

Oxford-UdK Berlin Partnership in Arts and Humanities

**Prof. Dr. Dirk Hohnsträter (UdK Berlin / ITPK) &
Prof. Patrick McGuinness (University of Oxford / St Anne's College)**

Forms of Attention: Mapping the Everyday in Oxford and Berlin

April to October 2025

Project Report

From well-established geopolitical alliances, the local rail infrastructure to the reshaping of entire neighbourhoods, the certainties and routines on which we rely each day are constantly called into question. In the midst of far-reaching change, the ordinary isn't banal, it reflects broader trends, serves as a site for shared experience, and a starting point for action. We need the everyday, and yet we do not perceive and value it until it is endangered or proactively explored by artists, social scientists and thinkers all of whom de-automatise our perception of everyday life and thereby open up possibilities to reflect on it and imagine its future form. The project aimed at developing a language and a systematic framework that allows to better understand the loss of 'normalities' in an increasingly insecure world.

Approach and preliminary results

Our concrete work took an exploratory approach. Over the course of three multi-day field trips to Oxford (June and October 2025) and Berlin (October 2025), we observed how the two cities maintain their ordinary character amid extraordinary transformations and how their residents deal with the ever-increasing challenges of their daily lives. Alongside the immersive exploration of site-specific practices ("pratique des lieux"), we engaged in intensive

discussions on theoretical and literature/art-related aspects of the topic, e.g. by examining Yuriko Saito's writings on everyday aesthetics. Beyond this, we conducted topic-related research interviews with colleagues from various disciplines, including Holly Langstaff, Jenny Middleton, Bernhard Malkmus, and Violetta Splitter, thereby establishing valuable contacts for a potential follow-up to the project.

Our exploratory mapping of the seemingly mundane in two highly diverse cities identified three areas for comparative research:

- material culture and mundane economics such as market halls, hardware stores, and museums dedicated to the everyday
- public infrastructure in post-industrial, increasingly gentrified urban landscapes (e.g., parks, libraries, community centres)
- the significance of recurring practices in forming the fabric of everyday existence, as demonstrated, for example, by the phenomenon of the regular.

A key takeaway from our research was that certain social figures familiar from literature, like the flâneur, require proper contextualisation: There is no such thing as "the" everyday, as various everyday lives coexist in a city, often without ever coming into contact with one another.

Presentation and future outlook

The project was presented by Dirk Hohnsträter at the UdK Rundgang in July 2025 and by Patrick McGuinness at the digital Seedfunding Showcase UdK Berlin x TORCH Oxford in November 2025.

Furthermore, we intend to incorporate the results of our project into either a special issue of the journal CounterText or a standalone joint piece in the magazine. The editors have already expressed their interest.

We intend to continue our collaboration in the future, potentially through joint funding applications, such as a submission for an AHRC-DFG Research Grant.

During our time working together, further ideas for future collaboration also emerged. Comparing teaching practices at Udk and Oxford seems particularly promising, especially in the light of our unique career trajectories and the changes brought about by AI.

Showcase at the 2025 Rundgang

