

Practical exercise in experiencing environment adapted from
Species of Spaces by George Perec as translated by John Sturrock.

Observe the street... with some concern for system perhaps.

Apply yourself. Take your time.

Note down:

The place:	Hilton Street, Koffee Pot, Northern Quarter, Manchester City Centre, Near Stevenson Square
The time:	08.37 and some seconds, no doubt. 10.19.
The date:	11.11.2009
The weather:	Grey but not raining, cold but not icy 09.47 - the sky is lighter, a break in the clouds.
Note down what you can see. Anything worthy of note going on Force yourself to write down what is of no interest, what is most obvious, most common, most colourless?	17 Shops (not including this one - only one other is open) a milk float, not seen one of those in age, an ever changing number of buses, some double deckers, lots of buses, a few white vans, 5 bright alarms, 1 parked car, a bicycle, 4 Puddles drain S, a bus stop charging gun allow the floor a public toilet, a disused public toilet 2 bollards on a central reservation, road markings, patches in the tarmac where the road was dug up & re-surfaced, a crane over a building, bricks, windows, window frames (one bldg has window frames painted green) a To Let sign, lots of shutters, gutters, lamp posts.
The street: Try to describe the street, what it's made of, what it's used for. The people in the street, the cars.	A Square with two roads crossing it at right angles and a series of alleys leading off between buildings. There is a bus station, or at least a bus stop where buses start & terminate & on a reservation in the centre of the square there is a disused public toilet which has been painted with murals & graffiti by local street artists. There are 2 cat stops, a phone box, a bus waiting to go to Rushcroft, advertising a film of no interest to me the cars are infrequent but one has just stopped to unload or load items to/from the boot. There are 2 men smoking outside a shop and a variety of people walking. a couple, 2 older businessmen with folders, a man with a laptop, a girl in a green coat, a cyclist in a neon yellow jacket a traffic warden, another man with a laptop.
The buildings: distinguish residential from official buildings	Red brick, old warehouses it seems. one opposite me (the one with green window frames has 'I J & C Cooper Ltd' built into the bricks but I don't think that company trades there anymore. Some of the buildings have marble or limestone cladding up to the first floor where the brick is allowed to take over again. The car with the open boot is still there, a man is loading boxes from the art shop into it. the bus to Rushcroft has left & the smoking men have gone inside. A man & a woman with laptops walk past. one of the buildings has 3 floors but a fourth floor that covers only half the third floor. one building has no red brick at all, only Sandstone blocks (cladding?) and a triangular flomish above one window on the second floor in a fake-Greek style - there are 5 pigeons grooming on top of it.

Appendix 1

<p>The shops: what do they sell in the shops? Ask yourself where the locals do their shopping.</p>	<p>2 art shops which sell artist materials, a barbers, a bar, a newsagent, a wholesale clothing outlet, a retro clothing and accessories shop, Only the art shops are open (at the Newsagent) there are 10 shops which I cannot tell the trade of or if they are even trading, the shutters are down. A van is unloading boxes into the wholesale clothing outlet, two builders in dirty yellow jackets clutching takeaway boxes walk past, 2 young men wait by a bus stop. There are no essential shops here, none supermarkets or grocers, only Saturday shops or places to get newspapers and haircuts. Things I have bought in the art shops include: Canvas, acrylic paint, permanent markers, ribbon, brushes, glass paint, sketchbooks, spray varnish, drawing ink, spray paint, sequins, beads, fire lines, pencil leads.</p>
<p>The cafés How many are there? Why did you choose this one?</p>	<p>This is the only café here, there is a bar over the road but it is shut. I chose this café as I know they are willing to make changes to the menu so I can eat and because my other 2 favourite cafés are underground and this is only just round the corner from where I have to be at 10.30 and I know they don't mind you sitting here for ages because I have done it before. They also have a mural on the wall and a good selection of flyers that are useful for finding out what's going on this and next month in the area, near + far.</p>

Make an effort to exhaust the subject, even if that seems grotesque, or pointless, or stupid. You still haven't looked at anything; you've merely picked out what you've long ago picked out.

<p>Detect a rhythm: the passing of cars. Count the cars.</p>	<p>a blue car, a taxi, a bus to Piccadilly, a black car, a traffic queue of these vehicles another bus a black car a silver car, a bus to Rochdale, a police car. A bus to Piccadilly, a Spar delivery van (parked) a bus to Piccadilly a queue at the lights, a BT van, a glass recycling truck, a dark green car, a black car, a blue bus on the cross road, a silver car on the same, a bus to Ashton, a white van turns on from the cross road and out of service bus stops at the stop, 2 white vans, one selling water, no traffic stall. A black car on the cross road, a bus, a blue car.</p>
<p>Read what's written in the street: Newspaper kiosks, posters, traffic signs, graffiti, discarded handouts, shop signs.</p>	<p>Hilton Street. Open 7 days a week, no appointment necessary, open to the public, Sorry, not in service, Bluebird, unlimited bus, train & tram travel in Greater Manchester, BT, bringing it all together for London 2012, Emergency Glass recycling, Habitat House, To let, American Graffiti, Stevenson Square, www.fredaldous.co.uk, Travel Master, Spar, here for you, Manchester Piccadilly via Chadderton, Hayes & Firth Ltd, Blyth's Art Shop, discount art materials. New Season Stock now in 15% discount, Totally New, Totally Chocolates, News Agent, The Corner Barber Shop.</p>

Fashion:	<p>black fleece coat, black trousers, blue jeans, white trainers black coat, blue coat, black jeans with patches, baseball cap, black coat with zips and buckles, beige baseball cap, shirt, tie, trench coat, grey tracksuit bottoms, brown shoes, long blue scarf, grey jacket, blue jeans, green fleece, brown trousers, red boots, turquoise + shirt, leather jacket, Caramel jacket, BT uniform, green back pack, grey baseball cap, Soggy knitted hat, Neon cycling jacket, white shirt, beige skirt, black shirt, striped scarf, grey scarf, big earrings, a poppy, another poppy, grey fleece, blue jacket khaki trousers, Camouflage trousers, a neon jacket & a white hood hat, dyed red hair, brown hooded jacket, green baseball cap, grey combats, converse trainers, blue shirt.</p>
Decipher a bit of the town: describe the number of operations the driver of a vehicle is subjected to when he parks merely in order to go and buy 100 grams of fruit jelly:	<p>unpacking boxes: 3 men, one passes boxes from the back of the Van to the front (or is that the other way round?) one at a time, these boxes are big. second man pulls them over from the top (he is standing in the road) until they are lying on their side, then puts his arms around the box as if he is hugging it and slides it towards him. when he feels he can take the weight, he lifts slightly and steps back until the box is no longer supported by the back of the van. He then carries it awkwardly with his body at a strange angle, one step at a time, one leg rigid, one taking tiny steps until he reaches the shop front. He takes the box inside, is gone for some seconds then returns to the van. The third man is observing & apparently directing operations until a box bigger than is manageable must be unloaded then he will help. The job is done, the first man brings down the shutter at the back of the van & catches it. All 3 go into the building.</p>
Decipher a bit of the town: why do buses go from this place to that?	<p>buses seem to stop here a lot which is unusual as this is not a main street. I assume that it is convenient for them to stop here for a while as there is not much other traffic & the drivers can park & have a rest, maybe a coffee & a cigarette, before starting their route again but they are not in the way of any main traffic routes. Not many people wait for the buses here. In fact I'm not even sure they pick up passengers here. Most of the busy stops are round the corner on Oldham Street or on Piccadilly, by the larger shops & busier streets. The buses serve the suburbs. A cheaper, slower alternative to the trains. For those who need to prioritise economy over speed & convenience.</p>

Appendix 1

<p>The people in the streets: where are they coming from? Where are they going to? Who are they? People in a hurry. People going slowly.</p>	<p>Not many people seem to be in a hurry, they come from & go to the 2 main crossroads, I haven't seen anyone use the alleys. Workmen from building sites or on maintenance visits (the BT van is gone now), business men with laptops walking with purpose. Students wandering (but not many, it is still too early). The people are moving as though they have somewhere to go but no fixed time to be there. The lady with the red boots & turquoise shirt has re-appeared after $\frac{1}{2}$ an hour in a building & is now walking toward the crossroad. Most people (I imagine) at this time are already at their place of work or study & most people who are walking now are either on days off or are working to flexible timescales & are maybe avoiding rush hour. People seem to like standing around outside the newsagent smoking. A few business men seem to be walking in the direction of the station. Students walk as though looking for a distraction.</p>
<p>Try to classify the people: those who live locally, those who don't live locally.</p>	<p>There is not a lot of residential accommodation here, most people are passing through. There are some expensive flats to the north but they would be occupied by full-time workers in office based jobs & they will mostly be in work now. Builders working locally like this café. Business on breaks. Old ladies living in the suburbs have come in to town to collect their pension from the post office & buy bread, now waiting to go back to the suburbs. Students come to this area for the trendy retro shops, art supplies & cool bars but there are not many around at the moment. Everyone else looks lost and lonely, no where to go, nothing to do, no one to see, not much to say.</p>

Carry on

Until the scene becomes improbable

until you have the impression, for the briefest of moments that you are in a strange town, or better still, you can no longer understand what is happening or not happening, until the whole place becomes strange and you no longer even know that this is what is called a town, a street, buildings, pavements...

tiles, bricks, benches a bicycle, a man talking, tyres turning, an indicator flashing, a window reflecting, a van door closing a bus door opening, a ticket is bought, rubbish in a bin, rubbish on the floor by the bin, a carrier bag smirking & banging against the leg of the person carrying it, people stop & talk in the street by a bicycle chained to a lamppost, clouds move over the sky, 19 white lines divide an alley from the road, a man carries an umbrella, a lady carries a green plastic basket. brake lights, chocolate advertising, a carrier delivers a parcel (knock on door, present, sign for, close door back in van, drive off) indicators flashing, flashing, flashing, flashing, crossing the road, foot steps, a puddle, give way signs, CCTV camera, 10 lampposts.