

Methods of Investigating by Nikunj Topno

Everyday I walked past Saint Pancras Gardens with a sense of curiosity. It seemed to slow down and invoke a feeling of senescence. So I embraced Georges Perec's methods to investigate the place and was met with a surprising revelation that it was a memorial garden and a former burial ground.

Perec, in his book *'Species Of Spaces'*, encourages readers to "Observe", *"Apply yourself. Take your time. Note down the place."* and also says "You must set about it more slowly, almost stupidly. Force yourself to write down what is of no interest, what is most obvious, most common, most colourless." So I did. I walked through the pathways, observed its details, saw the nuances, listened to the garden, tried to catalogue the comings and goings through drawings and capture my perceptions through note-taking. As I immersed myself in the garden, questions began to arise. Whether my assumptions were shaping my understanding of the place? Was I imposing my thoughts onto the space, or was the space itself influencing my thoughts? These inquiries highlighted the complex interplay between my own perceptions and the characteristics of the space, which ultimately deepened my engagement with the environment. It led me to a central question: What elements within this space alluded to history?

I recognized that history wasn't just contained within the tangible monuments and markers; it was interwoven with the sights, sounds, people and the nature within the space. I took Perec's approach to methodically engage with the space and explore the question. This approach mirrored Mitch Miller's *'dialectograms'*, which combined different methods of observation to investigate the place from ground up. As I delved deeper into the space, I couldn't help but draw parallels to the concept of *'Powers of Ten'* by Charles and Ray Eames. Viewing the space as both a part and a whole within its broader context, I began to appreciate the interconnectedness of the factors at play and look at history from different perspectives.

In conclusion, by adopting Georges Perec's approach, I discovered that every space, no matter how unassuming, has the potential to serve as a repository of the past, the present and the future. And the process also affirms the theory of *Derive*, a method developed by the Situationist International. As we spend time in spaces and view them as both individual components and integral parts of the larger context, we gain a more profound understanding of the stories they hold.

Georges Perec and Sturrock, J. (2008). Species of space and other pieces. London: Penguin.

Mitch Miller, Dialectograms Office, E. (2010).

Powers of TenTM (1977). YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfKBhvDjuy0>.

Situationist International, Derive