebvre, Walter Benjamin, and Michel de Certeau, *The Extinct Scene* privileges the provisional, makeshift quality of writers, artists, and filmmakers who constantly invented new ways of capturing those everyday experiences that would otherwise escape attention. The book's organization by genre helps convey this feeling of provisionality by stressing the disparate formal strategies that characterize its clusters of writers, filmmakers, and visual artists. As Davis explains, each genre represents an "interpretive choice . . . that directs our attention and frames what we see and

how we see it" (21). Confronting the same sense of geopolitical transition, each genre offers a response conditioned by its governing medium and form.

Davis's readings of visual artists and filmmakers are particularly deft, and one of his book's prime virtues is its ability to describe a cultural landscape spread across competing types of media. The book is at its most incisive in its accounts of John Grierson's documentaries, Basil Wright's *Song to Ceylon*, and Henry Moore's Tube sketches. It is not so much that these readings are better than the literary ones; it is more that they can reach beyond the literary and establish a broad cultural context for late modernist engagements with the everyday. These connections are facilitated by the text's clear, confident prose, which seamlessly moves back and forth between discussions of films, travelogues, novels, and visual art.

The Extinct Scene will thus interest scholars working in literary studies, film studies, and the arts more generally. It is a valuable contribution to the growing scholarship on late modernism, to which it adds a compelling interpretive frame. It should also appeal to scholars working on the intersection of geopolitics, the state, warfare, and the arts, and its theoretical reflections on "everyday life" will benefit those seeking to develop a better understanding of how art mediates larger world-historical forces.

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