

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Oxford
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 28 Modern Languages and Linguistics
<b>Title of case study:</b> Valuing Everyday Life
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Professor Michael Sheringham's recent work has explored how thoughtful attention to everyday life can enhance individual and collective experience. One essential strand is city life; another is seeing our individual stories as intertwined with the multiple histories that have shaped our daily environment, and hence seeing memory as an archive. Sheringham's writings, broadcasts and public appearances have brought together creative writers, artists, film-makers, philosophers and social theorists, across the Humanities, Social Sciences, and visual and performing arts. This has fostered a more coherent and integrated debate by professionals and practitioners in these areas, and has shown how academic work in the fields of the everyday, the city and the archive can help individuals look more closely at their own experience, and enrich the quality of their lives.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Michael Sheringham has been Marshal Foch Professor of French Literature at Oxford since 2004 and is a Fellow of the British Academy. His recent explorations of everyday life and urban experience grew out of his earlier work on the genre of autobiography, which connects literature and ordinary experience. The engagement with everyday life brings autobiography into the wider field of 'life-writing', linked with creative writing and with narratives focused on individual experience and memory, and also introduces a wider range of artistic practices. His co-edited collection <i>The Art of the Project</i> [see §3.1], investigated how artists in various media have set up quasi-scientific (often parodic) experimental projects in the sphere of daily practices, to show that art can convey particular forms of knowledge.</p> <p>Everyday life has often been condescendingly dismissed as banal routine; Sheringham's work explores its value and richness. While previous research on everyday life arose within discrete disciplines such as social anthropology, architecture and planning, philosophy, art, or literature, Sheringham's originality lies initially in his comparative and synthetic approach. His book <i>Everyday Life</i> [§3.2] maps out a whole new disciplinary field. Sheringham analyses a wide range of twentieth-century literary and reflective writing, and distils an account of everyday life as <u>structured</u> (one's 'day' has a shape), <u>historical</u> (one's day repeats the routine of many previous days and thus sustains one's identity through memory), and <u>interpersonal</u> (one is always dealing with others, at home, at work, and even in the street, which is a place of performance and self-display).</p> <p>Sheringham's research also connects everyday life with 'archive studies' [§3.3-4]. In 2009-10 he held a Leverhulme Fellowship for a project on 'Archival Identities' that linked the above-mentioned themes with the widespread contemporary fascination with archives – the material remains of the past – and with the intellectual and ethical questions they raise. He also asks why archives, archivists, archival projects and archival journeys feature so prominently in contemporary European fiction and life-writing philosophy and theory; historiography; and the visual arts. His research foregrounds urban life, which poses the challenge of maintaining communal life and values in a new setting. He has published a number of articles exploring the everyday, the city, and the archive focusing particularly on Paris [§3.5-7].</p> <p>Sheringham's work invites individuals to focus more closely on their own experience, to find value in its everyday fabric, and, especially, to value the everyday - and its reflections in city life and in the interaction of social and individual memory - as an essential ground of existence, instead of being depreciated or neglected in favour of more specialised and goal-directed activities. He suggests how educators, practitioners and curators can be encouraged to make everyday experience central to their activities.</p> <p>The research underpinning this case study was carried out principally in the context of Sheringham's chair at Oxford, with periods at UC Berkeley (in 2006), where, as Pajus Distinguished Visiting Professor in French, Sheringham co-organised a conference on poetry and the everyday and taught a seminar on 'The Everyday and the Archive'. At the Camargo Foundation in Cassis, France (2010), where a three-month fellowship enabled him to work with composers, visual artists, and creative writers.</p>

### 3. References to the research

Sheringham's recent work has been supported by a Leverhulme Trust Research Fellowship ('Archival identities' £44k 1/10/09-30/09/10).

- [1] J. Gratton and M. Sheringham (eds) *The Art of the Project: Projects and Experiments in Modern French Culture*, Oxford: Berghahn, 2005. Available on request.

'This volume is a rich inventory and review of critical and creative processes in contemporary French culture. [...] The reader discovers a gamut of creators and creations that turn not on great or monumental themes but on engagement in ephemeral and vital areas of everyday life', Tom Conley, *French Studies*, vol. 61, 1, 2007, 125-6.

- [2] M. Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*, Oxford University Press, 2006, 440 pp. Paperback edition June 2009. Available on request.

Reviews of *Everyday Life*, starting with a full page in the *Times Literary Supplement*, were plentiful and uniformly good. They ranged across peer-reviewed Humanities journals in Modern Languages, English, and Social Science journals (e.g. *Space and Culture*), in the UK, US and France, and included reviews, e.g.: 'immensely rich, diverse, and scholarly discussion, the first comprehensive investigation of a concept and practice central to contemporary French culture', Elza Adamowicz, *Modern Language Review*, 102 (2007), 524-6, and substantial review articles, e.g.: Michael Gardiner, *Space and Culture*, 12 (2009), 383-8: 'Simply put, this is the most well-researched and wide-ranging book on everyday life now available in English'.

- [3] M. Sheringham, 'Michel Foucault, Pierre Rivière and the Archival Imaginary', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 'Archive' double issue, 8.2-3, 2011, 235-57. In REF2

- [4] M. Sheringham, 'La figure de l'archive dans le récit autobiographique contemporain', in Dominique Viart (ed.), *Les mutations esthétiques du roman français contemporain, Lendemains*, [Tübingen: Stauffenberg] vol 27, no. 107/108 (2002), pp. 25-41. Shorter English version: 'Memory and the Archive in Contemporary Life-Writing', *French Studies*, 59 (2005), 47-53. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/fs/kni068>

- [5] M. Sheringham, 'Archiving' in Matthew Beaumont and Gregory Hart (eds). *Restless Cities*, London: Verso, 2010, pp. 1-17. Available on request.

A review by P.D. Smith in *The Guardian*, 26 June 2010, underlined how the article bridges academic research and a broader appeal to common experience: 'To tap into the history of a street or a building is to experience an extra dimension, as Michael Sheringham's rich and allusive essay on the city as archive makes clear ...'

- [6] M. Sheringham, 'Paris - City of Names: Toponymic Trajectories and Mutable Identities', in Katia Pizzi and Godela Weiss-Sussex (eds), *The Cultural Identity of European Cities* (London, New York, Berne: Peter Lang), pp. 165-84. Available on ProQuest ebrary via institutional account.

- [7] M. Sheringham, 'Paris: City of Disappearances' in Anna-Louise Milne (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of Paris*, 2013. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511793363>

### 4. Details of the impact

Beyond its academic dissemination and recognition, Sheringham's work on the city, the everyday and the archive has fostered creative attention to the collective and individual dimensions of urban experience, cultural memory, and everyday life through events and interventions. These have mediated and made accessible the ideas of thinkers, creative writers and artists whose work focuses in different ways on the everyday world. He has articulated research findings in articles, reviews and lectures that have wide non-academic circulation, in interviews in journals for the wider public, in talks to professional bodies, in gallery talks, and in radio broadcasts; been pitched accessibly, always aiming to make often complex ideas comprehensible to the non-specialist. He has involved French as well as English contexts, so as to encourage interchange between non-specialist audiences in different language communities, creating opportunities for his work to appear in (primarily French) translation. Improved public awareness and more informed debate have been brought about in various contexts.

**Increasing Public Understanding of the concept of everyday life:** After *Everyday Life* [see §3.2] appeared, Sheringham was invited to deliver four lectures: *Poétique du quotidien: la rue, la journée, l'archive* (March 2007) at the Collège de France. Whilst the lectures occurred out with the

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REF impact period the lectures were later (2008) broadcast on the national radio station France Culture; podcasts of three of the lectures were made available on its website for a period afterwards <sup>[i]</sup>. *Everyday Life* sold well and appeared in paperback in June 2009. This has meant that the book is much more accessible to public audiences, furthering public understanding of the concepts explored by the author. A French edition, translated by Maryline Heck and Jeanne-Marie Hostiou, came out with Presses Universitaires de France in Spring 2013. The French edition *Traversées du quotidien: des surréalistes aux postmodernes* was part of the book series 'Lignes d'Art', aimed 'not only at scholars and specialists, but all those interested in the on-going evolution of artistic activity' <sup>[ii]</sup>. Advance publicity for the translation included two substantial interviews, and a long review article in leading French journals for the general public: *Esprit*, August 2010; *Europe*, January 2012; *Critique*, December 2008. Following publication, Sheringham was interviewed in *Next*, the monthly magazine of the newspaper *Libération* (6 April 2013), in the weeklies, *Marianne* (7 June) and *Les Inrockuptibles* (22 May), and on French Radio (27 May).

In March 2009 Sheringham gave a lecture entitled 'Disappearing Acts: obscure lives and precarious identities in twentieth-century literature' in the Kent University Open Lecture Series (aimed at the University's 'town audience' and often involving politicians and other prominent figure as well as academics invited to relay their work to a general audience). The podcast is still available on the university website <sup>[iii]</sup>. In June 2010 he gave the Inaugural Lecture, 'City of Disappearances: Losing Oneself in the Modern and Post-Modern Metropolis', at University College London's 'City Centre' which reaches out to a wide public by co-ordinating 'a range of different research projects on aspects of the cultural and literary history of the metropolis from the Middle Ages to the present' <sup>[iv]</sup>. In April 2009 Sheringham organised a study day on 'Paris and Visual Arts' for Oxford's Department for Continuing Education, and in February 2013 he gave a lecture on City poetry entitled 'Inspired by Paris', at a day school in the same context (average attendance 80 people).

Round Tables and Workshops at cultural centres and literary and art festivals, addressed to non-academic audiences, include events at the French Institute in South Kensington (June 2009); the first EVENTO Arts Biennale in Bordeaux (a major arts festival across the city, October 2009) <sup>[v]</sup>; the annual literary festival, *Rencontres de Chaminadour* held at Guéret (Creuse) in September 2009, where Sheringham was also interviewed (see France Culture website <sup>[vi]</sup>) for a radio programme 'Carnet Nomade' based on the event; and the annual literary festival *Enjeux de la littérature contemporaine*, held at the Petit-Palais in Paris (January 2011). <sup>[vii]</sup>

**Applying the concept to the work of professional bodies, practitioners and creators:**

Sheringham's work on the aesthetics of experimental, and often archive-based, everyday projects led in February 2009 to an open lecture at the Architectural Association in London, and a follow-up seminar to an audience of c. 100. Imparting insights from his research but also discovering new facets Sheringham and his audiences engaged in a mutually enriching dialogue bearing on such issues as the place of memorialization in the city and different ways in which individuals engage creatively with urban space. A further invitation to lecture there, which had to be declined for health reasons, testifies to Sheringham's reputation for 'accessibility and transparency' in addressing varied audiences <sup>[1]</sup>. Sheringham was approached more recently by a tutor at the Architectural Association to present his work as part of one of their teaching units: 'In 2008/09 when I was a student in the Histories and Theories MA programme directed by Marina Lathouri you had given a seminar talk to our class, followed by a lecture at the school. The talk and your writings have been of great influence to my research to date. I have been doing quite a bit of research over the last 4-5 years on Georges Perec and the Oulipo group and the role that constraints play in the design process, both literary and architecturally. This research is the basis of the new Intermediate unit that I am launching at the AA this year. I am starting to put together a seminar series for the unit and wanted to reach out to you and see if you would have interest in giving a seminar talk [...] It would be great to have you down to London as I know your expertise would be very beneficial to the students.' <sup>[2]</sup>

As one of twelve fellows at the Camargo Foundation at Cassis (France) in September-December 2010, Sheringham engaged in dialogue with writers, composers and visual artists as well as historians and a sociologist. By bringing American and British contributors together in a French context this fellowship generated new ways of thinking across national boundaries. The everyday

and the archive proved to be key concepts in rich exchanges in which the local audience, made up of teachers, local government officials and other interested parties collaborated enthusiastically, responding to the benefits of cross-fertilisation between disciplinary perspectives and between reflective and creative outlooks and practices.<sup>[3]</sup>

**Contributions to Museums and Art Galleries:** In March 2010, in the contemporary art space, Casino Luxembourg, Forum d'Art Contemporain, in Luxembourg, Sheringham contributed to a public lecture series in the context of an exhibition called 'Everyday(s)'<sup>[viii]</sup>. By providing an opportunity to link the exhibited artworks with a range of ideas on everyday life, this event prompted the audience to consider the value of creative reflection on everyday experience at individual and collective levels. The Whitechapel Gallery, London, with MIT Press, has twice reprinted sections of *Everyday Life* in the Documents of Contemporary Art series (print run 4200). The series provides access to a plurality of voices and perspectives on a specific subject or body of writing that has been of key influence to contemporary art internationally in a format accessible for the general art-going public.<sup>[ix]</sup> The commissioning editor said of the extract of Sheringham's work used in Johnstone's anthology: '[...]there is no other text that sets out the connection, as you do so brilliantly, between the concerns of figures such as Lefebvre and the characteristics of the project, as explored in the works of artists such as Sophie Calle, who is also included in this collection. Particularly due to the descriptive examples, this is an ideal text for many of the intended readers, who will be artists and art students, not all of whom will be familiar with French theory.'<sup>[4]</sup>

By engaging with these different types of interlocutor and beneficiary Sheringham has brought his research on the everyday, the city and the archive to bear on the concrete existences of his audiences, helping them to think about neglected or depreciated facets of their everyday lives. This refocusing of attention changes in a range of ways the individual's awareness of the balance between participation in solitary and collective experience. It does so by encouraging recognition of the creative potential harboured by the everyday, for instance in the potential of city experience to energise and diversify experience creatively, and to make us aware of the extensive 'archives' of collective memory manifested in the institutions, monuments and trajectories that make up the cityscape many of us inhabit.<sup>[5]</sup>

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

### Testimonial evidence:

- [1] Invitation letter (held on file) from Architectural Association, Bedford Square.
- [2] Letter (held on file) from Unit Tutor, Architectural Association.
- [3] Testimonial available from the Former Director of the Camargo Foundation
- [4] Email from Freelance commissioning editor, Documents of Contemporary Art Series
- [5] Testimonial available from Professor of Comparative Literature, UCL and Princeton

### Other sources:

- [i] Archived pages for podcasts of three lectures: <http://www.franceculture.fr/emission-poetique-du-quotidien-la-rue-la-journee-l-archive-13-2007-07-16.html>
- [ii] Information about the Lignes d'art series [http://www.puf.com/Collections/Lignes\\_d'art](http://www.puf.com/Collections/Lignes_d'art)
- [iii] Disappearing Acts lecture information and podcast [http://www.kent.ac.uk/openlectures/audio/library/sheringham\\_13-3-2009.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/openlectures/audio/library/sheringham_13-3-2009.html)
- [iv] City of Disappearances event information <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/citycentre/Events/inaugural>
- [v] EVENTO Arts Biennale programme, see pages 1 and 17 [http://www.bordeaux.fr/images/ebx/fr/groupePiecesJointes/1486/47/pieceJointeSpec/99062/file/evento\\_dp\\_sept09\\_UK.pdf](http://www.bordeaux.fr/images/ebx/fr/groupePiecesJointes/1486/47/pieceJointeSpec/99062/file/evento_dp_sept09_UK.pdf)
- [vi] Les rencontres de Chaminadour information and podcast link to Carnet Nomade programme <http://www.franceculture.fr/emission-les-rencontres-de-chaminadour-2009-10-11.html>
- [vii] Enjeux IV – "Littérature en vérité" 28-30 January 2011 <http://www.m-e-l.fr/en,208>
- [viii] Casino Luxembourg event <http://www.casino-luxembourg.lu/en/Agenda/Les-Mardis-de-l-Art-Le-quotidien-et-l-archive-contraintes-et-projets>
- [ix] *The Everyday*, ed. Stephen Johnstone, 2009 and *Memory*, ed. Ian Farr, 2012. Both in Documents of Contemporary Art series published by Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press. [http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/shop/product/category\\_id/31/product\\_id/129](http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/shop/product/category_id/31/product_id/129) [http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/shop/product/category\\_id/31/product\\_id/1267](http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/shop/product/category_id/31/product_id/1267).