



Unit 1

Methods of Investigating Written Response

PROMPT

Identify two readings from the course reading list that relate to your investigation, and then describe and expand on these connections through writing. To help you be specific, describe the connection to each reading in context of one of the following types of relationship: theme, form, process (Discuss each reading using a different type.)

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Location: The Amphitheatre at the British Library

THEME

This project explored how everyday actions shape the atmosphere of public space, focusing on the Amphitheatre in front of the British Library. The investigation drew on Georges Perec's essays 'The Street', 'The Neighbourhood', and 'The Town' in *Species of Spaces and Other Places* (1974, pp. 46–67), where he encourages readers to attend to 'what is most obvious, most common, most colourless' (Perec, 1974, p. 50). To immerse myself in observing the mundane, I began by sitting in various locations and taking notes. I noticed that my perception of the space changed depending on where I sat and the time of day, which led me to develop a more structured approach.

Following Perec's (1974, p. 51) idea of 'detecting a rhythm', I began hand-mapping activities at different times, recording how people sat, ate, talked, moved through the space, and how their moods were perceived. Perec's approach helped me recognise that these ordinary actions actively shaped the atmosphere of the space. To visualise this, I translated his literary method of observation into hand-mapping, allowing me to trace social patterns and gain a clearer understanding of how people collectively create a sense of place.



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PROCESS

My process aligns with Shannon Mattern's *Infrastructural Tourism* (2013), which discusses 'touring, collecting, and documenting' as forms of self-reflexive observation (Scott, as cited in Mattern, 2013) that reveal invisible systems. Similarly, my mapping practice became an embodied form of observation. Each drawn line captured both the site's social rhythm and my own perceptual experience, uncovering patterns of awareness that shape how people share public space.

From this fieldwork, I created three maps representing different times of day: morning, afternoon, and evening. Radiating lines showed each person's sitting duration and aura, while movement lines traced their paths through the space. This process, as Mattern (2013) states, 'making some process perceptible', led to three distinct rhythms emerging. Mornings were sparse, with fewer people sitting and most passing through quickly. Afternoons became lively and social as groups gathered. By evening, the atmosphere quietened, with individuals spending longer periods alone, often resting or lost in thought.

Building on Perec's (1974) focus on everyday rhythms and drawing on Lefebvre's Rhythmanalysis, as explored in Lyon (2019), I began to notice moments of tension where different rhythms intersected. These conflicts became visible through overlapping auras on the maps, illustrating how individual actions constantly reshape the collective atmosphere. This was affected not only by time and weather but also by how people paid attention to each other, or did not.

The final outcome was a participatory leaflet that reflects an idea discussed in Mattern's (2013) journal. According to Bauch and Scott (as cited in Mattern, 2013), 'the process of bringing people to the places we study ... teaches people through direct corporeal experience ... in a way that is impossible from reading alone.' The leaflet encourages others to sit, observe, and record their experiences. Its aim is to turn noticing into an exercise in emotional and spatial awareness. By combining Perec's (1974) attentiveness to everyday life with Mattern's (2013) embodied approach, the project repositions observation as both a method of understanding and a tool for fostering collective awareness in public space.

REFERENCES

- Perec, G. (1974) *Species of spaces and other places*. London: Penguin.
- Lyon, D. (2019) *What is rhythmanalysis?* London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Mattern, S. (2013) 'Infrastructural tourism', *Places Journal*, April. Available at: <https://placesjournal.org/article/infrastructural-tourism/?cn-reloaded=1> (Accessed: 12 October 2025).