Pugh J.

**[A sceptical approach to 'the everyday':
Relating Stanley Cavell and Human Geography.](#)**
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Abstract

Over the past few decades there has been a turn toward 'the everyday' in the social sciences and humanities. For some authors, this turn is about making the everyday a new repository of authority of some sort, political, social, cultural or otherwise. For others, however, any turn toward the everyday interrupts any such evaluation. Focusing upon Stanley Cavell and the philosophical lineage that he continues from Emerson, Nietzsche, Thoreau and Wittgenstein, this paper examines Cavell's interest in the menace and power of scepticism as key to understanding the everyday as a lived experience. As an introduction to this particular part of Cavell's work for many Geographers, the paper puts Cavell in relation to more familiar approaches to the everyday, including de Certeau, critical Human Geography, non-representational theory, affect theory, psychoanalysis and pragmatism.

Keywords: everyday, scepticism, Stanley Cavell, Wittgenstein, Human Geography

1. The everyday turn and scepticism

“‘everyday life’ has been widely referenced and problematized in recent years within geography and many of the social sciences and humanities.”

[Gregory et al., 2011: 223]

The everyday turn has formed a grounding for a broad range of theories and approaches emerging in Human Geography over the past few decades. Historically implicated in the long cultural turn and the shift from structuralism to post-structuralism, today the everyday runs through an assortment of new approaches in Human Geography. From de Certeau's (1984) seminal *The Practice of Everyday Life*, to more recently in critical Human Geography (Barnett, 2005), non-representational theory (Harrison, 2002; Thrift, 2008), affect theory (Connolly, 2006; Massumi, 2015), psychoanalysis (Pile, 1996; Blum and Nast, 2000) and pragmatism (Wood and Smith, 2008; Wills and Lake, 2017), the everyday continues to weave its way through many of our key concerns (Eyles, 1989; Crang, 2000; Gregory et al., 2011). This paper explores the Philosopher Stanley Cavell's particular engagement with 'the everyday' and puts this in relation to these key debates in contemporary Human Geography. As Rorty (2005) says, over the past sixty years Cavell has developed a particularly innovative way of approaching the everyday; which, unlike many contemporary debates, maintains a much more explicit connection with Western Philosophy's foundational interest in the sceptical problem of other minds and the external world.¹ As Cavell (2005a: 159) recurrently emphasises, it was this long tradition of scepticism, from Socrates to

¹ A good example of this is Wittgenstein's (1953: §253) sceptical statement: "I have seen a person in a discussion on this subject strike himself on the breast and say "But surely another person cannot have THIS pain!". Wittgenstein's point, as explained in this paper, is that the answer cannot be affirmed or denied with certainty; but rather the associated drive for the transcendental can become constitutive of a sense of illusory qualities, rupture and impasse in human sociality and the everyday as a lived experience. For Cavell, Wittgenstein then reworks, but also continues, the Western tradition of philosophical scepticism that goes back to Socrates.

Descartes, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, which for most of the history of Western Philosophy energised “our fundamental concerns about our relation to the world” and others in it. Yet, as Rorty and Cavell also say, these are not now the sorts of concerns that animate much contemporary debate about the everyday in the wider social sciences and humanities. Cavell has had some impact beyond Philosophy in the fields of Anthropology (Das, 1998), Political Theory (Mouffe, 2000; Rorty, 2005; Berlant, 2011) and Film and Literature Studies (Eldridge and Rhie, 2011). However, there is no article in a major geography journal that takes Cavell’s work as its central focus and running concern throughout. Those Geographers who have drawn upon Cavell to influence their own fields of research in such areas as critical geography, justice and planning most notably include Barnett (2004, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2012, 2014), Laurier (2011, 2012), Laurier and Brown (2008), Laurier and Lorimer (2007, 2012) and a few others (Entrikin, 2002; Hillier, 2006; Gunder and Hillier, 2007; Pugh, 2013). This paper systematically places Cavell’s work in relation to a broad range of key themes in contemporary Human Geography and the everyday – specifically, de Certeau, critical Human Geography, non-representational theory, affect theory, psychoanalysis and pragmatism.

2. De Certeau and Cavell

Michel de Certeau’s (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life* is one of the key historical texts to have shaped the ‘everyday turn’ over the past few decades. Like Lefebvre’s (2002) *Critique of Everyday Life*, Highmore’s (2002) *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* and Thrift’s (2008) *Non-Representational Theory*, this book is among the most formative and frequently cited in geography and related disciplines. As Mike Crang (2000: 136) says, de Certeau is a good place to begin any reflection on what we mean by ‘the everyday’ in geography, as he has become something of a “small-scale mantra in geographical writings”. In particular, de Certeau’s invocation to turn away from geography ‘on high’ still makes him, for many Geographers, “the champion of the common folk and street level social theory” (Crang, 2000:136; Kwan, 2013; Saunders and Moles, 2013). De Certeau has played a key role in the everyday turn in Human Geography (McDowell, 1994; Nash, 2000; Lorimer, 2005). He has influenced mainstream definitions, such as in the *Dictionary of Human Geography*, which defines “everyday life” as

“A realm associated with ordinary, routine and repetitive aspects of social life that are pervasive and yet frequently overlooked and taken-for-granted. For many commentators, the everyday is inherently ambiguous and indeterminate, something that is both everywhere yet nowhere, familiar at the same time as it escapes.”

[Gregory et al., 2011: 223]

But here we can schematically pick out at least two ways of approaching the everyday that allow us to bring the work of Cavell to light. On the one hand, there is de Certeau’s (1984) grounding of authority in the everyday that amounts to something like a kind of therapy against the longstanding abstractions and Idealisms of Philosopher Kings, Metaphysics and Transcendental Reason that have permeated the Western Philosophical tradition since before Plato. Here de Certeau (1997: 22) says:

“A theory which takes as its theme, (and often for a taboo) ‘what is happening’ would be precisely the means of eliminating what is happening here and now. It would be discretely but surely ... since the heterogeneous element has been a priori eliminated”.

De Certeau's approach to the everyday famously focuses upon how the metaphysical freezes out the critical pluralities and heterogeneity of everyday life, and he therefore says we should submit to the authority of the ordinary rather than the abstractions of Philosopher Kings and Transcendental Reason. But on the other hand, there are less read philosophical traditions, such as those engaged by Cavell (but which also include Emerson, Thoreau, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Berlant see below) that adopt a very different way of approaching the everyday. Unlike de Certeau, this different philosophical lineage does not invoke the authority of 'the everyday' to sceptically stress pluralities and distribution of agency in everyday life at the expense of the metaphysical drive, precisely because this can work to denude the everyday of its more *critical* capacities. Instead, in Cavell in particular, an engagement with scepticism and the associated drive for the transcendental is bound up in a radically different and distinct way of approaching the everyday. This more critically brings to the fore how a sense of non-identity and illusionary qualities become constitutive of the everyday itself as a lived experience – a sense of absence, loss or disconnection from the everyday, from which a sense of self and community may recover from, or otherwise. As we will see later, Cavell's foregrounding of such states of suspension as everyday experiences further makes his work appealing for more recent contemporary theorists of the everyday, such as Lauren Berlant (2011: 260), who argues that a "Cavellian ethics" is a means of telling stories about trying to reconstruct a sense of self and/or community, whilst living through feelings of ongoing impasse and wandering absorptiveness. But when it comes to Cavell in particular make absolutely no mistake about the fundamental stakes at hand in his approach to the everyday and associated key tropes of impasse and suspension. Cavell's (1996a) central and recurrent argument is that the sceptical problem of other minds, the external world and associated critical capacities cannot be expunged from our experiences of the everyday, precisely because, as I now explain, scepticism is part and parcel of the human form of life.

A useful way to bring this out is to stay with a comparison between de Certeau and Cavell. Both begin their analysis of the everyday with Wittgenstein, but they make very different readings of undoubtedly the most important Philosopher to have shaped the everyday turn in the early 20th century. In the opening pages of *The Practice of Everyday Life* de Certeau (1984: 9) singles out, credits and applauds Wittgenstein as the "Hercules" who, through his turn toward ordinary language philosophy, cleared the pathway for what was eventually to become the everyday turn. In particular for de Certeau (1984: 9), Wittgenstein invoked the everyday as a "critique of the Philosopher as Expert", casting out the realms of Transcendental Reason, Metaphysics and Philosopher Kings from our analysis of the everyday so that we focused instead upon the mundane and the ordinary (see also Pugh, 2012). As de Certeau (1984: 9, emphasis in original) says, after Wittgenstein, "henceforth" there should be a "*submission* to the ordinary". However, I contend, there is a fundamental problem with de Certeau's reading of Wittgenstein and his understanding of the everyday which also works to draw out the distinctiveness of Cavell's approach. In particular, the problem with de Certeau's reading is not what he *does* say, but what he leaves out or reads out of Wittgenstein that Cavell insists should remain and be kept in play. For allowing de Certeau his point that the metaphysical acts to freeze out the critical pluralities of the everyday, the question for Cavell still remains: how is it that this sceptical impulse away from the authority of everyday, that drive to make transcendental, does still remain in play; and, indeed, quite naturally becomes constitutive of the everyday as a lived experience? Moreover, are there not many conceivable contexts and circumstances where to gloss over the sceptical problem and the associated transcendental drive would be to deny the very conditions of alienation, exile and oppression that brought scepticism about in the first place; leaving us a mystery to ourselves, let alone the world? (Cavell, 1972/1981; Affeldt, 1998; 2010; Laugier, 2009; 2013). Thus, for Cavell (1988: 170), "[i]t seems to me that the originality of [Wittgenstein's] *Investigations* is a function of the originality of its response to

scepticism, one that undertakes not to deny scepticism's power (on the contrary) but to diagnose the source (say the possibility) of that power" as it becomes constitutive of the everyday. Here Wittgenstein "has as fully worked out a theory of how language becomes metaphysical as he does of how language becomes ordinary." (Cavell, 1994: 6–7). Picking up on this, in Cavell's wide ranging studies – from his critiques of dominant philosophical traditions, to his work in film and literature – what is therefore recurrently at stake is this radical concern with the sceptical impulse, associated transcendental limits and how people find their way back to each other; acknowledging each other, somehow, or otherwise, in the midst of exile, separateness and finitude. Scepticism and the associated drive to exile from the ordinary is not a problem to be avoided or read out of how we approach the everyday, because, unlike de Certeau's reading of Wittgenstein, Cavell (1994, 2005b) does not so much understand Wittgenstein to be grounding authority in the everyday, as taking a more direct interest in how the *sceptical impulse* and drive to sublime – in justice, pain, or love, for examples – emerges quite naturally out of everyday situations and contexts.

We can start to clarify the distinctiveness of the approach, as Cavell (1969) does, with an example from Wittgenstein's (1953: §253) famous case of an everyday use of the word "pain":

"I have seen a person in a discussion on this subject strike himself on the breast and say "But surely another person cannot have THIS pain!"

On the one hand, we could not possibly provide this person with the *certain* knowledge that we do share their pain (in the sense of grasping the certainty of the meaning of the world). But on the other, referring to social or cultural expressions of pain alone (or more sophisticatedly, as in Agamben or Foucault, examining the societal power relations that construct knowledge) does not get us much further either, in actually being able to give this person an answer to their sceptical and alienating question. Yet, despite this apparent gap or failing in our relation to others and the world, Cavell (2010a: 93) firmly maintains that we are still "right to look for a sense of essence or necessity in our concepts", only we are apt to look in the wrong place. Here it is not the authority of the everyday but scepticism that is the "*discovery* of the everyday, a discovery of exactly *what* it is that scepticism would deny" (Cavell, 1988: 170). In the case of the above sceptic's question about pain, scepticism emerges as an "*absence*" or feeling of impasse in everyday human sociality, a loss or rupture in the everyday and the acknowledgment of others (Cavell, 2010a: 95, emphasis in original). For Cavell then, the sceptic's turn to human sociality amounts to something like a confession, and a working through of these feelings of suspension and the illusionary qualities of the everyday (from which a sense of acknowledgment, self and wider social relations may recover, or otherwise). This is the radically different type of scepticism in Cavell's work; different from a hermeneutics of suspicion or general critical wariness about other's truth claims. In Cavell's (1969: 248) work, scepticism is associated with the opening up of relation to others and the world:

"To meet the sceptic by saying that we *can* have the same feeling, fails; in failing, it [nevertheless] perpetuates the idea that whether we have the same feeling is *relevant* to whether we can know what another is feeling; but if this is taken as relevant, it is discovered that the sense in which we can have the same feeling is insufficient for knowing whether another person feels what I can feel, or feels anything at all. A gap has (apparently) been revealed ..." between ourselves and the world.

What Cavell is therefore working toward more generally through this interest in scepticism is a different perspective of what it means to be *critical* in our engagements with the everyday. Today, critical theorists and Geographers are more likely to not engage the depths of this philosophical

tradition of scepticism (e.g. Geertz, 2000; Goffman, 2002), whilst for Cavell scepticism and the associated drive for the transcendental is a means of telling stories about the illusionary qualities of the everyday. It is about trying to reconstruct community out of this sense of nonidentity, as a worthy endeavour, to be explored seriously (see also Emerson, 2000 and Nietzsche, 2003). In contrast to de Certeau, Cavell (2010a: 92) does not then easily align the everyday turn brought about by Wittgenstein with a turning away from the sceptical impulse and the drive for something transcendental, but rather says:

“This is what I take Wittgenstein to express in saying “What we do is lead words back from their metaphysical to everyday use” (Wittgenstein, 1953: §116), with the proviso that you might not, without reflection, or suggestion, tell when the metaphysical has intervened in our lives, as reported here for example: “I have seen a person ... strike himself on the breast and say: ‘But surely another person can’t have THIS pain!’” (Wittgenstein, 1953: §253). But we live in the everyday before words are returned; we live then in exile from our words, and the return is never at rest.”

Thus, for Cavell (e.g. 1994: 6–7, 2010a: 92), whereas Kant was only interested in the drive for a limited number of categories of reason, Wittgenstein was interested in how *any* word we speak may, and at any moment, reveal our separation from others and our inability to make ourselves intelligible. The invocation is not so much about just being critically wary of others, but to slow down and rake over the terms that we use to grasp everyday life; which, through Cavell’s reworking of the longstanding philosophical tradition and problem scepticism, are revealed at any moment to put our acknowledgment of each other and the world in doubt. As noted, he works such themes through a wide range of studies, from film and political theory to literature. The concerns are particularly well exemplified in Cavell’s (2003a) reading of Shakespeare, where in *King Lear*, *Othello* and *Macbeth*, for examples, a daughter’s expressions of love, a wife’s satisfaction, and the stability of a wife’s humanity all become manifestations of scepticism’s theme of world annihilating doubt (Das, 2007). These plays pivot upon how scepticism as a lived reality throws the everyday into doubt, and the question for the central characters becomes how, or whether, any sense of self, justice or community is to be recovered (Cavell, 1978, 1979, 1981, 1996b, 2003a; Fischer, 1989; Rothman and Keane, 2000; Eldridge and Rhie, 2011; for examples). But if the tone of Wittgenstein’s philosophy is often noted as tortured (Affeldt, 2010), then here it seems to me that Cavell’s work is more obviously focused upon questions of tact and the subtleties of impasse in human relations. This is not to say that it lacks power, but that for Cavell the intricacies of acknowledgment of others are brought to the fore (see Barnett, 2005, 2008 below). As Hillier (2006) aptly remarks in her own work drawing upon Cavell, he has a particularly attuned sense that foregrounds how it is all too easy to avoid the uncertainties of human sociality. For many Human Geographers the everyday turn is about making the everyday a new repository of authority of some sort, political, social, cultural or otherwise. Eyles (1989: 103), for example, says that everyday life is “the plausible social context and believable personal world within which we reside”. However, for Cavell, the turn toward the everyday is not only about leaving the ivory tower and abstract theorising for the messiness and performative practices of the streets; it is also down, into the denial brought about by the power and menace of scepticism, and how scepticism is quite ordinarily and naturally woven into the social fabric of everyday life (Critchley, 2005). As we will now see, this raises some important questions for Human Geography – for debates in critical geography, non-representational theory, affect theory, psychoanalysis and pragmatism, as well in the work of Geographers including Clive Barnett, Eric Laurier, Paul Harrison, Nigel Thrift, Felicity Callard and many others.

3. Critical Human Geography and Cavell: theories of injustice and resistance

The foregrounding of scepticism in Cavell's work has many implications. In his critique of Rawls (2009) *Theory of Justice* Cavell (1990) challenges Rawls's famous normative argument – "Those who express resentment must be prepared to show why certain institutions are unjust or how others have injured them" (quoted in Cavell, 1990: 108). Cavell argues that Rawls is typical here of many in the social sciences and humanities today in tending to see justice as something that can be prescribed and governed like the rules of a game. The rules of a game allow games to be practiced and played, the intentions of players to be shaped, and their consequences confined and scored. When we play according to the rules of a game the limits of responsiveness and of what is permissible are known in advance. But when it comes to questions of moral judgment in everyday life, this can be precisely the problem. As Cavell (1990: 113, emphasis in original) says, the moral life is not governed

"by a rule but only by a *judgment* of moral finality, one that may be competently opposed, whose content may then enter into a moral argument, one whose resolution is not to be settled by appeal to a rule defining an institution; a judgment, hence, that carries consequences unforeseen or forsworn in games."

For some Human Geographers here Cavell has provided both a refreshing and appealing alternative approach to questions of everyday injustices and resistance. In his own formative work, Barnett (2016: 114) has developed an influential perspective within the field of Human Geography where an understanding of injustice

"does not involve calculating fair shares from a distance, nor an appreciation of philosophical arguments about shared capacities for reasoning, or indeed for suffering. It arises first and foremost from the difficult acceptance by a subject of their own of vulnerability, a response that arises in a scene of acknowledgment of the claims of others rather than in a knowing relation of what is right, or good, or justifiable."

What is important to recognise here is that Barnett builds this perspective of injustice from a serious engagement with Cavell's work on scepticism and the everyday more generally, as exemplified in what has become a seminal paper in Human Geography in its own right entitled *Ways of Relating: Hospitality and the acknowledgement of otherness* (Barnett, 2005). Here Barnett (2005: 16) says that Cavell adopts

"a redemptive attitude toward philosophical scepticism, the moral of which, for Cavell (1979, 241), is that "the human creature's basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing, anyway not what we think of as knowing". For Cavell, what exceeds knowledge in human relations is what demands acknowledgment. Acknowledging refers to a mode of relating to others that supplements the traditional privilege accorded to knowledge as the primary medium for relating to the world and others. Acknowledgment is therefore best understood as an 'inflection of knowledge' that arises in relation to appeals to which the appropriate response is not recognition, but rather the acknowledgment of suffering, the showing of sympathy, or just listening."

In Barnett's influential work then, Cavell enables us to rework questions of justice and injustice in distinctively important ways, so that they are less framed around the certainties of rule-following, the coherences of knowledge and justice, than they are more vulnerable concerns with scepticism

and acknowledgment. In this section of the paper I want to expand such concerns more widely to argue that such Cavellian-inspired approaches, which, above all, work to foreground how scepticism is “stitched into everyday life” (Das, 2007: 16), can raise some really important questions for a widespread critical tradition that influences Human Geography today. From Mbembé to Agamben and Schmitt, this critical tradition too straightforwardly projects a coherent sense of knowledge, control and sovereign subjectivity at work in everyday life and “onto events and decision-making” (Berlant, 2011:96). Berlant (2011: 96), a follower of Cavell herself, sees Achille Mbembé as “exemplary” of this tradition, as when Mbembé says “[t]o exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power”. Agamben too also focuses upon how “a biopolitical state can strip someone to what is bare or naked life that produces bodies that are killable with impunity” (Das, 2007: 16). Important as such critical approaches can be when making *antagonistic* political claims against oppressive forces, for Berlant (2011: 96), like Cavell, there are also dangers in casting the human “as most fully itself when assuming the spectacular posture of performative action” (see also Das, 1998). In contrast, the invocation in Cavell’s work on scepticism is to not only think about the social fabric of everyday life in terms of the illocutionary force of words, how conditions of felicity or infelicity can be met or are reparable through reference to social conventions and disciplinary rule-following (see also Laurier, 2012). It is not only to think of the social in terms of “performative utterances” that act as possible reference points that monitor social convention, rule-following, institutions and oppression, but also in terms of what Cavell (2005b: 185) calls “passionate utterances”. This is a technical term that Cavell develops in relation to Austin’s work on performative utterances, so that a “passionate utterance”, by contrast, is an expression of the *limits* of social convention and the absence of a standing language that puts our future together in doubt (Cavell, 2005b: 185). Or put another way, a passionate utterance for Cavell (2005b) points toward a possible spiritual, rather than intellectual, failure in our relationship with each other (see also Cavell, 1996a). As Laurier (2010:143, emphasis in original) says:

“Cavell draws out a contrasting set of conditions, an important one being that, with the passionate utterance *there is no conventional procedure involved* that will produce the desired effect for the speaker Without these pre-given roles the speaker must offer their standing with you and at the same time ‘single you out’. [Cavell, 2005: 181]”

All this amounts to an understanding of social convention and rule following in everyday life, associated questions of injustice and suffering, that are not over-focused upon the *disciplinary power* of social conventions, institutional powers and forces (when compared to someone like Kripke, 1982). But are instead particularly attentive to the *weaknesses* brought about by scepticism as a lived experience. Cavell’s foregrounding of scepticism in this way is more cautious and tentative (compared to Mbembé, Agamben and Schmitt) about its critical abilities to ascribe fantasies of mastery over everyday life, the transmission of knowledge and societal rule-following.

Before turning to the now perhaps obvious overlaps here between Cavell and non-representational theory, such critical points can be briefly extended further in another direction when we consider how the everyday in the social sciences and humanities is now also often thought of as a site of creative resistance and hidden transcripts, as in the work of influential scholars like James Scott (1990) or Hans Joas (1996). Here I agree with one of Cavell’s most careful readers, Veena Das (1998: 183), that whilst these creative approaches have “the advantage of showing society to be constantly made rather than given. The problem is that the notion of the everyday is too easily secured in these ethnographies because they hardly ever consider the temptations and threats of scepticism as part of the lived reality and hence do not tell us what is the stake in the

everyday that they discovered.” For Das, like the certainties in the work of someone like Agamden, Mbembé or Schmitt above, focusing too much upon the creativity of the everyday can also at times become too secure in its abilities to work around scepticism – from expressions, acknowledgments, or otherwise, of pain, trauma, grief, love and violence, to the everyday work of rumour and the state (see Das, 2007). For Das then, after Cavell, when we explore such contexts and circumstances where scepticism emerges and reconfigures social relations we are better able to attend to the stakes at hand. This of course does not deny that the everyday is creative (Scott), performative (Butler), and disciplinary (Agamden), among many other concerns, but it does bring more to the fore the role of scepticism in the fabric of everyday social life, exile and separation as well.

4. Non-representational theory and Cavell

Critical Human Geographers such as Eric Laurier have been interested in Cavell for some time (Laurier and Lorimer, 2007, 2012; Laurier and Brown, 2008; Laurier, 2011, 2012). The previous quote from Laurier is contained within his chapter contribution to Anderson and Harrison’s (2010) seminal edited text *Taking-Place: Non-Representational Theories and Geography*. Nonrepresentational Theory (NRT), like Cavell, seeks to counteract a perceived over-reliance upon reductive approaches to language, social convention and rule following. NRT more particularly reorientates analysis toward the power of the nonrepresentational, nerve endings and affect (Thrift, 2008). I will turn to affect theory itself more specifically shortly, but I want to start exploring similarities and differences from Cavell by foregrounding how, for key non-representational theorists including Nigel Thrift (1996) and Harrison (2002), as NRT was emerging in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Wittgenstein too also played a useful role in justifying this non-representational turn. But as we shall see, the readings of Wittgenstein here were rather different from those made by Cavell.

Laurier and Philo (2006) take Harrison’s (2002) paper ‘*The Caesura: remarks on Wittgenstein’s interruption of theory, or, why practices elude explanation*’ as emblematic of NRT as it was emerging at the beginning of the millennium. Throughout his paper Harrison (2002: 488) is positive about Wittgenstein, exploring in some detail how Wittgenstein can play an important role in “‘dissolving’ certain traditional conceptual dilemmas”. In particular, how Wittgenstein’s “work can give a *different understanding of what to expect by and from an explanation* and thereby intimate a different, perhaps suppler, more hospitable, way of going-on— one more attentive to and in acknowledgment of the eventful non-representational, and practical movements of understanding.” (Harrison, 2002: 489, emphasis in original). Reflective of the more general concerns of the non-representational turn at this time of writing (see also Thrift, 1996), one key way in which Harrison believed that Wittgenstein could help NRT out is by exposing the Idealism, implicit or otherwise, associated with how social constructivism, realism, and many other philosophical traditions explain the world, and emphasise both the limitations of this narrow form of rule-following and instead turn us onto the performativity of practices. Here Harrison (2002: 491, emphasis in original), correctly in my opinion, takes on broad range of the social sciences and humanities as his target, saying

“that the idealism identified by Wittgenstein manifests itself in many modes of explanation, from constructivist to what we may broadly refer to as ‘realist’ (naïve or otherwise). All these modes share the basic presupposition that cultural activity is ‘guided’ by or is the ‘realisation’ of rules which lie behind actual events and thereby determine conduct in situ: rules which when uncovered or unmasked would serve to explain the constitution of meaningful activity as meaningful.”

Going on to quote de Certeau, Harrison (2002: 494) says that such Idealistic approaches to understanding society and rule following “would be precisely the means of eliminating what is happening here and now”. Thinking back then, such concerns therefore also connect well to what I earlier said about de Certeau and how abstract understandings of rule-following freeze out the everyday and the gaze of Idealism becomes like a “Medusa” (Harrison, 2002: 494). I agree with all of this in Harrison’s Wittgenstein paper so far. However, from here on, crucially for Harrison, the response of NRT is not so much about how we could now rework scepticism more effectively, but, rather, to draw our attention to the “*performative*” nature of rule following in Wittgenstein (Harrison, 2002: 495, emphasis in original). As Harrison (2002: 499, emphasis in original) explains with regard to the examples Wittgenstein employs in the *Philosophical Investigations* of how ordinary words are put to use:

“Wittgenstein directs us to scenes in which words, (gestures, propositions, poems, and so on) open directions for going-on. His style, the ‘scenic’ method, this giving of examples, is [an] attempt to illuminate *the performative, practical and nonrepresentational nature of the acts of disclosing or Showing which give sense and resonance to what is Said*. The difference which is being indicated here is between an analytic framework which treats words, (gestures, poems, and so on) as sequences of representations—as *denotative*—and one which acknowledges them as presentations—as *disclosive*.”

NRT then takes us in a direction that adopts a particular therapeutic approach to the everyday; one that does not so much eschew representation, as is often claimed, as understand representation as disclosive and performative. Interestingly, leading Geographers have read the point that representation “may never succeed in fully capturing what an individual means, feels and thinks” in Harrison’s work, and NRT more generally, as possibly opening up a “gap [through which] scepticism squeezes its way back into our inquiries.” (Laurier and Philo, 2006: 355). But in his Wittgenstein paper I would say Harrison’s (2002) move is somewhat in a different direction. Harrison, more like Derrida than Wittgenstein, seems to be part of a different philosophical tradition that argues for the difficulty of escaping *from* Idealism. By contrast, scepticism, particularly as it is worked through in Cavell (1988: 175, emphasis in original), is about how we “cannot truly escape *to*” Idealism from the rough ground – that is, the emphasis is placed upon the impulse to “exile” and “philosophical emptiness” as constitutive of the everyday as a scene of illusion (Cavell, 1996a: 326; Critchley, 2005). Here scepticism and the transcendental impulse “constitutes a rupture or break. It redirects attention. However, whilst it can seem otherwise, it does not direct attention toward anything. For in the place of an object of attention there is emptiness.” (Affeldt, 2010: 282). But this is why Cavell is so fundamental for how we can approach the everyday – because Cavell’s point is not merely that Idealism and the metaphysical act like a Medusa and block our access to the things that are important to us in everyday life (which is not an “especially surprising” point to make, Affeldt, 2010: 282). Rather, it is that “I, as I stand, who do so. I do so recurrently, and I do so precisely through turning away from them toward philosophical emptiness” (Affeldt, 2010: 283). As noted earlier in relation to de Certeau, to say that we should embrace a reading of Wittgenstein that returns us to the rough ground is then hardly therapeutic, because a failure to engage the contesting dimensions of scepticism, exile and finitude still “leaves me a mystery to myself” (Affeldt, 2010: 86). Once again then, whilst of course the metaphysical amounts to a turning away from the everyday, the questions still remain: why should one have wanted to embrace philosophical emptiness and the metaphysical in the first place? Under what conditions of injustice, pain, suffering and other contexts did this impulse, impasse and exile emerge? How can such conditions be addressed even as we find ourselves on the rough ground?

In surely one of the most important engagements with Wittgenstein in Human Geography to date, Harrison (2002: 496) sometimes appears to get close to this reading of Wittgenstein when he talks about how *Philosophical Investigations* “never settles once and for all, never finally comes to rest”. But rather than associate this restlessness with a therapeutic approach that still firmly keeps scepticism in play, as I have just been discussing, Harrison’s critique is instead levelled at the abstract rule-follower of Ideals and social conventions; so as to turn us toward the nonrepresentational and performative nature of rules instead. It is then surprising, given how scepticism is not engaged, that Harrison actually ends his paper with a powerful example of scepticism in the work of the anthropologist Veena Das. For whilst Harrison sees Das’ work as illustrative of a non-representational approach, he does not acknowledge that Das herself puts Cavell’s reading of the sceptical problem at the heart of her understanding of the everyday. Harrison (2002: 501) quotes Das at some length with regard to her anthropological accounts of violence against women in India:

“what is unique about pain is the absence of any standing languages either in society or in the social sciences that could communicate pain, yet it would be a mistake to think of pain as essentially incommunicable. At stake here is not the asymmetry between the first person (‘I am never in any doubt about my pain’) and the third person (‘you can never be certain about another person’s pain’), but rather that to locate pain I have to take the absence of standing language as part of the grammar of pain. To say ‘I am in pain’ is to ask for acknowledgment from the other just as a denial of another’s pain is not an intellectual failure but a spiritual failure, one that puts our future at stake.”

Das’ then still very much keeps scepticism in play; explicitly. Indeed, as she repeatedly says in her work, it is precisely one of her central concerns as an Anthropologist that “both the temptations and threats of scepticism are taken out from the study of the philosopher and reformulated as questions about what it is to live in the face of the unknowability of the world (for my purposes especially the social world)” (Das, 1998: 183–184; Das, 2007). In a more recent paper Harrison (2007: 602) raises the related and salient question that how we understand the breakdown or failure of communication “comes down to how we hear or hearken to the failure of representation and how we let this resound through our theories and account”. Given the concerns just raised, this is an extremely important observation to make. For both the NRT of Thrift (2004) and Cavell (2005b), a passionate utterance like a cry is an invitation to explore the limits of representation, and, therefore, can be thought of as a type of experimentation. As Cavell (2005b:185) says, a “passionate utterance is an invitation to improvisation in the disorders of desire”. But in Cavell’s case (2005b: 185) most explicitly, because passionate utterances demonstrate a *weakness* in the security of what could be called “public” or ordinary language, as I explained earlier, then they (can) also work to further switch the register of acknowledgment toward the idea of the “private” individual. This is not the same as saying that there is such a thing as a ‘private language’, but rather that a passionate utterance (can) direct our attention toward the sense of an “I”, and, therefore, to how people’s very sense of self and relation to the world is now in jeopardy (Cavell, 2005b:184). The draw of *this* essence – this ‘I’ – which often manifests in Cavell’s (1996a, 2003b, 2005b, 2005c, 2010a, 2010b) recurrent interest in the human soul, becomes “something like the *absence* of the experience, or distinctiveness of the word that is required, but also something like its being called forth by (the experience of) the *reality* of what it conceptualizes...” (Cavell, 2010a: 95, emphasis in original). Here Cavell’s move is both distinctive and powerful because it reveals how only focusing upon the performative nature of language and representations, or the affective power of the non-representational, for examples, does not seem to go far enough in also keeping in play how “[e]ssence is expressed by grammar” as well (Wittgenstein, 1953: §371). This is not to say bluntly that NRT or performative theory has it ‘wrong’.

Rather, I would prefer to say that a Cavellian reworking of scepticism *expands* the critical register beyond the affective power of the non-representational and performative practices, to also vitally incorporate how the sceptical impulse, which, for Cavell (2003b), is intrinsic to the human form of life, works through everyday relations as well (see also Emerson's (2000) 'Self Reliance' and Nietzsche's (2003) 'philosopher the day after tomorrow'). This argument in favour of scepticism may, of course, be precisely the problem for some who support NRT. Although Harrison's (2007, 2009) more recent work does seem to open up more possibilities, given the lack of explicit engagement with Cavell here, and more generally in Human Geography, I leave these hopefully for future debate.

5. Affect theory and Cavell

In a recent paper Linda Zerilli (2015) has also brought Wittgenstein and Cavell into touch with an often closely associated field of study to NRT in Human Geography, that of affect theory. Like Zerilli, here I shall focus mainly upon that Deleuzian strand of affect theory which is most influential in Human Geography associated with writers including Connolly (2006), Massumi (2015), Thrift (2008) and Berardi (2009). But I will also develop the argument in a different way from Zerilli by maintaining my own concern with the importance of scepticism in Cavell, as well as linking the discussion back to explicit synergies between Cavell and another sort of affect theory done by Lauren Berlant.

Affect theorists like Connolly, Massumi and Berardi understand affect as the raw material of becoming and play of substances (that is, ontology). They often draw upon an understanding of affect developed by Spinoza, defined as "the modifications of the body by which the power of action of the body is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time the idea of these modifications" (quoted in Thrift, 2004: 62). Affect then is prepersonal, proceeding directly from and between bodies. In their work Massumi, Connolly and Berardi have been particularly interested in borrowing from, among other sources, biological and neurological models to explore this understanding of pre-personal affect as the intensification of body-mind-culture relays under contemporary forms of capitalism (Papoulias and Callard, 2010). Seen in such terms, contemporary crises in capitalism are not only economic but also affective. Indeed, for Massumi (2015: 1–2), "the economy is best understood as a division of the affective arts." But this strand of affect theory has also attracted important criticisms as well. For example, Berlant (2011: 15) says that there can be a tendency in some strands of affect theory to see "neoliberalism" as a "world-homogenizing sovereign with coherent intentions that produces subjects who serve its interests." Berlant (2011: 15) argues that in Berardi "singular actions only ever seem personal, effective, and freely intentional, whilst really being effects of powerful, impersonal forces". Similarly, Barnett (2008: 188, emphasis in original) develops an extensive criticism of what has come to be known as this "layer-cake" interpretation of affect:

"Layer-cake interpretations present propositional intentionality as resting upon a more basic level of pre-conceptual, practical intentionality in such a way as to present propositional intentionality as derivative of this layer of practical attunement (Brandom, 2002, 328). On this view, the practical presupposition of the available, ready-at-hand qualities of environments in embodied actions that treat these environments as merely occurrent, or present-at-hand, is interpreted as implying an order of *conceptual priority* of the practical (Brandom, 2002, 332). This model of conceptual priority puts in place a view of practical attunement as a stratum that is autonomous of propositional intentionality. It is treated as a layer that 'could be in place before, or otherwise in

the absence of the particular linguistic practices that permit anything to show up or be represented as merely *there*'. Brandom, 2002, 80"

Quoting Barnett at some length in her own paper, Zerilli (2015: 282) says that this poses some real problems for affect theorists. On the one hand, Zerilli (2015: 282) says, affect theory too often makes a straw man out of conceptual rationality in order to knock it down, reducing it to "conceptually determined responses", rather than Wittgenstein's more performative understanding of rulefollowing. But on the other hand, certain strands of affect theory need to be equally careful about reducing everything to "affectively primed responses" as well (Zerilli, 2015: 282; Barnett, 2008; Rekret, 2016). Zerilli thus asks a pertinent question about whether there is a way to stop such concerns from sliding too far one way or the other. In response, I would say that there is in the work of the Cavellian-inspired affect theorist, Lauren Berlant, which, in my opinion, is a form of affect theory that goes quite some way to addressing such concerns. Notable here is Berlant's (2011: 260) influential book for Human Geographers, *Cruel Optimism*, in which Berlant says that she explicitly develops a "Cavellian ethics". In many ways I see Berlant as bringing Cavell into the contemporary era. Like Cavell, Berlant is a philosopher of the Ideal. But neither makes straw men out of Ideals and thinks of them as essentialised, totalitarian and deterministic narratives, but rather understands Ideals for what they are – reflective of a sense of absence or impasse in the present and human sociality associated with the affective force of a fantasy that nevertheless sustains us in everyday life. Specifically, in *Cruel Optimism* Berlant (2011:4) explores how contemporary North Americans and Europeans often live life in an ongoing state of what she calls "impasse", frequently characterised by a lurching between waxing and waning Ideals and fantasies of the good life amid heightening precarity and uncertainty. Like Cavell, Berlant (2011) is thus centrally concerned with the affective force and pressure of Ideals in the present – in her case, anything from the fantasy that a chocolate bar or a career will give us the good life, through to our attachments to the waning collectivity of the welfare state. In her more recent and fascinating book, *Sex, or the Unbearable*, co-written with Lee Edelman (Berlant and Edelman, 2013), Berlant really develops this concern for how people sustain cruel optimism in fantasies of sovereign mastery over everyday situations (as in psychoanalytic theory), but also in the forms of uncertain intuition, intimacy, affinity, agency and solidarity that can emerge when people have a different relation to their own nonsovereignty (one that treats nonsovereignty as an affective space of feelings things out). Whilst this is not the place to elaborate in detail, in response to Zerilli's call for a different sort of affect theory, it then very much seems to me that Berlant's Cavellian-inspired affect theory effectively maintains that tension between the fantasy of mastery over everyday life, on the one hand, and the decompositional forces of affect on the other. Like Cavell, Berlant is interested in what the affective force of the Ideal and fantasy does in the present, but also how it decomposes and works its way through relations of acknowledgment, or otherwise, in everyday lives. Both are interested in what the recurrent turn to the affective form of Ideals does in the plane of the ordinary. This is obviously not to deny the differences between Berlant and Cavell as well, but to more generally flag up how both have similar tendencies in the examples they employ – from Shakespeare's plays in Cavell (2003a), to contemporary poems about living in the suburbs in Berlant (2011) – to characterise the everyday as a scene of negotiated suspension whilst remaining affectively attached to fantasies of mastery and Ideals.

6. Psychoanalysis, pragmatism and Cavellian moral perfectionism

Such concerns bring me to the final connection I want to make: between Cavell and the reception of psychoanalysis in Human Geography. In particular, I will consider how Cavell's work aligns well

with Felicity Callard's (2003: 295) seminal critique of how psychoanalysis has been read in Human Geography entitled *The Taming of Psychoanalysis in Geography*. As Callard (2003: 295) says, whilst in his own writing Freud's formulation of the unconscious seems to largely foreground "inertia and repetition", by contrast, in Human Geography it has often been invoked to bolster understandings of "progressive transformation" and political resistance. Callard's criticism is that psychoanalysis has been too easily appropriated in Human Geography in the services of social constructivism and political resistance, at the expense of Freud's more consistent emphasis upon states of impasse, suspension and lassitude (a criticism which I now also take seriously with regard to my own previous work, Pugh, 2005). As Callard (2003: 299, emphasis in original) says:

"Most obviously, and of most significance for the direction in which psychoanalytic geography is moving, this has meant rendering psychoanalysis compatible with a critical-geographical framework characterised theoretically by *assimilated* versions of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and certain kinds of anti-essentialist feminist and critical race theory. Such a framework ... operates with a curiously idealized model of subjectivity and of politics—even when that framework is used to attend to the unruly sphere of the psyche, and hence, apparently, to the unconscious".

For Callard (2003: 307), in contrast to this social constructivist and political resistance trend in critical Human Geography, Freud forces a "confrontation with a psyche deeply antagonistic toward change; individuals trapped in the repetition, rather than the supersession, of traumatic formations ...". There are strong overlaps here between Callard and Cavell's approach. In Cavell's (1990) reading of Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*, for example, Cavell focuses upon how psychic trauma, scepticism and injustice work through one of the central characters, Nora, recounting to her oppressive husband the vast range of terms through which her everyday sense of alienation is constituted (as both a wife and a woman in society more generally). She recounts a whole range of everyday concepts – from conversation, education and happiness, to becoming human, becoming strangers, and honour. For Cavell (1996a: 332), this recounting draws attention to how an approach to scepticism and the everyday parallels with psychoanalysis, so that in both

"[t]he practice of the ordinary may be thought of as the overcoming of iteration or replication or imitation by repetition, of counting by recounting, of calling by recalling. It is the familiar invaded by another familiar. Hence ordinary language procedures, like the procedures of psychoanalysis, inherently partake of the uncanny."

In Nora, through her act of recounting her relation to the everyday, there is this uncanny sense of someone standing beside herself (of a familiar life being invaded by an as yet unattained self). But the question is not so much one of resistance outwards or upwards, at least not as this is often formulated in the critical resistance literature; as of scepticism, like psychoanalysis, being the "*discovery of the everyday*", which may be a deeply troubling and unruly experience (Cavell, 1988: 170). Nora recalls the ordinary terms of her daily existence in relation to her oppressive husband and wider society, and in so doing the quotidian is revealed as strange, the everyday fantastical and we are faced with what Cavell (1988: 153) calls the "uncanniness of the ordinary." As the play develops further, Nora walks into another room on her own, whilst Torvald shouts from outside the door that he now forgives her outburst. When Nora reappears Torvald says "You've changed your clothes". Nora replies "Yes, Torvald, I've changed" (quoted in Cavell, 1990: 111). The central question in this play is thus what Callard (2003: 308) would perhaps call "*intransigence in the very process of transformation*"; or, as Cavell (1996a: 330–331) would say, those who undergo such a "transfiguration" as Nora are apt to "make themselves wilfully difficult to understand". Moral

justifications have come to an end, and justice, as it stands, has done what it can. Nora has not only reached an intransigence with Torvald, but also herself and the wider society that she lives in. But the direction of her associated transfiguration is not up toward any predefined goal or star of articulable alternative resistance, but instead down, into the living impasse of what Cavell (1996a: 332) calls “the chain of a day’s denial.” What is radical here, I contend, is then to acknowledge the pressure of one’s own separateness and finitude, others and society more broadly as it stands; to feel the illusory, artificial and trance-like qualities of the everyday as this lived experience; but, equally importantly, to not then return back to this rough ground, but to find oneself transfigured by the intransigence.

Finally then, whatever else Cavell’s philosophical tradition is, it is not pragmatism. The recurrent *impasses* and uncanny feelings of *nextness* keep pragmatism too much at bay. If someone tells you ‘be pragmatic’ what they are in effect telling you is not to dwell too much on feelings of scepticism, impasse and doubt, but to somehow get on with it all, adapt, adjust and move on. Whilst the founding fathers of North American pragmatism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – including William James, John Dewey and Charles Peirce – emphasised “the primacy of practice”, as Cavell (2003b: 221) says, the philosophical tradition of pragmatism does “not take scepticism seriously”. Indeed, for Cavell, right from the birth of the pragmatic tradition, in William James’ influential text *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, scepticism was relegated to an illness that James famously called the “sick soul” (1902/2002:99). As Cavell (2003b: 221) says, “James perceives the condition [of scepticism] as being of a particular” condition; so that the sick soul is not present in those who have a “healthy-minded temperament”. Like social constructivism, pragmatism is a tradition recurrently engaged in Human Geography and related disciplines (Forester, 1993; Sunley, 1996; Bridge, 2008; Jones, 2008; Coaffee and Headlam, 2008; Barnes, 2008; Healey, 2009). One understands the pull for those interested in questions of resistance and moving on from oppression (Wills and Lake, 2017). But here, like Cavell, I also encourage us to step one generation back from pragmatism, to the Godfather of William James, Ralph Waldo Emerson. Indeed, Cavell (1990, 1996a, 2003b, 2013) often reads Emerson alongside Wittgenstein and situates both at the head of a different philosophical lineage which he calls *Moral Perfectionism*. Others he includes in this tradition are Thoreau, Nietzsche and the Romantic poets Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake. Cavell (2013: 5) sees *Moral Perfectionism* as a “continuation with romanticism”, because, like the Romantic poetics, Emerson and Thoreau also tended to posit a feeling of distance and *nextness* to everyday life brought about by a desire to *fully grasp* the everyday and bring it closer (and the associated romantic failure of loss in not being able to do so). Those Cavell includes in the lineage of *Moral Perfectionism* often start by foregrounding experiences of embarrassment and disappointment with their culture as a whole, a sense of distance from the everyday; how one feels compromised by that culture and its inability to listen to itself and the individuals that make it up (as in Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, and Nora). This disappointment, in a way that Berlant² also says includes her in the Emersonian tradition, is associated with the everyday as a scene of ongoing suspension and impasse that is coupled with an attachment to the affective force of an as yet unattained but attainable self – hence, perfectionism is kept in play. It is a philosophical tradition which does not eschew the impasse, but indeed foregrounds how people inhabit, dwell and feel out the contours of impasse as a lived experience. Indeed, as noted, for both Berlant and Cavell *impasse* becomes arguably the key orientating trope, and not the aside to be glossed over, even as it is maintained by everyday affective attachments to

² Berlant was asked this question by the author of this paper after her keynote presentation at the Emotional Geographies Conference, Edinburgh, June 10th, 2015. The question was posed in front of the audience and concerned whether or not Berlant sees herself as continuing the particular philosophical lineage developed by Emerson and Cavell. Her answer was yes.

Ideals and associated decompositional pressures. As Berlant (2011) says, this all feels a very appropriate philosophical tradition to engage for our times.

7. Conclusion: the eventual everyday

The 'everyday turn' in the social sciences and humanities has largely downgraded concerns with the philosophical problem of scepticism. Despite a range of innovative perspectives – from de Certeau to contemporary critical Human Geography, affect theory and non-representational theory, psychoanalysis and pragmatism – one of the oldest questions of the Western philosophical tradition has now been almost completely expunged from our critical thinking about everyday life. Indeed, to even talk about scepticism today is to risk being ridiculed and held in check, as Rorty (2005) sought to check Cavell by saying that for the sake of pragmatism we should consign scepticism to a relic of the past. But as Cavell (2005a: 159) said in response to Rorty, so “[n]ow the question becomes how its preoccupations could ever have seemed to express our fundamental concerns about our relation to the world and I and others in it...” It just seems all too easy to say that much of the history of the Western Philosophical tradition – from Plato to Descartes, Hume and Kant – simply got it wrong. As Cavell (2005c) explains, whether in Wittgenstein's (1953) approach to 'philosophy', Emerson's (2000) 'Self Reliance', Thoreau's (2010) 'Civil Disobedience' or Nietzsche's (2003) 'philosopher the day after tomorrow', being attentive to *scepticism* becomes a way of (re)turning to the everyday anew. For Cavell (2005a: 159) then, although scepticism should certainly be fundamentally reworked in new ways, it still remains important for how we come to acknowledge others in everyday life; in how we become “the dealer of those small deaths of everyday slights, stuttered hesitations of acknowledgment, studied reductions or misdirections of gratitude, that kill intimacy and maim social existence”. Scepticism here is not a *mere aside* to everyday life, relegated to the work of a Philosopher like Hume sat in his isolated study, who then forgets about its power when he goes out into the wider world with his friends (Cavell, 1988). Nor is scepticism reduced to an isolated expression of “unnatural doubts”, confined to the insane or possessed (Das, 2007: 6). It is also not a matter of only focusing upon how the unknowability of the social world has been made more acute by processes of modernity and globalization (as in Appadurai 1996: 158–78). But rather, as in the work of Cavell's contemporary Veena Das (1998: 184), scepticism is about how the “uncertainty of relations is part of human sociality”.

Despite being influential across many disciplines, Cavell is not only largely overlooked in Human Geography but also in many mainstream social science and humanities texts on 'the everyday'. Indeed, both Cavell and Wittgenstein are notable omissions from Ben Highmore's (2002) widely cited edited collection *The Everyday Life Reader*. The argument of this paper then is that contemporary critical theory on the everyday should return a little more than it does to some of these older philosophical questions and debates that Cavell keeps in play. In our seeming relentless fascination and appetite for ever-new ways of framing the everyday some old concerns are being too easily forgotten. In our thirst to explain the new, we expunge the sceptical problem of other minds and the external world too readily. Yet, as Cavell (2005a) says, contemporary life has not made this, one of the oldest philosophical problems, redundant. As in the cases of others in his *Moral Perfectionist* tradition, such as Emerson, Thoreau, Das and Berlant, in Cavell's work scepticism and the drive for the transcendental is bound up in human sociality itself, a means of telling stories about trying to reconstruct community, as a worthy endeavour, not to be dismissed lightly.

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