International Journal of Linguistics
andLiterature (IJLL)
ISSN(P): 2319-3956; ISSN(E): 2319-3964
Vol. 7, Issue 5, Aug – Sep 2018; 33-48
© IASET

International Academy of Science,
Engineering and Technology
Connecting Researchers; Nurturing Innovations

COMBATING CONVENTIONAL REALISM AND COMMODITYFETISHISM IN REPRESENTATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE: ASTUDY OF RON SILLIMAN'S *BART ON BART*

Abeer M. Refky M. Seddeek

College of Language and Communication (CLC), Arab Academy for Science,

Technology and Maritime Transport (AASTMT), Alexandria, Egypt

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is twofold; first it explains Everyday Life and Cultural Theory as based on the studies of Michael Sheringham, Ben Highmore, Guy Debord and the Situationists, and Henri Lefebvre. It shows that la vie quotidienneresists categorization and requires various forms of representation and discourse to reflect its continuum. It explains Everyday Life Theory concern with urban geography and the dérive technique as well as the dominance of Capitalism commodity fetish that commodified and stamped with value the social and political aspects, even language. Secondly, the paper discusses Ron Silliman's BART on Bart's (1982) probing of the quotidian through its structure that is based on accumulation, repetition, juxtaposition and extreme length, the new sentence and procedural constraint as means of describing the real. It shows the city as a whole in movement to explain the continuum of the everyday. The paper concludes that BART on Bart negates conventional realism and the capitalistic approach of commodification.

KEYWORDS: *Capitalism – Everyday Life and Cultural Theory – Marx's Commodity Fetish – Realism – Situationism*

Article History

Received: *08 Aug 2018* **|** ***Revised:*** *17 Aug 2018* **|** ***Accepted:*** *23 Aug 2018*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Significance of Study

Language poetry, which emerged in the United States at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, changes the poetic language from customary discourse. It indicates the "subversive political activity" of the 1970s and associates with leftist politics and the literary magazine *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* published in the 1970s. It has a social content and is mainly concerned with the theory and practices of everyday life.However, Language poets' contribution to everyday life has not been adequately evaluated or received due attention.There are multiple studies about everyday life theory including those of famous theorists such as Michael Sheringham, Ben Highmore, Guy Debord and the Situationists, and Henri Lefebvre, whose work on *la vie quotidienne* is invaluable to the language poets and among them is Ron Silliman.

The American poet, Ron Silliman (1946-),is an influential language poet. He is the editor of *In the American Tree: Language, Realism, Thought* (1986), which is the primary Language Poetry anthology that sets the trend. He also wrote *The New Sentence* (1987), which is one of the movement's defining critical texts. In Silliman's poetry"meanings are

found in the connections between words, and between words and sentences" (Prevalent 334). There is "difficult pleasure" in reading his poetry; "difficult" because the reader is challenged as to how the poem is supposed to behave, and "pleasurable" because it does not guide readers through the text, but rather urges them to combine patterns and make associations which areunique (334). This is clearly manifested in *BART on Bart* (1982), the poem under study. This paper attempts to answer the following questions: What are the main features of Everyday Life and Cultural Theory? What are the techniques adopted by Silliman to render everyday life? What is the relation between conventional realism and commodity fetishism? How are these aspects reflected in Silliman's *BART on Bart*?

1.2 Everyday Life and Cultural Theory

The Everyday Life and Cultural Theory is represented in Henri Lefebvre's two studies, *Critique of Everyday Life* (1991) and*Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1971), Ben Highmore's *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* (2002), and Michael Sheringham's *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (2006).This theory states that everyday resists form (Sheringham 22) and its description"eludes all attempts at institutionalization" and "evades the grip of forms" (Lefebvre, *Critique* 182).For Andrew Epstein, it is impossible to represent, scrutinize and record everyday life "without killing it, robbing it of its vitality and elusiveness, its inconspicuousness, its refusal to be categorized" ("There" 743), which is typical of its being everyday.

Highmore contends that "To treat everyday life as a realm of experience unavailable for representation or reflection is to condemn it to silence" (21). He suggests that "the everyday is a flow" and hence any attempt "to arrest it, to apprehend it, to scrutinize it, will be problematic" (21) because extracting elements from the continuum of everyday life will hamper its most important feature, namely, its ceaselessness. In describing everyday life, time and synchronization are of extreme importance.

For Highmore, everyday "is a site of resistance, revolution and transformation" (17). He stresses that it "represents an impossibly evasive terrain: to attend to it is to lose it" (20). For him, everyday life is full of contradictions in the social paradigm; the ordinary and the extraordinary, the obvious and the concealed, and the known and the unknown. Attending to everyday life is an attempt to unravel the mystery and the handle the unmanageable and the unknowable. He adds that the everyday "becomes the setting for a dynamic process: for making the unfamiliar familiar; for getting accustomed to the disruption of custom; for struggling to incorporate the new; for adjusting to different ways of living" (2). It is not monotonous, or routine work, but it encompasses the "bizarre and mysterious," "strange occurrences" (3), "mystery" (12), and "phantasmagoria" (14) including various scenes and multiple interpretations. Highmore believes that everyday life entails both mental and sensual experiences that extend the range of meaningful elements to be represented.

Moreover, Highmore states that there is no perfect or proper representation form to describe everyday life as it "exceeds attempts to apprehend it" (21).He claims that much of Everyday Theory is intentionally oriented towards "responding to the way in which conventional discourse has erased and ignored the everyday" (25) and aims at making it recognizable, despite its particularity, by generating new"accounts of the social totality" (25). It thus becomes obvious that the everyday is neither a realm of experience unavailable for representation nor a fearful or threatening phantasmagoria. It requires various means of representation and discourses to accommodate all its objects and times. To represent everyday life vividly, the phantasmagoric representation must be substituted by "practical, poetic and critical operations" (16).

In the same context, Lefebvre adds that *La vie quotidienne* represents the ordinary or the cliché emphasizing continual recurrence and insistent repetition. He says, "*La quotidienne*…really refers to repetition in daily life, to that

which repeats itself consistently" ("Towards" 78). That repetition found in the daily chores and the routinized pleasures of the cycle of work and leisureis also deemed aroutinized aspect of capitalist everyday life. He writes,"Everyday life is made of recurrences: gestures of labor and leisure, mechanical movements both human and properly mechanic, hours, days, weeks, months, years, linear and cyclical repetitions, natural and rational time"(*Everyday*18). Such repetition indicates the interrelationship of all aspects of everyday life.

Lefebvre believes that neither empirical reality can reflect the force behind it, nor the world of thought can reveal essential truths. He explains that "The limitations of philosophy – truth without reality" counterbalance the limitations of everyday life "reality without truth" (*Everyday*14).He statesthat the simple events of everyday life comprise two sides simultaneously: a little, individual, chance event and a complex, social, rich event (*Critique*57). Lefebvre explains that there should be an analysis of everyday life that helps "expose its ambiguities" to"release the creative energies that are an integral part of it" (*Everyday* 13).

On the other hand, Sheringham defines the project of paying attention to everyday life as "an artificial, rule-bound, per formative situation" the author gets physically involved into under conditions that force not only readers'attention to the everyday, but also the writer's (386). Hence, readers engage in the description of everyday life and the writer becomes aware of every detail during the process of recording or documentation. For Sheringham, the everyday is "inherently resistant to being captured in the nets of realism" (42-43)hence the language poets "break with entrenched conventions of representation and realism and develop new, often challenging methods and forms." They use new forms of representation such as repetition, collage, use of procedural, constraint-based methods of composition, and extreme length. Thus, they can make the unfamiliar familiar and the unknowable knowable. The power of the language poets lies in changing the way language represents everyday life and reality. They adhere to Walter Benjamin's theory of aesthetics in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (2008) that the production of art, which is a representation of the world and its objects, becomes mechanical in the machine age and deprived of its aesthetic value (218).

1.2.1. Lefebvre, the Situationists: Urban space and the *Dérive*

Lefebvre's focus on urban space supports his critique of everyday life. For him, the unmanageability of the everyday archive is handled by spatializing the interrelations of the everydaysince the spatial is the "only stable thing there" (*Everyday* 9). The interrelation between Lefebvre's urban geography and the critique of everyday life completes the dialogue initiated between him and the Situationists in the 1960s. Lefebvre assumes that the urban processes would provide "the conditions for the overturning of commodity culture, his call for the restoration of *la fête* to the city and his insistent demand to transform everyday life" (36).After the revolutionary events of Paris in May 1968, there became a cultural revolution that seemed to help the emergence of the festival within the urban everyday that promised to change it into a carnival. The Situationists maintain that "Play is the ultimate principle of this festival, and the only rules it can recognize are to live without dead time and to enjoy without restraints" (Highmore 138).

TheSituationistsstrongly believe in Guy Debord's "analysis of social relations based on reified images" (Highmore 138) which leads to a continuous critique of everyday. Both Lefebvre and the Situationists claim that the contemporary urban everyday of capitalism saturates all forms of mass culture, all the modern equipment, attitudes, etc., and penetrates everywhere to disclose the discontinuities of everyday life (Lefebvre,*Writings* 72). These discontinuities are the fissures in the urban fabric, the "uneven development which characterizes every aspect of our era" (Lefebvre, *Critique* 8). The discontinuities of the city are manifested in spaces of different temporalities, outmoded spaces with different

cultural characteristics that can hinder the "homogenizing and hypnotizing effects of capitalist standardization" (Highmore 141). That city that witnesses decay and poverty side by side with glamour and wealth can abolish the false historicism of modernity, leading to an end of the dream of commodification.

The practices of Situationism as explained in *Debord and the Situationist International* (1995) such as the *dérive* and psycho geography that grew in the 1950s and 1960s are significant in describing everyday life. The *dérive* or drifting through the city for days, weeks and sometimes months to search for the city's psycho geography (McDonough 4) is the technique that Debord believes "shakes up the ambiences of everyday life," or according to the Situationists, leads to a "revolution in everyday life" (Sheringham 169). Its "observant aimlessness" assumes that the urban everyday can be "perceived as a form of unconsciousness" (Highmore 139-140) because drifting around the city reveals the hidden secrets and gives free association to urban everyday and the unconscious.

Debord explains that when committed to a *dérive* one or more persons "abandon, for an undefined period of time, the motives generally admitted for action and movement, their relations, their labor and leisure activities, abandoning themselves to the attractions of the terrain and the encounters proper to it" (McDonough 255-257). He suggests that central to the *dérive* is the "awareness of exploring forms of life radically beyond the capitalist work ethic" (215). Additionally, Debord believes that the *dérive* is a "technique of rapid passage through varied ambiences" ("Theory" 62), a "form of the subversive play within and against the urban environment," and a "controlled and … collective movement through several areas of the same city in order to distinguish … differences in ambience or atmosphere" (Kaufmann 108).The *dérive* has various impacts on man according to psycho geography or the urban effects of place and space and giving up oneself to the attractions of the urban environment to comprehend them (Highmore 139). It is also based on "minimizing the amount of labor" "characteristic of a 'serious work'" and focus on "collective play" and "eloquent improvisation of textual fragments" and "visual fragments" tackling various themes" (McDonough 217).

Psycho geography or the effects of geographical environment on one's behaviour and emotions does not focus on the "physical or the geographical phenomena that exist in a spatial context" (McDonough 252), but rather it focuses on space "as a context or container of social relations" and emphasizes that space is"constituted by" social relations (252). Therefore, it helps humans realize how urban spaces are used and shaped by ideological forces and how they affect those who experience them psychologically. Analysis of the urban scene or psycho geography discloses the unevenness of capitalist development. Thus this concept does not accept the city mentioned in tourist guidebooks.

1.3 Combating Capitalism and Commodity Fetish of Language

For Karl Marx (1818-1883), the German philosopher and economist, the "phantasmagoria of modernity is characterized by the commodity" (Highmore 14), so the human social relationships are concealed behind the relationship between things. Commodities invade every aspect of modern life to the extent that "in the phantasmagoria, things appear to be alive and people appear as objects of display" (14). Marx does not praise objects for their value or for the labor that produced them, but rather fortheir monetary value. He argues that when products of labor are brought into relation with each other as values, man does not attribute them to "material receptacles of homogeneous human labor." Consequently, equating products as values entails equating "different kinds of labor expended upon them." He goes on, "It is value ... that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic" and man attempts to "decipher the hieroglyphic" and to uncover the secret of social products (49).

Furthermore, Lefebvre believes that the everyday is based upon the logic of the commodity, or life as lived according to the rhythm of the capital. He thinks that in the wake of the Second World War "capitalism succeeded in thoroughly penetrating the details of everyday life" ("Towards" 75). He adds, "The commodity, the market, money, with their implacable logic, seize everyday life" and "commodification of everyday life took an unprecedented force" (Highmore 113). Therefore, modernization becomes so much interrelated to consumer culture.

Lefebvre insists that a revolution should not only change political personnel or institutions but"it must change *la vie quotidienne*, which has already been literally colonized by capitalism" ("Towards" 80).For him, the singularity of everyday event, "reverberates with social and psychic desire as well as with the structures of national and global exchange" (*Critique* 57). He does not call for archiving everyday life, but for relating it to economic structures of desire and exchange.

Capitalism hasalso invaded language. Marx suggests, "To stamp an object of utility as a value is just as much a social product as language" (49), meaning that stamping any object as a value makes it a social product just like language that can be used to make a profit. In the same context, Geoffrey Ward mentions that grammar assimilates elements to produce a structure that is considered a "profit in capitalism" that can be reinvested to take advantage of the human labor to get more profit. For him, the classical narrative structure is also a profit structure.

The language writers see post-war America as a "pure capitalistic" society "where everything is judged by its market value" even the very fact of reading isdeemed "a subject for commodification" (Chakroborty). They attempt to negate capitalism so, in language writing, every sentence acts as a unit of meaning that challenges the capitalistic approach of commodification. Language writers produce this meaning and thus propose a social engagement in the process of reading. According to Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein, two of the chief theorists of language writing, language writing attempts to negate the idea of commodity fetishism.They state, "The project of poetry does not involve turning language into a commodity for consumption; instead it involves repossessing the sign through close attention to, and active participation in, its production" (x). Andrews observes, "Meaning is not produced by the sign, but by the contexts, we bring to the potentials of language" (33).

The language poetsseek political and social change with a non-totalizing language use. They oppose capitalist communication and they fight against inequities in the social system that values money over man. Bernstein illustrates how inequality operates "In a society with such spectacularly inequitable distributions of power" (*A Poetics* 5). Hence, language poetry attempts to reveal this unfair condition and eliminate the use of language by those who appropriate it in a profitable way in an attempt to negate the commodity fetish of language.

Nonetheless, the language poets study the capitalist language use to show how this use is robbing humans of their value and agency, and as such, they take political responsibility. They seek to reveal the qualities of writing that can help understand and criticize the society as a capitalist system. They attempt to bring about real political change and as Marxism criticizes capitalism's effect on workers, they reject capitalist practices that affect the language of poetry. Thus, language poetry also combats capitalism and commodity fetish.

According to John Woznicki, language poets believe that capitalism is based on "a system of exchange" that makes the individual universal and keeps in line with capitalist ideology. When individuals use capitalist language and codes, they lose value and power. The narrative form enables a unified subject to reflect a uniform, conventional reality so that the "real" realism describes is everyday life index and thus gives ground to capitalist ideology. Hence, man is deprived of the ability to move forward and is trapped in a capitalistic continuum.Woznicki further illustrates that, for the language

poets, capitalism is an "artificially constructed reality" hence they "attack the normative power of language."

Thus it has become clear that everyday life is a flow of events, contradictions, mystery and phantasmagoria that rejects traditional forms of description and restrictions of conventional realism. The urban everyday of Capitalism penetrates all forms of mass culture, even language. Consequently, language poets resort to the *dérive* and psycho geography to give free association to the everyday and the unconscious. They reject the logic of Capitalism and commodity fetish of language that reflect an artificially constructed reality and employ techniques such as prose writing, repetition, procedural constraint and extreme length to describe the everyday continuum.

The following part discusses Silliman's poem, *BARTon Bart* (1982)to explain Silliman's attacking of commodity fetishism and conventional realism.

2. RON SILLIMAN'S *BART on Bart* (1982)

Ron Silliman is totally immersed in literary and cultural theory in the early 1970s and focuses more on Everyday Life and Cultural Theory. Additionally, the flourishing of Conceptual Art in the late 1960s and early 1970s urged him to use procedures and constraints in documenting everyday life. Thus, these three diverse aspects "the poetic-aesthetic, the conceptual, and the theoretical-political-cultural" (Epstein, "There" 743) helped Silliman in his probing of the quotidian.

2.1 Everyday Life and Cultural Theory as Represented in *BART on Bart*

BART on Bart (1982) records the minutiae of an ordinary day and urban daily life in San Francisco. Silliman writes *BART* as one, long sentence that goes on for twelve pages and follows the spontaneous technique he believes adequate to attend to everyday life details. By doing so, he negates the notion that everyday life is a realm of experience unavailable for representation. In writing *BART*, Silliman gives credit to the American poet Jack Kerouac for he considers *BART* "an act, homage to you Jack, oomaloom, one word after another" (*Age*309-10) andan adoption of Kerouac's sketching technique or spontaneous writing in which he records his impressions immediately disregarding editing or shape.

Silliman invades everyday life events and iscompletely taken into the grasp of the phantasmagoria of modernity that may sometimes be mysterious, fearful or life-threatening. He represents bits and pieces which may not fit in orderly thought and resist rational categorization.Silliman's technique enables him to present a comprehensive picture of everyday life that "smooth[s] over its contradictions, trim[s] away its boredom, idealize[s] its blemishes, or redeem[s] its banalities" (Epstein, "There" 744). His quotidian combines several contradictions of "private and public, universal and particular, tedium and possibility, repetition and newness, deprivation and plenitude" (744). This perception is in line with Sheringham's idea that the everyday is both "empty and miraculously full" (143).

In the context of Sheringham's definition of paying attention to everyday life, Silliman becomes physically involved in the "artificial, rule-bound, per formative situation" (386) that he describes in *BART*. He pushes the reader to actively engage in everyday actions with no pre-set goal. Sheringham describes this project as "a breathing space, a gap or hiatus that enables the quotidian to be apprehended as a medium in which we are immersed rather than as a category to be analyzed" (390). The reader and the writer become conscious of many everyday activities that are done regularly, routinely, or automatically as the habit.

BART represents the everyday as a flow or continuum of events. Silliman manipulates time and space, breaks down all boundaries, and denounces categorization of experience in delineating the everyday life experience as he wants it

to look as "collectively human" (Yu xx). Hegives an accurate description of the minutest details witnessed on a particular day at a certain location, so it delineates what it is like to be alive and alert in a specific time and place. Silliman indicates that by the clock ticks (11:59, 12:47, 1:59,etc.) and by mentioning the names of stations, streets, landmarks, stores, and neighborhoods in San Francisco, Oakland and Berkeley.

Silliman mentions that he is not a tourist or "worms in a salad" (*Age* 300), so he does not "go into the world and describe it," but rather the documents all everyday sights and sounds that constitute the background of daily life. Hence, he notices many things that one might ignore: "carpet of the car is yellow, orange, green, red, blue woven in also"; "big dumpsters in supermarket parking lot"; "man gets on with a racing form in hand, looks apprehensive"; "voice on the speaker system says don't ride bike on the platform"; "fat women with two boys, she shouts at them to sit down"; "Jimmy Carter for President '76, blue sign painted (crudely) on side of apartment building," and so on (*Age* 300, 300-301, 301, 301, 303, 306).Silliman's desire to record all the minutest details of human experience emerges from hid recognition that yesterday "doesn't exist anymore" (*Age* 305). The archive, or Silliman's poem, is all that is left of that day. Thus,*BART* carefully documents facts, places and functions as an archive for every day.

BART's structure is based on accumulation and repetition in an attempt to approximate the everyday life experience and the event it describes since the "powerful sense of the repetitive, cyclical rhythm" is a very significant feature of the everyday (Epstein, "There" 759). Repetition is Silliman's means to make the reader realize the occurrences which characterize daily life.The poem represents various things happening at the same time. Thus,*BART*, with its multiple voices and scenes, becomes a college that reflects the social aspect of the multifaceted everyday life with its "pluralism and polyphony of everyday culture, events, and language" (Epstein, "There" 758). Sillimanalso uses juxtaposition to deepen the critique and emphasize the contradictionsas *BART* is full of beauty and uglinessto indicate that the everyday is extremely varied.

2.2 Situationism,Conceptual Art and the *Dérive*

From the Situationism perspective, *BART* is Silliman's version of the practices of *Debord and the Situationist International* such as the *dérive*, psycho geography and surrealism's interest in unconventional investigations of the city. Silliman adopts the Situationists inventive strategies to explore the urban landscape in order to culturally criticize "how that space is administered under capitalism and how it is affected by class, race, and other social forces" (Epstein, "Pay").

The alternative version of the city sketched in *BART* echoes the living critique the Situationists envisioned in their plans for a "unitary urbanism" that is a living critique.So, Silliman describes the forgotten, outer edges of San Francisco and the East Bay, the urban decay of inner-city Oakland, and the stressed faces of tired passengers on the train. *BART* also juxtaposes the joy of being surrounded by people above the ground with the terror of being surrounded by other people in the underground dark tunnel.

In terms of the Situationism*dérive*, William Watkin claims that Silliman's riding for an entire day and documenting what he experiences is not random drifting at all. It has a more determined goal, which is reaching all four of the system's end-points and passing through all 71 stops (513). It aims at bringing overlooked aspects of daily life into focus and experiencing habitual behavior in a different way. Silliman refers to this throughout the poem saying, "now farther than I've ever gone before," "never was this far before," "this world is foreign to me" (*Age* 303, 307, 308). Again, in the opening lines, he indicates that his poem will take him into another, unfamiliar world: "Begin going down, Embarcadero, into the ground, earth's surface, escalators down, a world of tile, fluorescent lights" (*Age* 300).

Silliman speaks of the psycho geographical effect of the city on him saying, "how large is your turf," then he admits, "my triangle the City, Berkeley, Marin, plus of course parts of Sacramento" (*Age* 303), which reflects his limited experience of the Bay area due to his daily routines. He ponders on the political and social meaning of the sights he is not familiar with, or his comfortable triangle and says, "apartments very square here, you don't think of it as the City but it is" (*Age* 301). He also writes, "This world is foreign to me, an act of description, old railcars, I beam, a school or hospital off in the distance." Furthermore, he notes, "I'm the only white left on this car, tourism is different to different peoples," and a bit later observes "nothing but blacks on the streets below, then more plants, one for yeast, a billboard in Spanish" (*Age* 308, 307, 308).

In addition, during the 1960s and 1970s, aspects of everyday life became more visible in Conceptual art. However, *BART*has a more political edge than that manifested in Conceptual art and its close observation of the quotidian presents a thorough critique of everyday life.Silliman presents the experience of contemporary everyday life without distorting the main characteristics, namely,variety, complexity, and elusiveness.

Silliman makes a wide use of constraints, procedures, and conceptual projects. His ride on BARTis intensely concerned with observing, documenting, and critiquing urban social space as he "narrates his experiences on the various trains and platforms, records his impressions of people and places, comments on the political, social, and cultural aspects of what he sees, and,…, offers self-conscious commentary that reflects on the project itself as it unfolds" (Epstein, "Pay"). In doing that, Silliman uses a predetermined procedure to make the reader pay more attention to ordinary experience, launches a conceptual project by using the poem to document everyday life, and records everyday life both as a process of becoming in real time as it passes by.

BART's urban space intermingles with the social and the political life of San Francisco. Hank Lazer argues that Silliman's work "is often overtly political, even didactic in its attention to the political meaning of daily experience" (82). Silliman believes that the creative energies of everyday life can lead to left-wing political and social change. For him, everyday objects are indexes of political and social realities: "you could type towns by the kind of street signs they use, color, how much information they put on them, etc." (*Age* 304). He notes, "You always see stress in everyone's face, it's in their eyes, how they hold their mouth" (*Age* 301), or notices,"crowd is thinning, means either people are tiring or they don't want to go to Fremont, less wealthy and intriguing than Concord, homes not that poor, tho, small boats in the driveway, Hayward, large blocks of apartments, a school in the blue and green" (*Age* 307).

Additionally, Silliman's poem sheds light on the urban space as well as social relations and class differences as represented in public transportation. In an email interview he explains that in public transportation "different people stand or sit literally touching one another,"so, riding public transportation "is a profoundly classed (and thus for me class conscious) experience. Who sits where, how people interact, who's missing – all are heavily predetermined by those socioeconomic codes that constrain us all as actors" ("An Email" 26). Again, when Silliman goes through a suburban setting, he thinks how class impacts man's daily experience: "streets without sidewalks, with trees, affect the rural, swimming pools… a power mower for every home, tanned fat men in shorts." In a more impoverished area, he notices the pervasive deprivation and decay: "no lawns, just dirt, these tracks constantly bordered with cyclone fence topped with barbed wire (I just noticed), girl in a pink dress cries, a vacant lot, full of refrigerators and stoves, South Hayward" (*Age* 303, 308).

Realization of how political and social differences affect urban spaces makes Silliman's analysis of the urban in *BART* similar to that of Lefebvre and the Situationists who expose "capitalist 'progress' as uneven and radically discontinuous, while at the same time presenting itself as homogeneous" (Highmore 140). Thus, the urban scene and the psycho geography they represent avoid "the official city of the tourist guide" (Highmore 141). *BART* departs from the official, touristic San Francisco because it represents an act that is poetic and critical.

It can be argued that the everyday life project in *BART* isinfluential for two reasons;firstly, for focusing on the problem of description and the limitations hinderingdocumenting the everyday; and secondly, by employing that project as a tool to comment on the political and social aspects of the everyday life and to explain the uneven development of the everyday urban space in the capitalist culture of the late 20th century.

2.2 Attacking Conventional Realism

Like language poets, Silliman rejects conventional "realism" and the allegations that it can accurately render the everyday and ordinary life. In his poem "2197," Silliman contends that "Realism is a strategy, not a condition" (*Age* 194). He stresses that realism does not amount to a natural, innocent, transparent mode or condition. He attacks "realism" as nothing more than "the illusion of reality in capitalist thought" (*New Sentence* 10). However, he never gives up on the realist project, but rather endeavors to expand, improve and reconceive it not as accurately capturing the real as it is because the quotidian is full of contradictions. According to Epstein, it "is a complicated, unstable mixture – of private and public, universal and particular, tedium and possibility, repetition and newness, deprivation and plenitude"("There" 744).

Silliman is skeptical about the ability of *BART* to represent the real everyday life experience objectively. He admits that he cannot capture fully the events he sets out to delineate or the lives he wants to describe: "How can you describe people when you can only see surface features." He adds, "I can never hope to know all these lives" (*Age* 309, 308). Silliman confirms that any act of representation of daily life is only partial, selective and mediated by language and consciousness, "what I describe is what comes to me in words as I look out the window, miss all the rest, can't even write it all" (*Age* 309). Thus, he believes that there is no way to separate the real from how it is constructed in the poet's language.

Silliman strives to describe the social conditions within which he lives and works. He argues that if conventional realism cannot cope with the complexities of the postindustrial capitalist world, new forms should be invented. He incorporates in his work concrete reality or combination of insignificant gestures, transitory attitudes, insignificant objects, and redundant words. He suggests that experience of the real is discontinuous. The world is not a stream of consciousness, but rather a series of finite events. Daily life is filled with junctures that are always abrupt. The real becomes visible only when it generates new forms. In the same context, David Huntsperger maintains that "the real is a disruption to realism. Realist fiction cannot directly and continuously present the real because the reality does not unfold according to realistic plot structures" (112). Consequently, Silliman's new realismin *BART*represents"the real in the absence of a plot structure" (112).A series of events following each other as the writer sees them. Silliman uses the new sentence and procedural constraint as new tools to express the real and describe the dailiness of the American everyday life.

2.2.1. Shaping dailinessby the "new sentence" and "procedural constraint"

Silliman presents a flow of words, sentences, and stations within an urban space that is "neither alienated nor accommodated" (Wilson 33). It is like a "street-poet performance" in the "normative realism" of the ordinary. Silliman's

language becomes similar to the "flow of rails and scenes, subjects which are outer-determined, arbitrary and aleatory" (37). Hebreaks with the well-established means of representation and develops new forms. He employs two tools to shape the dailiness of the New York American poetry in *BART*;firstly, prose poetry or what he later calls the new sentence which is a "complete and grammatically correct sentence, juxtaposed paratactic ally in collage-like, discontinuous structures" (Epstein, "There" 748); and secondly, the procedural constraint method that relies on repetition, expansion, and modification.

Silliman's collection of critical essays, *The New Sentence*, links literary realism with bourgeois capitalism and shows how the new sentence can undermine both.Silliman's new sentence does have the potential of expressing the human experience as a whole. He considers the sentence as the smallest unit to signify meaning and meanings as chains of events and details that cohere within prosody.

Silliman also clarifies that the new sentence has "an interior poetic structure" as well as "an interior ordinary grammatical structure" and the "poetic structure of the poem" derives from the "poetic structure of sentences." The sentences become "unit[s] of quantity, not logic or argument." This strategy keeps the reader's attention at the sentence level or below, or at the language level. Consequently, the new sentence identifies the signifier, or language itself, as the "locus of literary meaning," rather than the "signified." Hence, Silliman's prose technique or the new sentence"reverses the dynamics which have so long been associated with the tyranny of the signified, and is the first method capable of incorporating all the levels of language, both below the horizon of the sentence and above" (*New Sentence* 93).To do that, the poet intentionally excludes reference and syntax, which are important elements of signification.

As for the second tool, procedural constraint, Huntsperger suggests thatSilliman's use of the procedural form is"an attempt to find a means of writing adequate to the real as it emerges within contemporary society" since there should be new forms given that conventional realism isinadequate to the represent the complexities of the post-industrial capitalist world (111-12). Silliman says at the beginning of *BART*, "Begin going down, Embarcadero, into the ground, earth's surface" (*Age* 300). It is Labor Day, a national holiday, "labor day, day free of labor" (*Age* 300), yet Silliman will spend the day working, as he writes his poem. Knowing of the special offer of the transportation system, Silliman decides to ride the commuter trains while writing all his thoughts and impressions about what happens: "it's an event, ride Bart for a day for a quarter, laborday is a day of rest, of description" (*Age* 305). This is a remarkably effective procedural constraint: ride the BART for one day and record in real time what he sees of the street life of San Francisco.

In *BART*, through the procedural constraint, Silliman takes the participant away from all the predictable paths throughout the city. He neither rides the public transportation system for ordinary purposes, such as going to work or sightseeing, nor for purposes that planners have designed it for, such as exploring, critiquing, and looking for aesthetic creation. Hence, this travel is no longer related to work, but to pleasure. Thus, *BART* challenges the urban planning that system of transportation is designed for and becomes a structure that helps the circulation of persons and capital through the city and its suburbs. Silliman contrasts the constructed city that tourists travel through with the city that inhabitants experience and distorts the image of the illusory San Francisco always found in the travel guidebooks.

2.2.2.*BART* as social event and labor

*BART*representsa complex social event. It is simply "an event" (*Age* 305) as Silliman mentions the twenty-five-cents special offer early on in the poem. It is a situation "that occurs naturally due to the singularity of the procedural constraint" in his poem (Watkin515). Accordingly, Silliman highlights "the value of working as an occurrence rather than

as a repetitious, regulated, and ultimately commodified action" (515). Watkin suggests that the event is the "it happens" that occurs moments before one thinks of writing it down, encoding it in language, and enslaving it to ideology. The event is not considered "reality, the real, or truth," but rather a moment that truly happened to or experienced by an individual, but cannot be recorded "without destroying its essential even thood" (516).The poet writes in real time all that happens over a period of time only to realize that the event he describes passes by. The poet struggles to make the even thood of the poem come into being while he is working on it.

Bernstein expresses the dilemma of the even thood of poetry claiming that "it reveals the conditions of its occurrence at the same time experienced" ("Stray" 40-41). Silliman recognizes the dual presence of poetic writing as an occurrence and description of that occurrence while writing *BART*. He realizes that "what he is transcribing is not a description of the experience of that day but the experience of description itself, which is the work he is undertaking" (Watkin 517). Silliman perceives the alterity and foreignness of the world he describes to the reader. He finds out that description is not a representation of what one sees, but rather of what occurs to one while perceiving things. *BART* reminds the reader of the vacation day that gets one away from the routine daily life. It illustrates how the "dialectical relationship between leisure and labor functions within the context of late twentieth-century capitalism" (Lefebvre 39-40). Silliman makes clear the cultural conventions behind the idea of the "Labor Day" as a "day free of labor."

Being on the Labor Day, the poet cannot identify the social status of his fellow passengers: "these aren't tourists, locals riding around as if they were, travel plans of the working class" (*Age* 304). Therefore, they are workers pretending to be tourists though they may ride the same train on working days for work purposes. The poet is the only passenger "working" on composing a poem. Choosing the exhausting act of writing on a day of leisure from the "grinding machinery of capitalist production" (Epstein, "Pay") highlights the difference between types of work, particularly writing and other types of labor. While everyone else plays on Labor Day, Silliman"works his work-as-play" (Wilson 37). Work in *BART* has several meanings: "the world of work, working, labor as the commodity, labor as a struggle, the work of art, poetry as work/ergon, and the process of working so as to make a poem" (Watkin 514).Silliman refers to the physical effort exerted while composing *BART*. He writes, "my wrist beginning to ache from the controlled act of writing," "an act of writing without let up," "I flex my writing hand to ease the pain, see a young man is watching me intently, trying to figure this out," and "I'm feeling weary now" (*Age* 304, 306, 308, 310).

However, the work that Silliman sets himself to do on this day is a deliberate act: "this is an act, this is deliberate …go into the world and describe it"; "1:59, I'm only half done, is that it, an act, something done deliberately, of description";"my writing is a scrawl, an act of description, I'm describing these people who watch me" (*Age* 301, 306, 311). By stressing that this is a deliberate act, Silliman emphasizes that the poem is "artificial, constructed, and deliberate," and therefore, quite distinct from man's "normal, largely unconscious experience of dailiness" (Epstein, "Pay"). However, it can simply be argued that Silliman is aware of the effort he is exerting, but simply records all details of everyday life unconsciously and spontaneously.

2.3 Combating Capitalism and Commodity Fetishism in *BART*

In his critique of the capitalist, consumerist American culture, Silliman demonstrates that capitalism has invaded all aspects of everyday life and this stance is similar to that of Lefebvre who states, "The commodity, the market, money, with their implacable logic, seize everyday life. The extension of capitalism goes all the way to the slightest details of ordinary life"; "A revolution cannot just change the political personnel or institutions; it must change *la vie quotidienne*,

which has already been literally colonized by capitalism" ("Towards" 79, 80). The fragments of everyday life represented in *BART* gives a clear idea about the American society under the manipulation of the invisible system of capitalism (Epstein, "There" 764) as can be seen in the inequality in the social system, class difference, etc.

Silliman maintains that realism or the prevailing literary mode of capitalism urges readers to see no significance in words themselves, but in the meanings behind them. Accordingly, readers ignore the signifier and focus on the signified. Thus, they ignore the actual units of production in writing or the part that indicates the labor into the process of writing (Huntsperger 110). As a result, they separate the writer from his/her own labor and consequently he/she falls into the trap of commodity fetishism.

For Silliman, the production model that determines the human life directly affects the language structures and language arts leading to the rise of capitalism and the phenomena called the commodity fetish ("Disappearance" 122). Production of material life determines the social, political and intellectual aspects of that life. Man's consciousness does not condition his/her being, but rather the opposite; man's social being is what dictates his/her consciousness. "The objects of consciousness are reduced to commodities and become the fetish. The commodity fetish in language becomes one of description, for the referential" (126).

Silliman believes that when language goes through the process of capitalism, the tangibility of the word is changed giving more descriptive and narrative structure and leading to the emergence of "realism," or the "optical illusion of reality in capitalist thought" (*New Sentence* 10). Such development under capitalism changes the reference in a language into referentiality (10) or alienation from user and use-function.

Silliman contradicts the Marxists who propose that the "context determines the actual, real-life consumption of the literary product and without which communication of a message (formal, substantive, ideological) cannot occur" ("The New Sentence"). This stance denies the notion that the poet must communicate a message, whereas he/she must communicate a formal message through which the substantive and ideological are expressed.

Silliman highlights that the transparency of language in ordinary communication is part of "a greater transformation which has occurred over the past several centuries: the subjection of writing (and, through writing, language) to the social dynamics of capitalism" (*New Sentence* 8). He maintains that when the social dynamics of capitalism dominate language, "words not only find themselves attached to commodities, they become commodities and, as such, take on the 'mystical' and 'mysterious character'" (8). This also leads to making words become independent, active objects in a world of similar entities. Since, according to Silliman, "the words are never our own," they become "our own usages of a determinate coding passed down to us like all other products of civilization" ("If by Writing" 167). As a result, man loses his social context because words become incapable of binding him into the human community. Hence, the society loses its "ability to define itself through language" and then loses its "identity, value and place in the world" (Woznicki). Thus, it has become clear that capitalism commodifies words and makes language lose its identity and value and become mysterious and detached from people. Consequently, poetry resists this commodification or capitalist transformation.

Marx's idea of objects "stamped" with value and turned into hieroglyphics to be read dedicates Silliman's understanding of language. He elaborates on Marx's anticipation of language through his production of language that becomes a commodity stamped, valued, and fetishized. He asserts that the "social basis of reality was transformed … where previously the manufactured objects of the world submitted themselves to the fetishizing and mutational laws of

identity and exchange solely through an economic process" (*New Sentence* 48).

Silliman sees poetry as different from other forms of work, "Poems both are and are not commodities.... Any commodity is necessarily an object and has a physical existence.... But not all objects are commodities. …only those which are made for exchange (and specifically exchange for money) become commodities" (20). Therefore, poetry is not work that can be exchanged for money and thus it is not subject to the capitalist system until it is printed in a book that is exchanged for money. *BART* was written in 1976 and published in 1982 in a flimsy paperback that did not make money for anyone.

It has become clearer that, according to Silliman, conventional realism is an illusion of reality in capitalist thought since the experience of the real is discontinuous and the world is full of finite events. *BART* represents the real while ignoring plot structure and focusing on the new sentence and procedural constraint. Labor is praised as an occurrence not a regulated, commodified action. *BART's* language urges readers to focus on the signifier, not the signified so as not to fall in the trap of commodity fetishism.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this paper explained the Everyday LifeTheory and practices based on the studies of Michael Sheringham, Ben Highmore, Guy Debord and the Situationists, and Henri Lefebvre. It became clear that *la vie quotidienne* resists form and categorization and requires various forms of representation and discourse to reflect its continuum. Attending to everyday life helps unravel the mysterious and manage the unmanageable, the unfamiliar and the unknowable. Everyday life is full of repetition and recurrences which indicate the interrelationship of its aspects.

It also became obvious that urban geography which saturates all forms of mass culture is a significant aspect of the everyday life theory. One of its important techniques is the *dérive* that leads to a revolution with its observant aimlessness that reveals the hidden secrets of the city focusing on the textual and visual fragments. Another aspect of everyday life is commodity fetish given that capitalism invaded everyday life and commodified its social and political aspects, stamping them with value, even language. Hence, language poets rejected capitalism and commodity fetishism.

The second part of the paper discussed Ron Silliman's *BART on Bart* (1982) and its probing of the quotidian. Silliman recorded the minutiae of an ordinary day and urban daily life in San Francisco through the spontaneous writing technique. His structure was based on accumulation, repetition, juxtaposition and extreme length. Silliman used the Situationists' strategy and the psychogeographical effect to explore the urban space under capitalism. He recorded everyday life as a process of becoming in real time and took the reader away from the city described in the tourist guidebooks.

Finally, the paper proved that Silliman rejected conventional realism and questioned its ability to render everyday life. He used the new sentence and procedural constraint to express the real. He negated the idea that capitalism dominated *la vie quotidienne* and criticized the capitalist consumerist culture. He was against conventional realism that urged readers to focus on the signified rather than the signifier leading both the writer and the reader to fall victims to commodity fetishism and deprived of the ability to move forward in an artificially constructed reality. It is concluded that words cannot become commodities because man would thus lose connection with the human community and hence the society would lose its ability to define itself through language, thus losing its identity, value and place.

In conclusion, it became clear that *BART on Bart*(1982) negates conventional realism and commodity fetishism as

every sentence acts as a unit of meaning that challenges the capitalistic approach of commodification.

REFERENCES

1. *Andrews, Bruce. "Text and Context."The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book, edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein, Southern Illinois UP, 1984, pp. 31-38.*
2. *Andrews, Bruce and Charles Bernstein."Repossessing the Word."The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book, edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein, Southern Illinois UP, 1984, pp. i-x.*
3. *Benjamin, Walter. The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, translated by J. A. Underwood, Penguin,2008<;https://www.amazon.co.uk/Mechanical-Reproduction-Penguin-Great-Ideas/dp/0141036192#reader_0141036192>;.Accessed: 30/3/2018.*
4. *Bernstein, Charles. "Stray Straws and Straw Men."The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book, edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein, Southern Illinois UP, 1984, pp. 39-45.*
5. *---. A Poetics. Cambridge: Harvard, 1992.*
6. *Brito, Manuel. "Two Anthologies Institutionalizing Innovative American Poetry: Ron Silliman's In the American Tree and Douglas Messerli's 'Language' Poetries."Revista De Filologia, Universidad de La Laguna, vol.24, 2006, pp. 47-56.*
7. *Chakroborty, Suman. "Meaning, Unmeaning & the Poetics of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E." IRWLE, vol. 4, no.I, 2008.*
8. *<worldlitonline.net/art3.pdf>, Accessed: 13/7/2018.*
9. *Debord, Guy. "Theory of the Dérive."Situationist International Anthology, edited by Ken Knabb, Bureau of Public*
10. *Secrets, 1995, pp. 62-66.*
11. *Epstein, Andrew. "'There Is No Content Here, Only Dailiness': Poetry as Critique of Everyday Life in Ron Silliman's Ketjak."Contemporary Literature, vol. 51, no 4, 2010, pp. 736-776. <lt;https://doi.org/10.1353/cli.2011.0008>;. Accessed: 30/3/2018.*
12. *---. "'Pay More Attention': Silliman's 'BART' and Contemporary 'Everyday Life Projects'." Jacket, vol. 39, 2010.*
13. *<http://jacketmagazine.com/39/silliman-epstein-bart.shtml>;. Accessed: 20/4/2018.*
14. *Featherstone, Mike. Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity, Sage, 1995.*
15. *Highmore, Ben. Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction, Routledge, 2002.*
16. *Huntsperger, David W. "'A new content': Procedural Form and Concrete Reality in Ron Silliman's Tjanting." Procedural Form in Postmodern American Poetry: Berrigan, Antin, Silliman, and Hejinian, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2010, pp. 97-130.*
17. *Kaufmann, Vincent. Guy Debord: Revolution in the Service of Poetry, U of Minnesota P, 2006.*

18. *Lazer, Hank."Education, Equality, and Ethnography in Ron Silliman's The Alphabet." Ron Silliman and the Alphabet, by Thomas A. Vogler. Quarry West, vol. 34, 1998, pp. 68-97.*
19. *Lefebvre, Henri. Everyday Life in the Modern World, translated by SachaRabinovitch, Harper Torchbooks, 1971.*
20. *---. "Towards a Leftist Cultural Politics."Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Gross berg, U of Illinois P, 1988, pp. 75-88.*
21. *---. Critique of Everyday Life, Vol. 1, translated by John Moore, Verso, 1991.*
22. *---.Writings on Cities, translated and edited by EleonoreKofman and Elizabeth Lebas, Blackwell, 1996.*
23. *Marx, Karl. Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol.1, edited by Frederick Engels, translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, Progress Publishers, 2015.*
24. *McDonough, Tom, ed. Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002.*
25. *Perelman, Bob. "Parataxis and Narrative: The New Sentence in Theory and Practice." American Literature, vol. 65, no. 2, 1993, pp. 313-324.*
26. *---. The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History, Princeton UP, 1996.*
27. *Prevallet, Kristin. "Rev. of Ron Silliman's The Age of Huts (Compleat)." Chicago Review, vol. 2, 2015, pp. 332-*
28. *334. < http://chicagoreview.org/wp- content/uploads/2015/02/prevallet-review-for-web.pdf>;. Accessed:*
29. *17/4/2018.*
30. *Sheringham, Michael. Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present, Oxford UP, 2006.*
31. *Silliman, Ron. "Disappearance of the Word, Appearance of the World." The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book, Edited*
32. *by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein, Southern Illinois University, 1984, pp. 121-132.*
33. *---. "If by 'Writing' We Mean Literature." The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book, edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein, Southern Illinois University, 1984, p. 167.*
34. *---. "Interview with Tom Beckett."Ron Silliman Issue.The Difficulties, vol. 2, no. 2, 1985, pp. 34-46.*
35. *---. The New Sentence, Roof Books, 1987.*
36. *---. "An Email Interview with Ron Silliman."Conducted by Thomas C. Marshall and Thomas Vogler. Quarry West, vol. 34, 1998, pp. 10-44.*
37. *---. The Age of Huts (Compleat), U of California P, 2007.*
38. *"The New Sentence."<http://noggs.typepad.com/tre/the-new-sentence.html>. Accessed: 13/4/2018.*
39. *Ward, Geoffrey. "Language Poetry and the American Avant-garde."British Association for American Studies (BAAS), Pamphlet no. 25, 1993.<lt;https://writing.upenn.edu/library/Ward-Geoffrey_Language- Poetry.html>;. Accessed: 16/3/2018.*

40. *Watkin, William. "'Systematic Rule-Governed Violations of Convention': The Poetics of Procedural Constraint in*

41. *Ron Silliman's 'BART' and 'The Chinese Notebook'." Contemporary Literature, vol. 48, no. 4, 2007, pp. 499-529. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27563768>.Accessed: 30/03/2018.*

42. *Wilson, Rob. "Reading Ron Silliman's BART on Bart: Serial Syntax and Paradise." American Poetry, vol. 5, no.2,*

43. *1988, pp. 33-41.*

44. *Woznicki, John R. "Poetry of Play, Poetry of Purpose: The Continuity of American Language Poetry."<lt;http://www.moriapoetry.com/woznicki.htm>;. Accessed: 10/4/2018.*

45. *Yu, Timothy. Race and the Avant-garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry since 1965, Stanford UP, 2009.*