

# Users and uses

Written response to the 'Methods of investigation' brief  
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When looking at an everyday space or place, whether it is as small as a bench or as large as a city, one would assume to grasp the essence of its use quite effortlessly. This might be due to the ordinary or domestic nature of these sites. When allowing deeper observations, however, several perspectives might appear and potentially question implicit assumptions or personal affiliations. Different methods of investigation could be used to reveal these otherwise-hidden patterns. This essay discusses my investigation of a specific site in relation to the investigative work of Georges Perec and Agnès Varda.

Initial inspiration that sparked my research was found in Georges Perec's book *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (Perec, 1974). In his book, Perec selected everyday locations as a subject of investigation. A description for his subjects, found in the book's foreword, details them as "spaces that are much closer to hand," or "that seems obvious to us," (Perec, 1974, p. 5) such as the corridors of the Métro or a public park. This approach led me to select, almost randomly, a small public square within my neighborhood, called the Burdett-Coutts Drinking Fountain, as the theme of my investigation. By selecting an ordinary, almost boring space as my research subject, I related my work with Perec's and took on his challenge of seeing through the initial perception of simplicity.

Following the first few days of investigation, I started noticing patterns of behaviors for three groups of people in the square: single visitors, groups, and children. After documenting the visitors' engagement with objects on the site, it was evident that each group uses the space in a different way. It allowed me to understand and visualize their unique perspectives and use of the square. In retrospect, this approach of behavioral observation relates to Agnès Varda's in her film *The Gleaners and I* (2000). Both Varda and I tried to see beyond our own perception of a site and to detect other users' using patterns. In the film Varda applies this observation on numerous examples, such as a supermarket, an apple orchard and a city market, where she detects and observes different uses and users of each site to understand it in a few perspectives.

Reflecting on my research, I can see the relation to both sources. First by selecting a subject inspired by Georges Perec's way of thinking, and second, by adopting a similar approach of observation to Agnès Varda's in her film. Both creators helped me gain tools to 'see' my selected site in different ways.

## Reference list:

Perec, G. (1974) *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. London: Penguin.  
*The Gleaners and I* (2000) [Film] Directed by Agnès Varda. France: Ciné-Tamaris.