

# UNIT 1

# METHODS OF INVESTIGATING

## SITE

The Planets  
at the British Library

## METHODS

Notetaking  
Photographing  
Diagraming

## Site

### The Piazza at The British Library

Since arriving in the UK, I visit the British Library almost every day to work, relax, and read. I love it so much that it has quickly become part of my daily routine. The Piazza is the public space in front of the library. It has cafés, installation art, and many seating areas.



British Library Piazza, London. Screenshot from Google Maps (Google, 2025)

**Site****To be more specific, I chose this circular seating space**

I usually come here to relax or eat when I feel tired (e.g. after reading course materials).  
I didn't even know the space had a name, which made me want to investigate it further.

The circular seating, with its small garden, creates a calm but lively place hidden from the city bustle.  
Even when it is crowded, I still feel I have my own space while also experiencing a sense of community,  
with the seating arranged so that people face one another (*alone, but not lonely*)

I took this photo because I imagined the rock saying I was 'dumb as a rock.'  
As it was above my head, I also felt its weight. (Taken on 21/09/2025, before the brief)

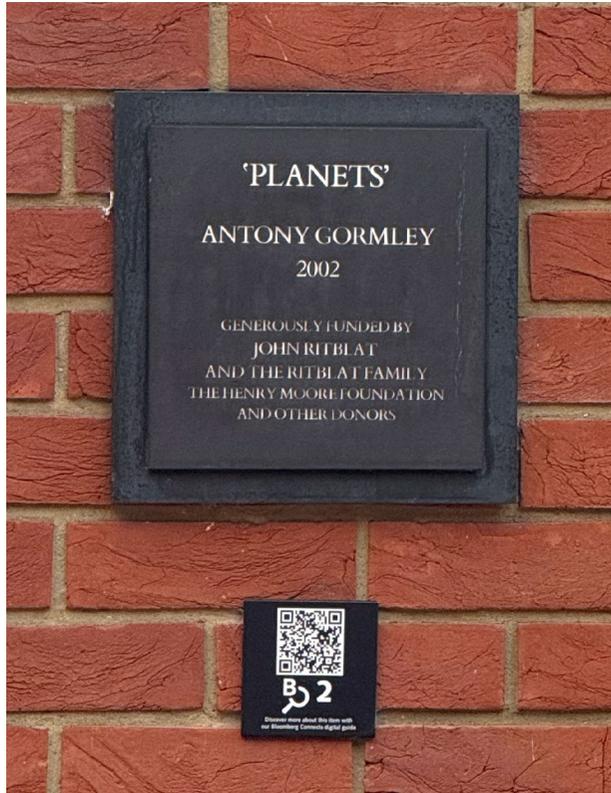


## Site

## The Initial Stage of Observation

23/09/25  
 ≈ 10.00

Before I began investigating, I wrote down a few preconceptions by observing the space and asking myself these questions:



### What's the name of this space?

The name of this space is "Planets" and I noticed the eight rocks around the centre. I thought they might represent a mini solar system.



### Why a circle?

A circle shows circulation, moving around a centre like a solar system. It can also make people feel connected, because the circular seating can be seen as a kind of social circle. Maybe it is also like an ecosystem, where different lives come together in harmony.



### What's it used for?

It seemed like a public space where people came to rest and socialise. Most of the users were visitors to the Library.

Middle Image: British Library Piazza, London. Screenshot from Google Maps (Google, 2025)

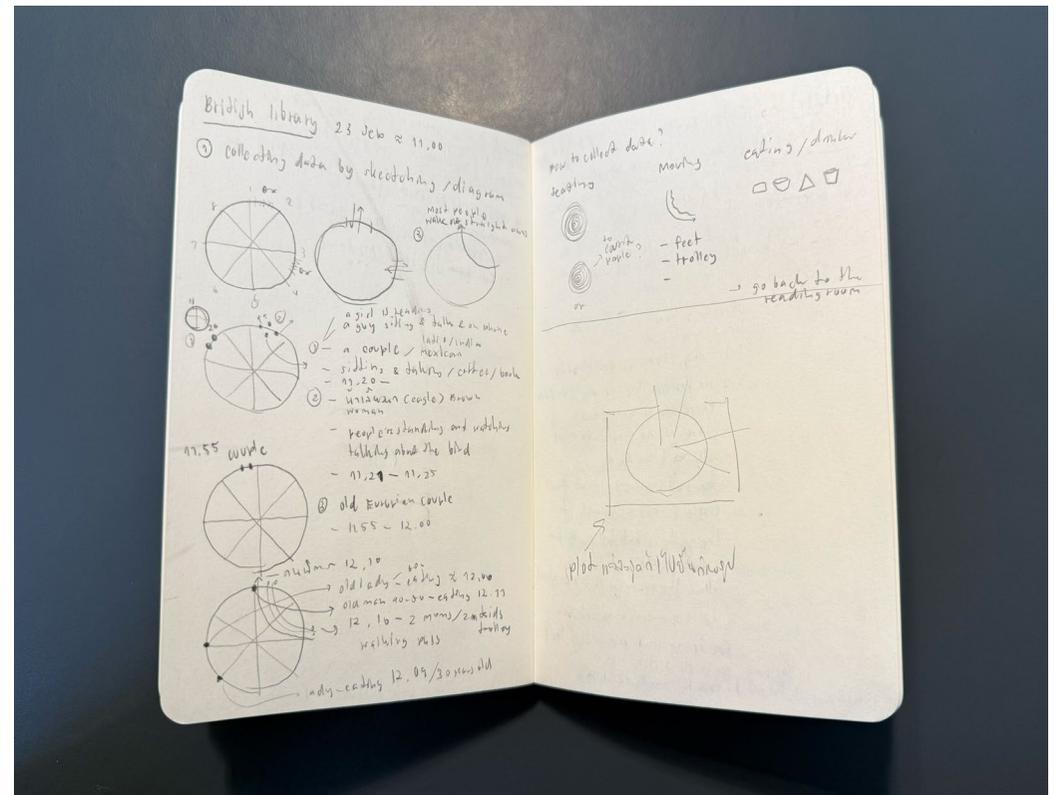
## Methods The First Attempt of Investigating

23/09/25  
 ≈ 11.00

I am interested in how the space is used and how people choose their seats, as this might show why it was designed in this way.

My first attempt was to sketch a diagram of the seating layout and note every activities I saw, such as who came, who sat, what they were doing, when they arrived and left, how old they looked, and why they might have chosen that seat.

I soon realised that trying to draw the diagram and take notes at the same time was too difficult. People moved too quickly, so I could not record everything, and my notes became messy. At that point, I decided to stop this attempt and think of a better way to observe and record.



## Selected Methods

- 1 NOTETAKING
- 2 PHOTOGRAPHING
- 3 MAPPING

# Method 1 Notetaking

23/09/25

-

25/09/25

After reading Species of Spaces and Other Places by Georges Perec, I realised that even ordinary places, like a street, can be described with many layers and details. He said you should "force yourself to write it down," so I began again with simple notetaking. For this method, sometimes I sat there for a long time, but on other days, just passing by, I wrote something down if I noticed anything new. On the next page, I will extract my notes by selecting the information I find most useful and interesting.

Note taking  
 Place: the planets, an installation art in front of the British Library  
 Time: 11:05  
 Date: 20, 23 sep 2025  
 Weather: 16°C, Mostly cloudy, a little bit of wind



**People**

- There were people when I arrived
- 7-6 a pair of friends → I can't observe them in time because I was too focused to describe everything / everything happens all at once → 1st departed
- 8-9 a pair of tourist couple with luggage / a lady waiting for apartment then within / EU mimics they departed → 2nd departed
- 1-8 a pair of friends → ladies are chatting → one dressed as propy style - brownish blazer and scotch skirt → one dressed as indie → 47, 15 boy walked along → 3rd departed

**After I sat**

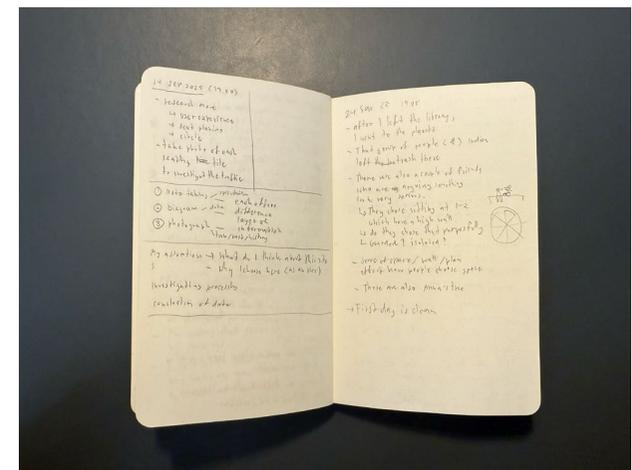
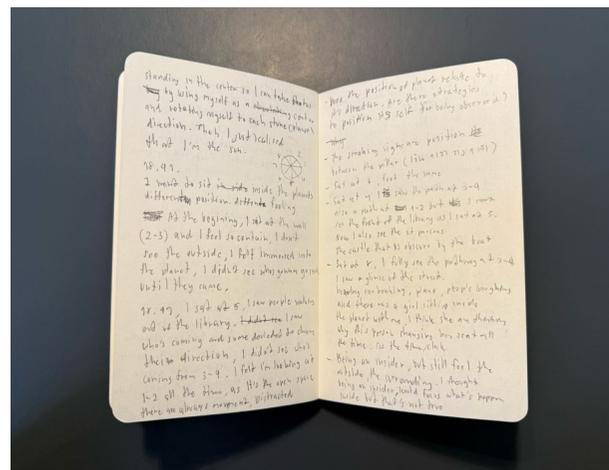
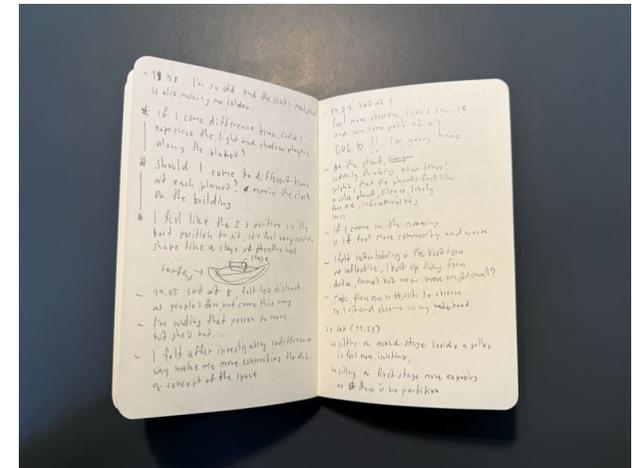
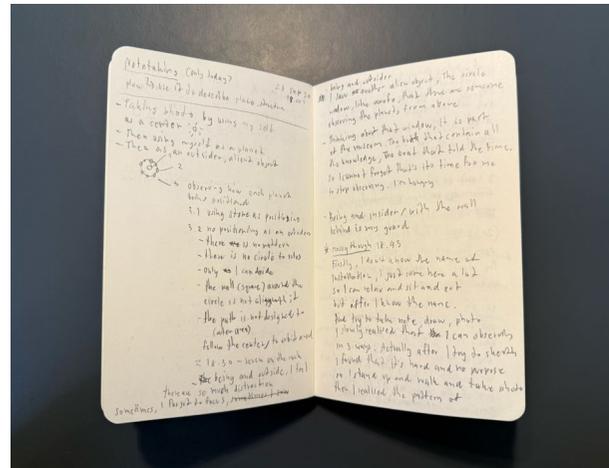
- 2-3 a Mongolian, Asian girl sitting alone, on her phone → 4th departed
- 2-3 a woman → 92, 91 → looking for food → landing in front of me → walking around, to each person
- 1 person was walking past fastly (man?) I can't observe detail
- 1 person
- couple of tourist, shopping ready 2 signs (EU ladies) 99, 24 walking past

describing place 97, 25

- 31% a circle seating area with 4 pillars which each of them has a stone on top of the pillar
- The stones, each of them is an organic form, partly natural because there are scattered lines flowing around the stone
- After recognizing the line, which I came here often and I had not noticed it before, the line on the stone is an engraved human form, the human form that is hugging the stone.
- Each of them positioned randomly on the pillar, some of the
- 97, 22, there are no one walking pass the circle, 97, 29 no one, felt cold, 99, 40 one walked pass
- The pillars: there are 4 pillars, 4 stones
- The layout: 1/4 circle form, seating areas along the edge, 2 exits, 1 wall, a drain hole in the middle
- 99, 53 a kid is scooting down the path way



- every lines in on the horizontal — surface things can sit on it is leading to the center and other are carry
- The seat - 2 stages of seating, except 1 wall
- Under the seat, there are 12 square holes with lights
- I saw a sign "piston"



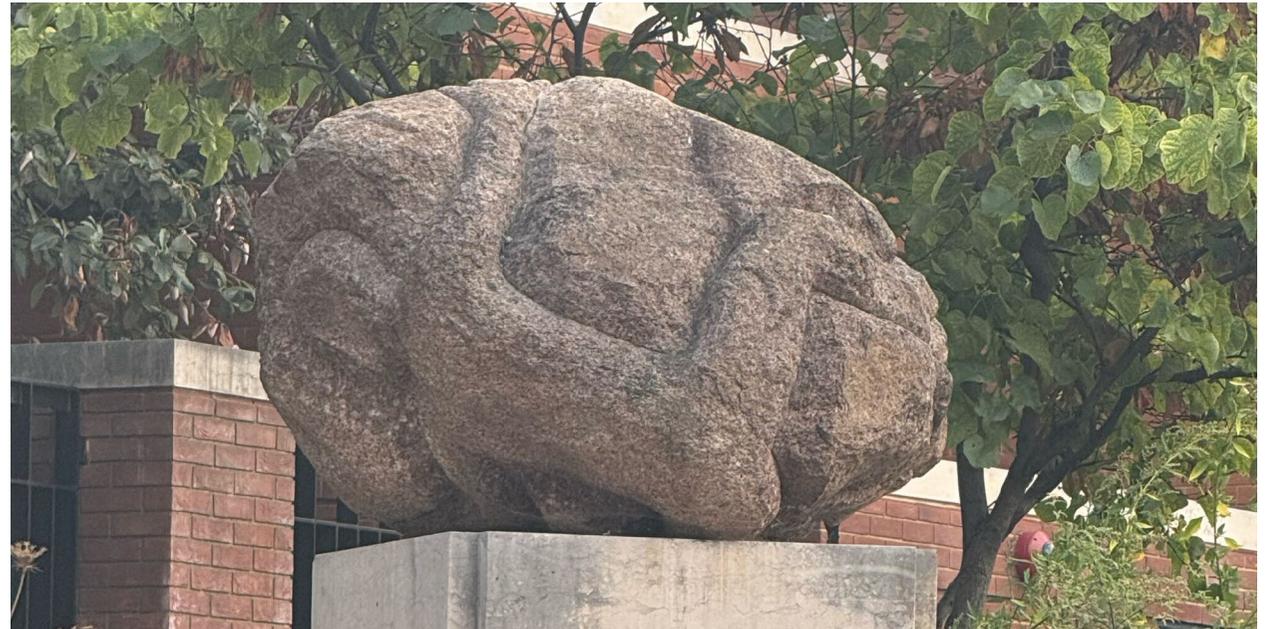
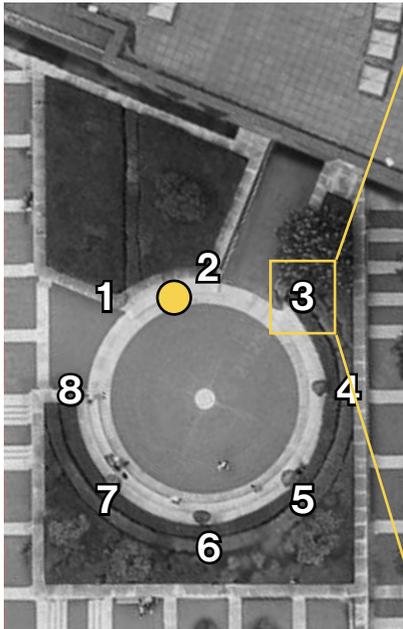
## Method 1 Samples of Notetaking

Date	Time	Weather	Approach	Observation	Reflection
Tue, 23/09/25	17.05 - 17.25	16 °C Mostly cloudy	People and activities	Many people came and went at different times, while others walked past the seating area. Besides library visitors, I also noticed <u>tourists</u> with <u>luggage</u> . Pigeons were patiently moving around, looking for food.	It was <u>hard to closely observe individuals</u> , since movements overlapped, some arrived, some left, and others passed by. Everything seemed to happen at once. <u>The pigeons were patient here</u> , unlike in St James's Park, where <u>a pegeon once tried to snatch my food</u> . <i>Why are pigeons here so well behaved?</i>
	17.25 - 18.00	Mostly cloudy	Space	It's a circular seating area with eight pillars. Each pillar has a unique dark brown rock on top, shaped differently from the others. The rocks look organic, but around each one are engraved lines.	At first, the overall form felt natural, as if made by nature, but the engraved lines looked man-made. Then I realised the lines form <u>a human figure hugging the rock</u> . <i>What might this be a metaphor for?</i>

 My notetaking spot

Engraved human figure hugging the rock

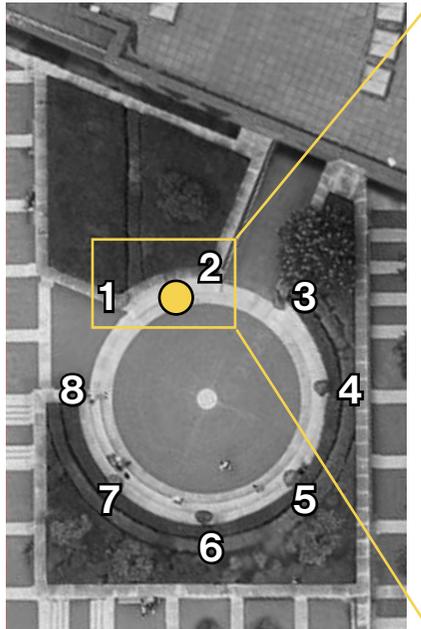
Closer Look at another rock



## Method 1 Samples of Notetaking

Date	Time	Weather	Approach	Observation	Reflection
Tue, 23/09/25	17.25 - 18.00	Mostly cloudy	Space	The seating area from numbers 3 to 8 has two steps, while <u>numbers 1 and 2 have only one step and a higher wall.</u>	I chose to sit here at first because <u>the wall made me feel more comfortable and guarded.</u> I also thought of this spot as a kind of stage, with <u>the wall as a backdrop</u> and the seating opposite like an audience  Was the design intended to be a stage or event space?

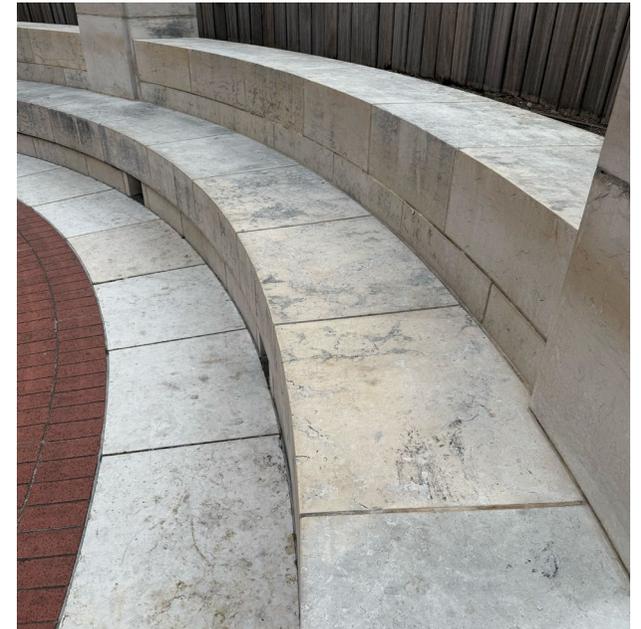
● My notetaking spot



High wall at 1-2



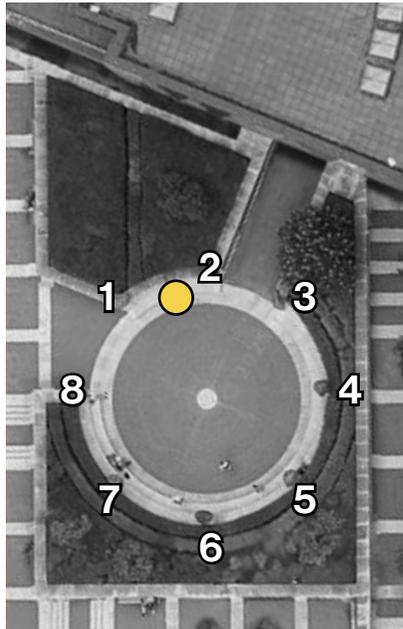
Two-step seating at 3-8



## Method 1 Samples of Notetaking

Date	Time	Weather	Approach	Observation	Reflection
Tue, 23/09/25	17.25 - 18.00	Mostly cloudy	Space	Thinking about the solar system, I realised that by sitting here I became another object in this system. I was orbiting within it, being <u>an insider</u> . The circular structure drew my focus to the space itself. Surrounded by the wall, I felt contained.	Maybe I can act as both an <u>outsider (observer)</u> and an <u>insider (user)</u> to see if I experience this place differently. This reflection led me to investigate further by photographing the space through this concept.

● My notetaking spot



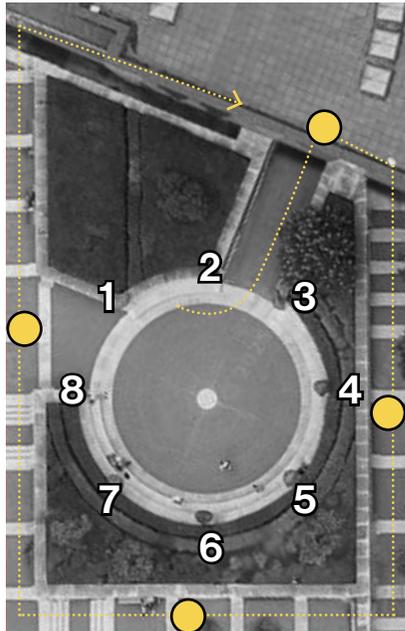
View from 1-2



## Method 1 Samples of Notetaking

Date	Time	Weather	Approach	Observation	Reflection
Tue, 23/09/25	18.30	Mostly cloudy	Space	<p>Being an <u>outsider</u>, I noticed there was no orbiting pattern, <u>no centre of gravity to draw me in</u>. The space looked more like a box guarding what was inside, and I was easily <u>distracted</u> by signs, buildings, noise, and movement of the city. <u>Without the wall, the sense of containment was lost.</u></p> <p>Is that a UFO? I spotted a circular window on the library building and saw a green light. Someone could be observing people from above.</p>	<p><u>Structure, shape, and form affect how people feel and behave in the space.</u> The circle creates focus and connection, while the box feels excluding from the outside.</p> <p>This space can also be exposed from above. I had thought it felt contained, without realising that from inside I could still be watched.</p>

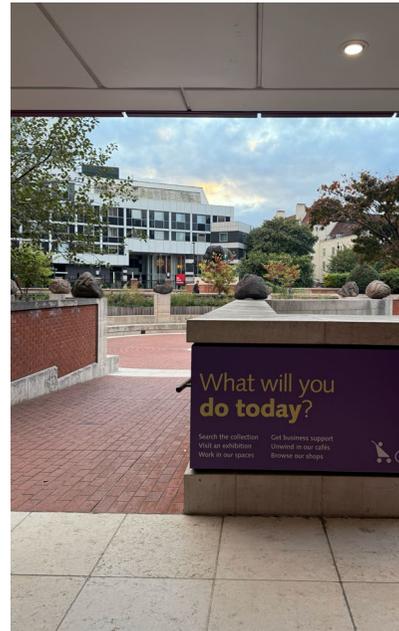
● My notetaking spot



View from outside at 6



View from outside at 3



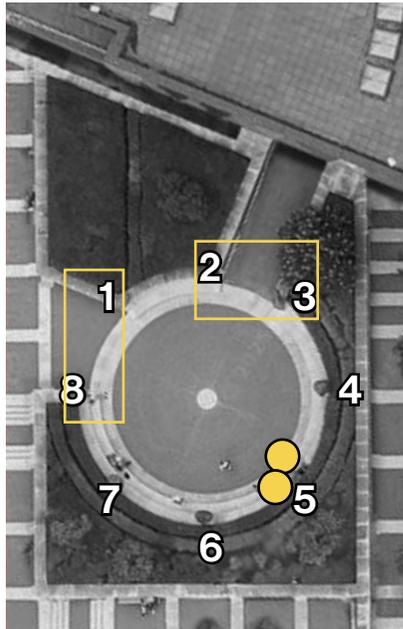
Is that a UFO?



## Method 1 Samples of Notetaking

Date	Time	Weather	Approach	Observation	Reflection
Tue, 23/09/25	18.47	Mostly cloudy. I forgot to track the temperature, but I felt very cold once the sun was gone.	Space	Being an insider again, I tried sitting at different spots. For example, when I sat at position 5, I could see people walking out of the library and noticed the slope at 2—3, which is another entrance to this space. This spot felt more open, but also more distracting.	Even as an insider, some spots felt too open and exposed to the outside, which affected my ability to focus. <u>This challenged what I once said about feeling contained.</u> Does visibility to the outside change how people choose where to sit?
			Space	When I sat on the second step near a pillar, I felt more contained, as <u>the pillar guarded me on one side.</u>	The pillar might also be a reason why people choose certain seats.

 My notetaking spot



View from 5 (left)



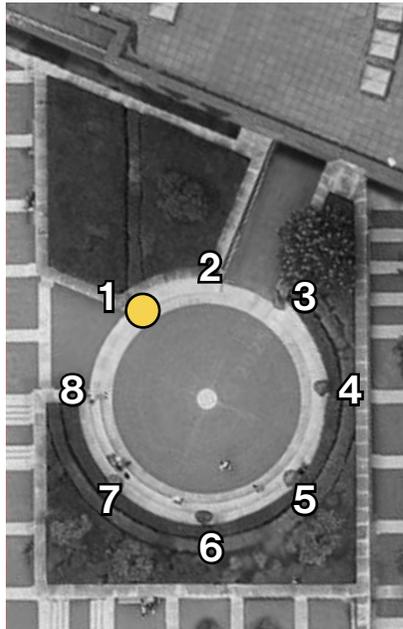
View from 5 (right)



## Method 1 Samples of Notetaking

Date	Time	Weather	Approach	Observation	Reflection
Tue, 23/09/25	19.07	Very Cold	Space	<p>Sitting at position 1, I felt more contained, as I could not see outside through either of the two entrances. As the sun went down, this “Planets” space felt even colder. <u>Silent and lonely</u>. There was no one here except me.</p> <p><u>The seat material made me feel even colder.</u></p>	<p>In the evening, the space felt quieter and emptier. I became more <u>emotional and reflective</u>, noticing my feelings more than during the day.</p> <p>I should observe at different times to test <u>how time and weather affect the way people interact with the space</u>, which I will test through mapping.</p>

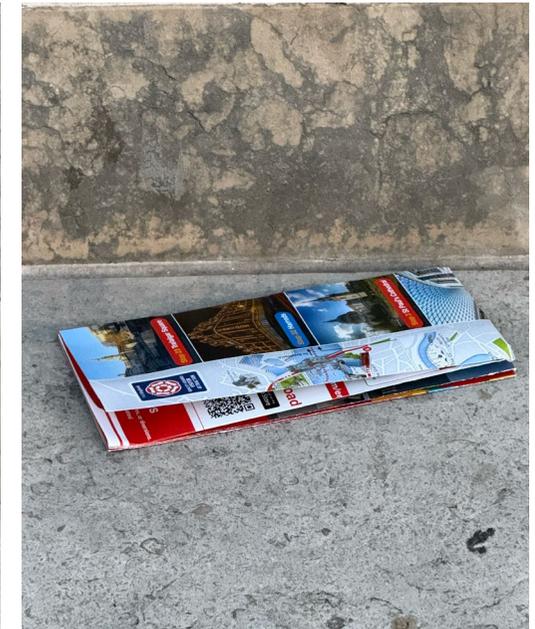
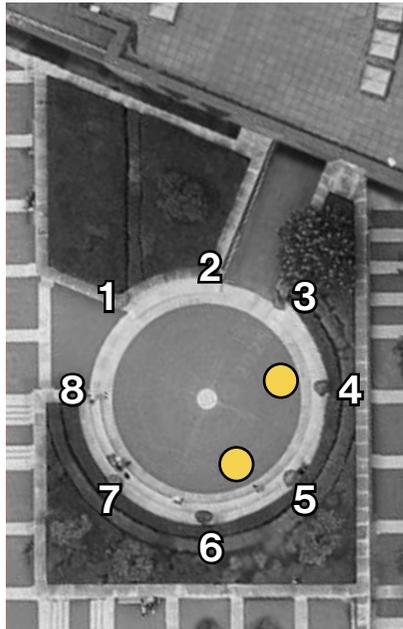
● My notetaking spot



## Method 1 Samples of Notetaking

Date	Time	Weather	Approach	Observation	Reflection
Wed, 24/09/25	19.08	Cold	Space	<p>I was here at 17:30 and saw a group of friends hanging around at positions 5-6, arguing about something. Then I left to go inside the library, and when I came back, I found trash around positions 5-6 on both steps. I had never seen trash here before.</p> <p>I also spotted a travel guide brochure at position 4, which seemed to have been left by a tourist.</p>	<p>It's a public space with many users, so these things happen. I also realised that I had forgotten to look for objects in this space. <b>Objects can reveal traces of who uses the area and how they use it.</b></p>

● My notetaking spot



## How each method change my focus

# 1 NOTETAKING

Notetaking slowed me down. I felt more immersed in the space, which gave me time to reflect in more depth on both its functional and emotional aspects.

## Selected Methods

- 1 NOTETAKING
- 2 PHOTOGRAPHING
- 3 MAPPING

## Method 2 Photographing

23/09/25

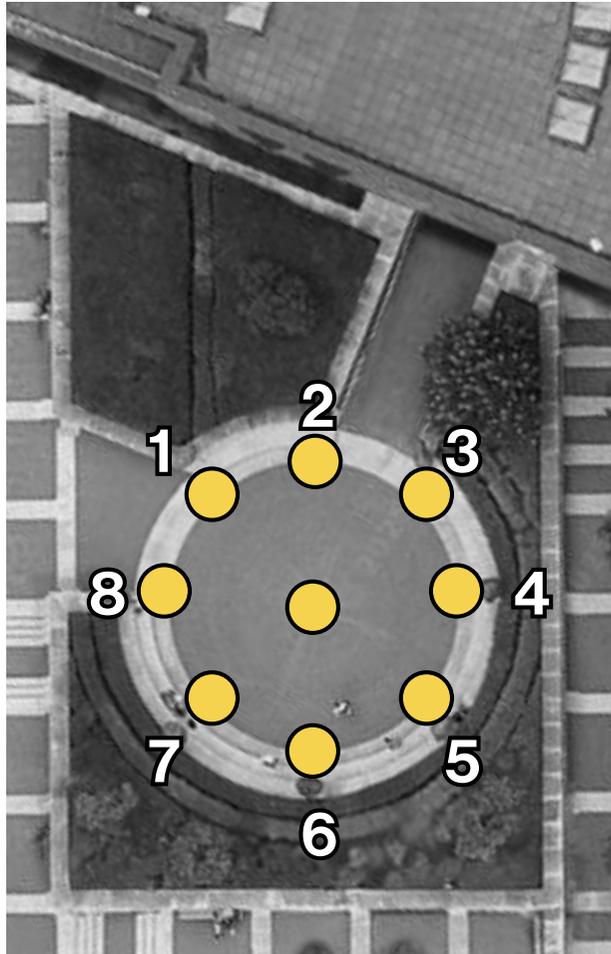
-

25/09/25

From notetaking, I developed the idea of viewing the space as both an outsider (observer) and an insider (user). I photographed from different spots to compare these perspectives and to investigate how position affects both the feeling of the space and the way people interact with it.

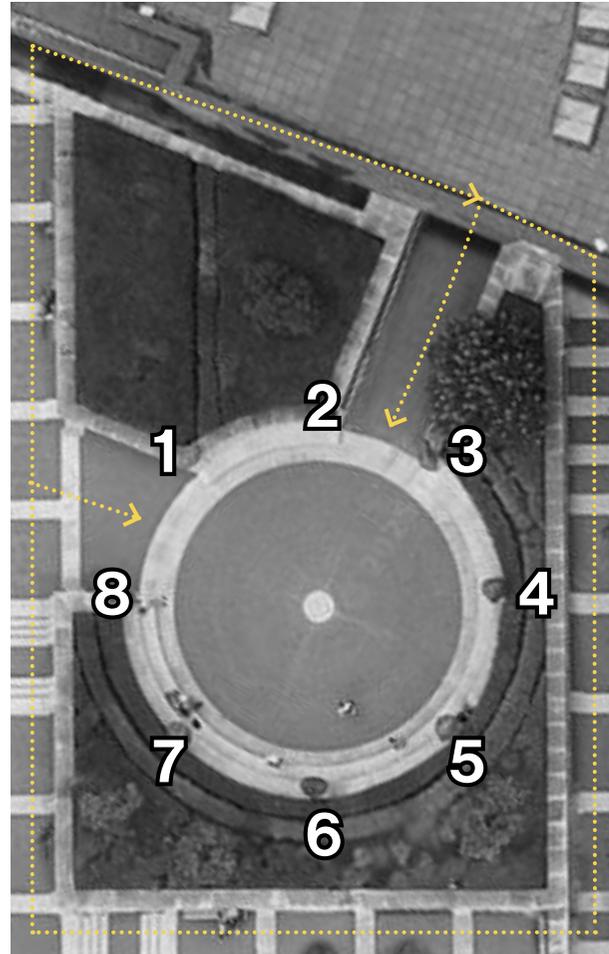
### Insider view

Photos taken while sitting or standing inside the circle at the centre and at each rock to mimic the orbit.



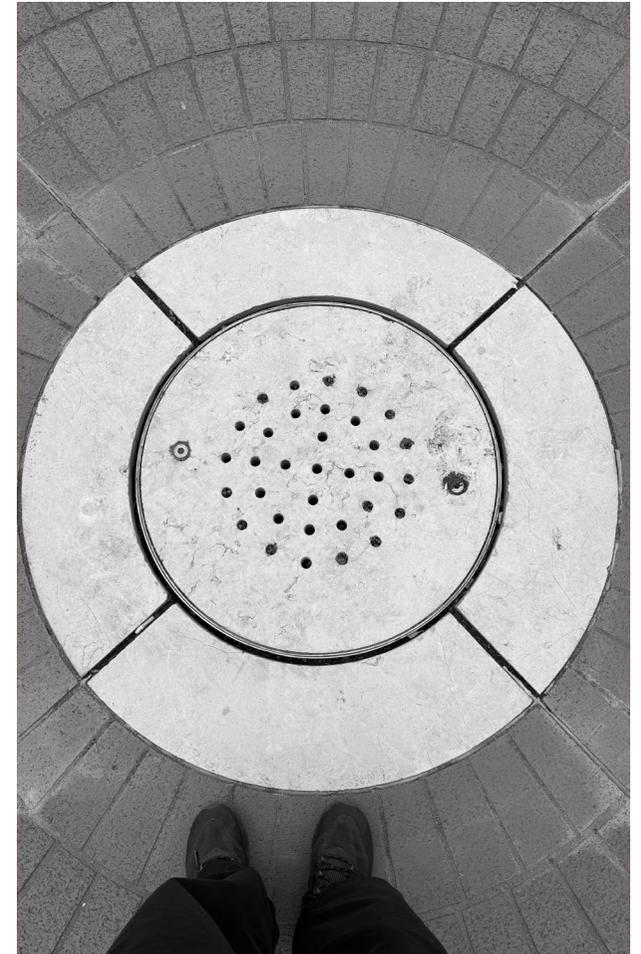
### Outsider view

Photos taken while walking around the space outside the circle, showing how it feels from the edges.



### Detail Shots

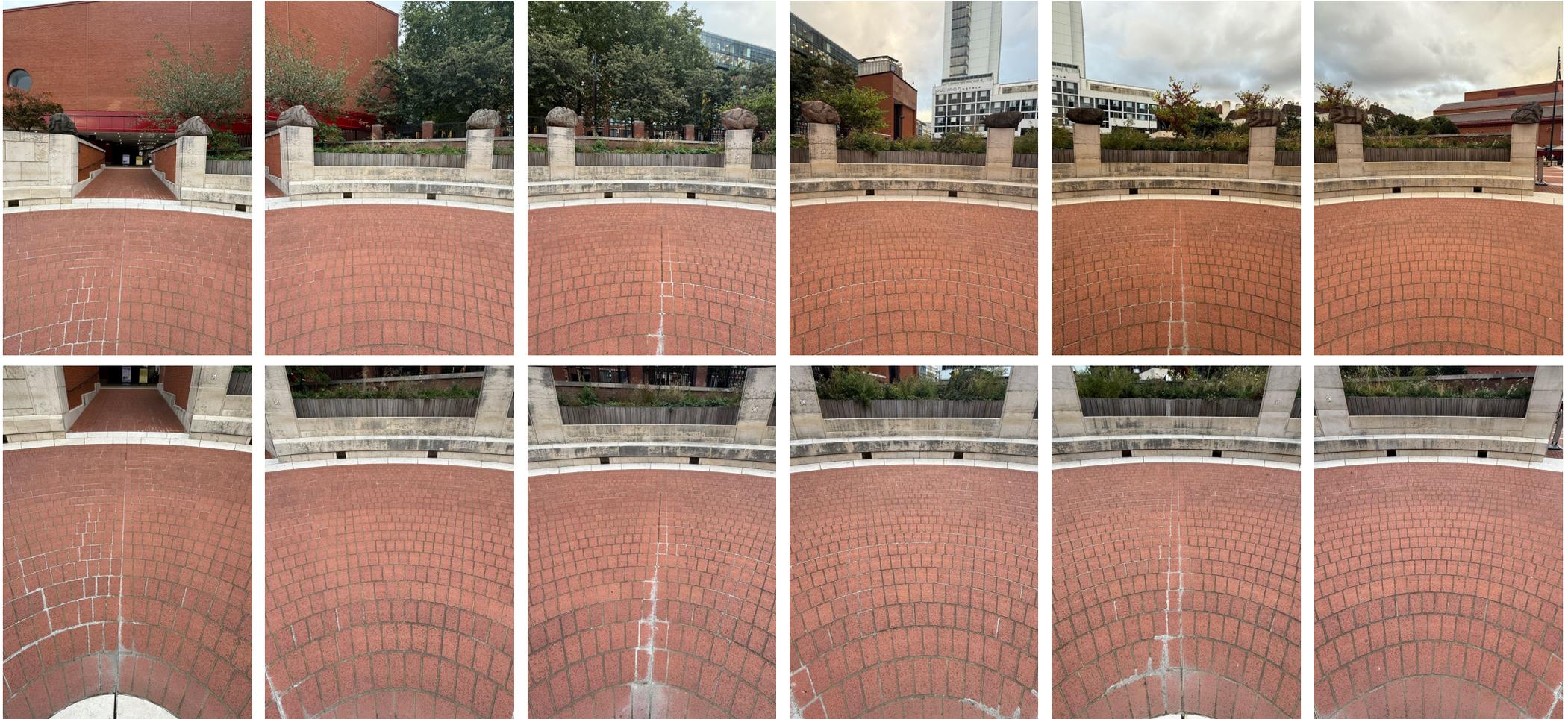
Close-ups capturing objects, materials, textures, and signs.



## Method 2 Photographing | Insider View

23/09/25

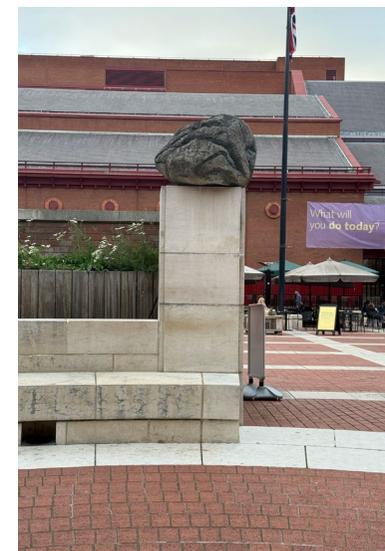
From the centre of the circle, I rotated to take photos in all directions. I photographed front angles to record the seating and walls, and lower angles to document the floor patterns.



## Method 2 Photographing | Insider View

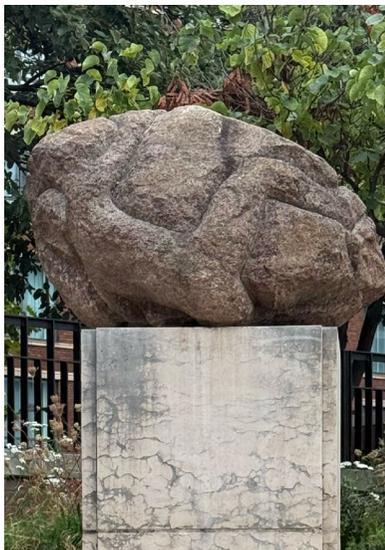
23/09/25

I took photos of each pillar to look more closely at their details and differences.



## Method 2 Photographing | Insider View

23/09/25 Looking at each pillar closely made me realise that the differences in shape, colour, and direction create variety within the circle. Instead of feeling uniform, the design suggests individuality, as if each rock and figure has its own character.



## Method 2 Photographing | Insider View

25/09/25

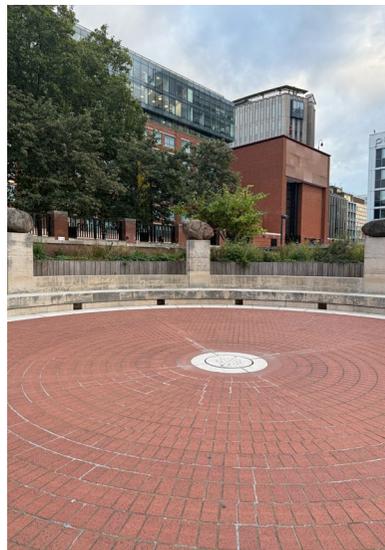
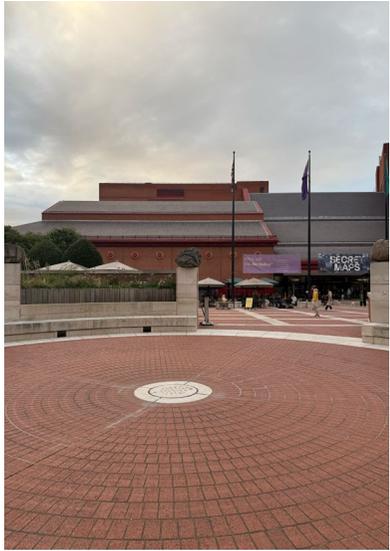
I took a panoramic photo while standing at the centre to observe the pattern of the space. I noticed that the gaps between the entrances are uneven, which makes the spacing between the pillars unbalanced as well. From this view, the background and the surroundings outside the circle also became clearer.



## Method 2 Photographing | Insider View

23/09/25

I took photos while standing at each pillar to see the view from each planet's perspective. This showed me how the atmosphere changes depending on position. Some spots felt more open and exposed, while others felt more contained. This might explain why people prefer certain seats over others.



## Method 2 Photographing | Insider View

23/09/25

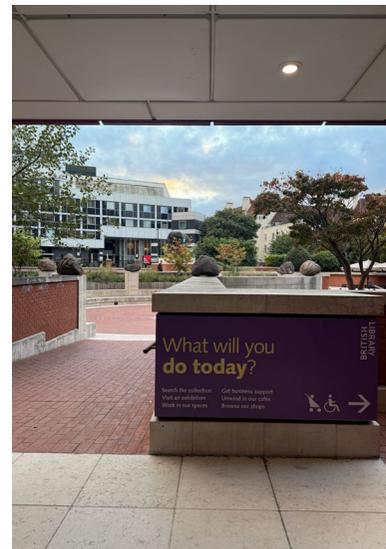
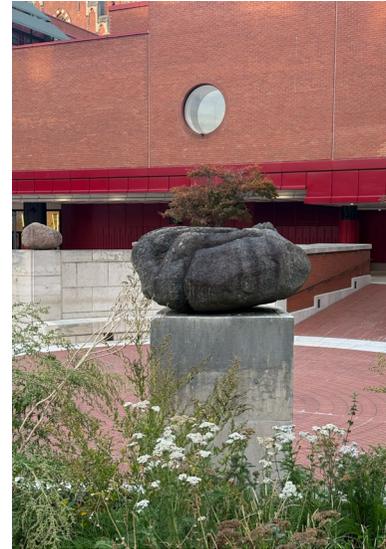
I observed the tiles of the seating and noticed yellow stains. At first, I thought they might show which seats were the most popular, but the stains seemed to be everywhere.



## Method 2 Photographing | Outsider View

23/09/25

When I walked around the outside, I kept trying to focus on the circle but got distracted by the box-shaped path. It didn't feel like I was part of the space anymore.



## Method 2 Photographing | Detail shots

23/09/25

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25/09/25

The Planets use the same brick and stone as the British Library, creating visual harmony. Signs around the space highlight different functions: safety (slippery surface warning), rules (no smoking), ecology (Mini Beast Habitat), and memory (Anne Frank's Tree). Cracks, stains, and weathering on the surfaces show traces of everyday use.

Material



Sign



## How each method change my focus

# 2 PHOTOGRAPHING

shifted my focus to perspectives such as, comparing inside vs. outside, contained vs. open, and revealed details I missed while notetaking.

## Selected Methods

- 1 NOTETAKING
- 2 PHOTOGRAPHING
- 3 MAPPING

## Method 3 Mapping

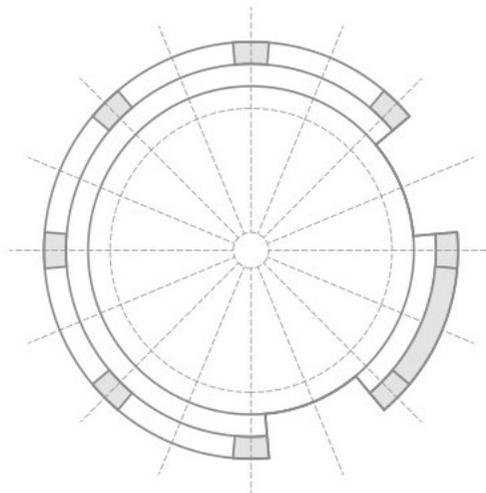
23/09/25

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25/09/25

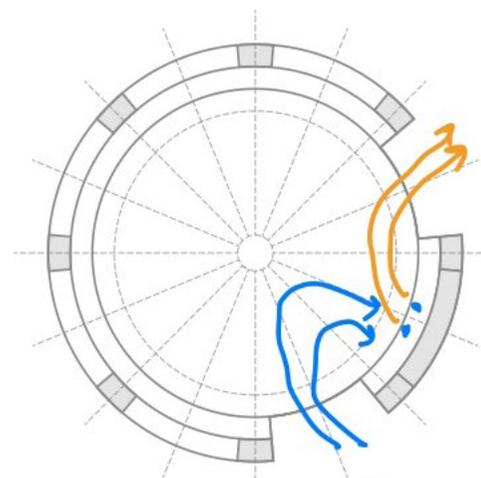
I experimented with mapping to record patterns of use on a diagram of the seating circle. I marked where people sat, whether they were alone, in pairs, or in groups, along with their activities (e.g. eating, reading, chatting, using phones), age range, and the times they arrived or left. I mapped the space at three different points in the day (morning, afternoon, and evening) with each session lasting 30 minutes, to see how time and weather influenced behaviour.

### A premade diagram



time  
 perceived gender F / M / O / UNK  
 age B / C / T / YA / A / OA  
 role reader/traveller/visitor/local/staff  
 group alone/friends/couple/family  
 mood -1 / 0 / 1  
 activity

### Example



time 16.41 - 16.51  
 perceived gender F / M / O / UNK  
 age B / C / T / YA / A / OA  
 role reader/traveller/visitor/local/staff  
 group alone/friends/couple/family  
 mood -1 / 0 / 1  
 activity chatting / drinking / on phone

### Legend

Perceived gender  
 F (female), M (male), O (other), UNK (unknown).

Age range  
 B = Baby (0—2 years)  
 C = Child (3—12 years)  
 T = Teenager (13—17 years)  
 YA = Young Adult (18—25 years)  
 A = Adult (26—59 years)  
 OA = Older Adult (60+ years)

Mood  
 -1 (negative), 0 (neutral), 1 (positive).

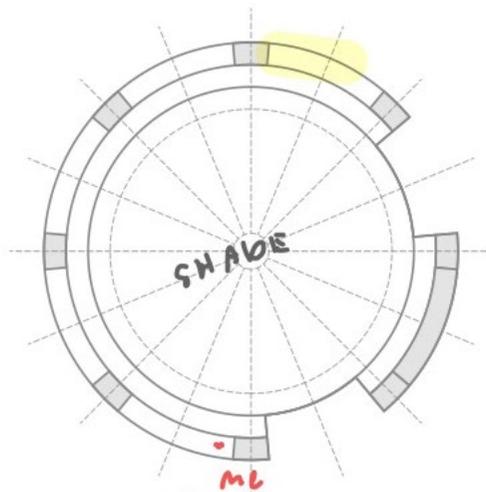
## Method 3 Mapping

23/09/25 Alongside behaviour, I also mapped weather and environmental conditions. I noted the direction of sunlight and shaded areas, as well as the temperature

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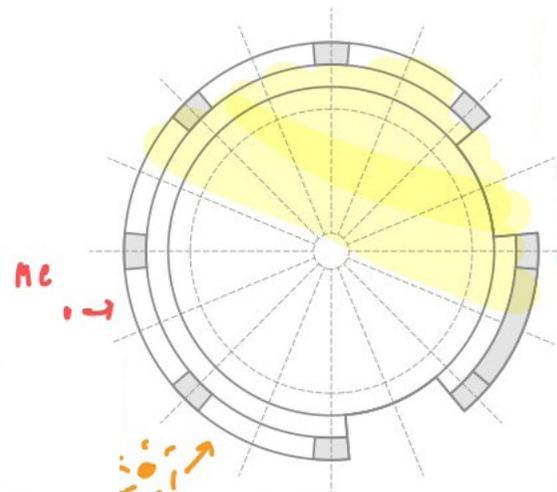
25/09/25

Morning (9.30-10.00)



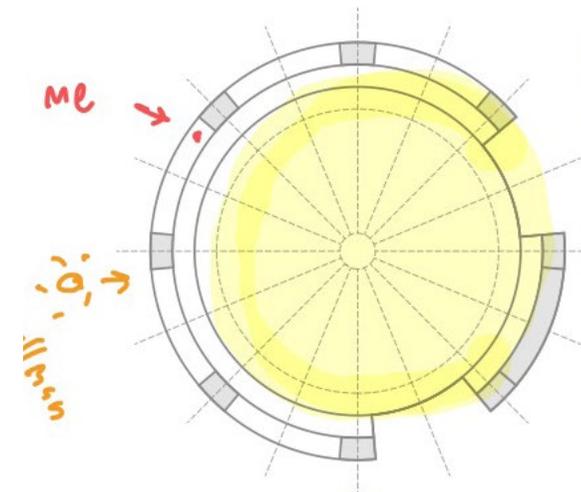
Session 3  
Date 25 sep  
Time 9.30  
Weather SUNNY  
Temperature 13  
Feel like

Afternoon (12.30-13.00)



Session 1-1h  
Date 29 SEP  
Time 12.30  
Weather partly cloudy / sunny  
Temperature 16°C  
Feel like  
NOW many

Evening (16.30-17.00)



Session 2-1h  
Date 14 sep 2025  
Time 16.30  
Weather sunny  
Temperature 19°C  
Feel like







## Method 3 Mapping

23/09/25

-

25/09/25

### Morning (9.30-10.00)

Very few people sat (only 4) most just passed by.

Most people headed into the library as it opened at 9:30, and the queue stretched into the Planets.

The atmosphere was quiet, and everyone who sat was working. All of them sat on the second step

There was one spot of sunlight, and someone chose to sit there.

The wall seating turned out to be the busiest area

### Afternoon (12.30-13.00)

The space was lively, with more pairs and small groups.

This was the busiest time, as many people were eating, chatting, or relaxing.

Sunlight made the space warmer and more inviting, which seemed to influence where people chose to sit.

### Evening (16.30-17.00)

The space was quieter and had fewer people compared to lunchtime.

Most visitors came alone.

Activities included chatting, using phones, resting quietly, and occasionally eating or drinking.

## How each method change my focus

# 3 MAPPING

directed my attention to patterns over time, showing how behaviour, seating, and atmosphere changed with time and weather.