



# Methods of Investigation

By Hazel Graham

I have identified two readings that relate to my investigation. The first is Georges Perec *The Street* from *Species, Spaces and Other Pieces*. The second is the film *London* (1994) by Patrick Keiller. There are similarities of form and process in both, as well as my own investigation.

To deeply interrogate a subject Perec (1974, p.50) recommends an approach that starts with observation. He suggested you “apply yourself, take your time” and to “force yourself to write down what is of no interest, what is most obvious, most common, most colourless”.

I employed this technique through my investigation of the front façade of the Everyman cinema in Oxted. In focusing solely on the window on the right of the front façade, I discovered reflections that described an ordinary, everyday street.

Perec asked himself questions about his observations that didn’t require answers and suggested you continue to observe “until you can no longer understand what is happening or is not happening, until the whole place becomes strange” Perec (1974, p.53). As I focused more deeply, I observed that the reflections distorted what we expect of how physical objects relate to the space they inhabit. This led me to ask questions about what was real and how we define what is real. Over time more imaginative descriptions emerged, that bore no connection to the labels we commonly give objects.

Employing Perec’s method to see things in a new way, to see things I wouldn’t usually notice, allowed me to discover the method of storytelling; to tell a story about a space.

The form of *London* (1994) is structured through a montage of static shots, combined with music or narration that offers social, political and economic commentary of the time. The visual quality of the film shows the conventions of documentaries, or photojournalism, which is reflected in the literal and implied tone of voice (monotonous narration). These forms combine to reinforce the position of the narrator as a commentator of fact and truth. Why does Keiller employ these techniques to a piece of fiction? Is the purpose of the piece to challenge the viewer as to what truth and fact is or to highlight the social, political and economic climate through storytelling?

Storytelling became my form, and my method, and I employed conventions of this genre as the context to reinforce my position, just as Keiller used documentary techniques to further his position. The structure of my story was the narrative arc that reflected the discovery I made through the approach of observation and notetaking. The tone of voice was in the third person, that allowed me to keep the identity of the narrator ambiguous until towards the end of the story, a common convention of storytelling to create surprise to the reader. The visual quality was that it was designed and laid out as a script,

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reinforcing the form, that was fiction.

I used Perec’s approach to investigate my subject and I used structure, voice and visual qualities, as Kieller did, to further this position. Despite there being twenty years between Perec’s observations and Keillers film, Keillers film and my Script, they all start “flatly” Perec (1974 p.51) through pedestrian description of everyday activity, use fiction or imagination to deepen interrogation, and use form to express new found knowledge and understanding of space.

**References**  
Perec, G. (1974) *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. Rev. edn. UK: Penguin.  
*London* (1994) Directed by Patrick Keiller [Film]. UK: British Film Institute and Channel 4.