

UNIT 1 - Methods of Investigating - Written response

Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown suggest in their Book *Learning from Las Vegas*, that our understanding of space is heavily influenced by the symbolic associations we attach to it and how spaces do not only have a physical and functional purpose but contain history, culture and social symbolism. This affects how we relate and interpret them.

(Venturi, 1972, P. 13)

This notion became strikingly evident when I encountered a metal white cage-like structure positioned in the middle of the square in front of King's Cross Station. What immediately caught my interest was the form of the object and how it relates to what's inside of it: a swinging bench. The cage is a symbol that generally gets perceived as an enclosing form with the purpose of confining and capturing something while the swinging bench stands for freedom, movement and playfulness. Those two opposites united in one object fuelled my interest in exploring it further, contemplating the profound contrast between its symbolic associations and its internal contents and observing how people engage with it and with the space surrounding it.

In the first week of my investigation, I used photography and sketching in order to get a better understanding of the form and space. My first approach was just seeing rather than watching and after week one feedback I realized I needed to dig deeper and do a more critical and systematic analysis. "Apply yourself. Take your time. ", as George Perec says in his book *Species of Spaces* (Perec, 1974, P. 50). Mapping the space helped me to identify the objects and structures around the cage and see how they can relate to the cage itself and to its symbolism of being a barrier.

In the next step I decided to just use my eyes and the lens of my phone to capture visual patterns and structures that I found in the square surrounding the cage. This method helped me to deepen my exploration of freedom and closure, barrier and non-barrier elements, and on how perception can change by just using form, colour and repetition.

Photographing in black and white and duplicating the visual elements I identified gave me a bigger picture on how symbols, structure, context and design intent function together.

For the final part of my investigation, I shifted the focus back on the people and on how they use the site. „Try to classify the people: those who live locally and those who don't live locally. ", as George Perec says (Perec, 1974, P.53). The method of classifying the users of my site into age groups has helped me to really focus on how behaviour patterns can change, and on how interpretations, experiences and cultural influences play a relevant part in how we engage with every object around us. The most interesting part for me was observing the children 's engagement with the cage and while doing so automatically seeing my surroundings through the eyes of a child. This has made me realize that sometimes we inadvertently create barriers when we view our surroundings through the lenses of our experiences and expectations. As adults, our preconceived notions and cultural influences often colour our interpretations of the world. Children on the other hand with their innate curiosity and unfiltered gaze break down the invisible barriers we construct and perceive the world with a new clarity, finding something valuable in things that we tend to overlook, just like Agnès Varda does in her documentary *The Gleaners and I*.

References

Perec, Georges. *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. Penguin Books, 1974.

Venturi, Robert, et al. *Learning from Las Vegas*; by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour. Cambridge M.I.T. Press, 1972.