Georges Perec’s Geographies

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Space seems to be either tamer or more inoffensive than time; we’re forever meeting people who have watches, very seldom people who have compasses. We always need to know what time it is (who still knows how to deduce it from the position of the sun?) but we never ask ourselves where we are.

(Georges Perec)

When I started my job as a postal worker in Huddersfield in 1998, the streets, much as they are now, were made of asphalt, Haribo wrappers, air-punching men in hooded tops, a man in beige salwar kameez who was carrying a toilet seat, buses, butterflies, buzzards, tinny reproductions of Chaka Demus and Pliers’ chart hits, double denim, dressing gowns, flip-flops, footballs, Ford Kas, Mr Mahmood and Mrs Moorhouse queueing for the cash machine, the smell of weed, bacon, dog piss, wheelie bins … . I was aware of the ‘hundreds of simultaneous actions, micro-events, each one of which necessitates postures, movements, specific expenditures of energy’ as Georges Perec evidently had been in Paris in 1974. Perec had already identified the anaesthetic effects of the habitual and had slowly, ‘almost stupidly’ set about recovering the things that may have been lost as a result. He advised, ‘Force yourself to write down what is of no interest, what is of most interest, what is most obvious, most common, most colourless.’ I too was suspicious of my habitual behaviour, my conditioning. I’d had my head turned by the work of the artists, Boyle Family, as an undergraduate in the early 1990s and taken it to heart when I read Mark Boyle quotes like this: ‘The most complete change an individual can effect in his environment, short of destroying it, is to change his attitude to it. This is my objective […]’ From the beginning we are taught to choose, to
select, to separate good from bad, best from better: our entire upbringing and education are directed towards planting the proper snobberies, the right preferences.4

Where Perec readied himself to step out into the streets and calmly execute his carefully considered plan while eating a camembert sandwich in a Parisian café and looking out of the window, I didn’t. I was forced to confront the streets in the course of my job and my initial response was to have a small nervous breakdown, shout at pigeons and scrawl down angry polemics with little punctuation or time for basic grammar. In this miasma, as I perceived it, my impotent rage was far too easily stirred by unavoidable everyday encounters with cheap garden ornamentation, ‘stick on’ fake leaded lights, the over 60s and their casual racism, dogs and dog excrement, etc. I was, however, writing these things down, which was a start. A typical diary entry from 6 November 2003: “I hate this fucking place because it’s shit” I said aggressively. The man looked taken aback; I’d never spoken to him before. He tried to console me by saying that Bradford was shit too although he conceded that it did seem worse here.’ I felt lost. I didn’t know where I was and eventually I realised I ought to try and find out. I began to recollect other, more measured, voices from my undergraduate studies: Paul Klee wanting to be ‘as though new born’,5 André Bazin’s ‘impassive lens’,6 and, most significantly, the ‘motiveless appraisal’7 of the Boyle Family. I began to consider these ideas and incorporate them into my writing in an attempt to make sense of the tangle of my unfathomably mundane surroundings. My approach became more empirical and objective. I made field notes recording what I could see at half-past every hour, I made daily lists that de-contextualised things by juxtaposing them seemingly at random: fragments of conversations and found notes, street furniture and retail signage, detritus and litter, ritualised behaviour and speech, wildlife and pets, as well as examples of conspicuous consumption/leisure, sartorial codes and, of course, garden ornamentation. I was picking away at the ordinary and what began to unravel was extraordinary.

In October 1974, Georges Perec spent a weekend in place Saint-Sulpice, Paris, attempting to discover ‘What happens when nothing happens?’. From a café window, he noted everything he saw in An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris. It’s through these and similar exercises in observation that he developed his virtuosic knowledge of how a place works. Inspired by these texts, I have sought out corresponding observations of the ‘infra-ordinary’ from my own journals. As Perec was in Paris, and I am in Huddersfield, it would be remiss of me not to mention that in 1994, Stephen Dorrell, the then Secretary of State for National Heritage
famously (famous round these parts anyway) referred to Huddersfield as ‘the Paris of the north’. There’s little doubt that this claim was rooted in political expediency rather than empirical fact but, when it comes to cigarettes, benches, stumbling pedestrians, bags, hats, umbrellas, pigeons, buses, dogs, litter, postal vans, mailboxes, etc., the two places do indeed have much in common.

In the first of the entries, Perec records that he is in Tabac Saint-Sulpice at 10.30am on 18 October 1974. He inventories some of the things he can see, with an eye to classifications, visible in the linguistic landscape. These include letters of the alphabet, names of hotels and the wording of street signage. From Perec, we turn to my notes on Huddersfield.

Date: Sunday, 13 January 2015
Location: Manchester Road–Blackmoorfoot Road, Huddersfield

The buses are racing each other between stops. The world flies past the window in a blur: BEST CARPET BARGAINS…Klippers Hair Salon…Sambuca Saturday…Karaoke Thursday…MEGA BOXES FOR £8.99…Royal Travel and Money Transfer…iTaste…Extra Care Housing…2 For 1 on Essentials (illustrated with a photograph of a packet of digestive biscuits)...YOU CAN’T BUY CHEAPER…Gold International…LE UVST TIPE X…FREE BOTTLE OF POP. A man climbs aboard looking flustered in fake leather and Fair Isle, ‘It’s always bloody late, this bus! He’s supposed to be five minutes in front of that other one’, he says out loud as he walks down the aisle. ‘Bloody rubbish!’ He sits down next to me in a fug of damp and sweat. The woman in front of us with the grey perm and turquoise gaberdine coat turns around, ‘These people are much more helpful than the Metro people though’, she says, ‘And it’s 30p cheaper’, she adds, her knuckles white on the handrail as the bus swings out into the middle lane to overtake its rival. ‘Go on, lad!’ yells the damp sweat man to the driver, pumping his fist.

Perec observes that ‘Most People are using at least one hand: they’re holding a bag, a briefcase, a shopping bag, a cane, a leash with a dog at the end, a child’s hand’.

In an entry from my journals from April 2013, I note the contrast between the ‘stalled mums’ holding onto dogs, pushchairs and toddlers and the ‘unencumbered’ grey-haired men who stride about the landscape, free to create new desire paths.
Out on the new estate: fake-sandstone-beige and UPVC-white with accents of grit-bin and Cold-Caller-Control-Zone-sticker yellow. The background noise of burglar alarms, wind-chimes, squabbling blackbirds, shouting PE teachers and that weird clanging from the insides of swaying metal street lamps, is occasionally drowned out by the engine of the JCB whose driver is concentrating so hard that his tongue is poking out. The fake ornamental bay trees have blown over onto the plastic lawn where the high-pitched cat deterrent is repeatedly triggered by the swirling leaves and bobbing daffodils. There are sea urchins and highly glazed period folk on windowsills and solar panels on roofs. And there are dogs: people without shoes open doors while holding dogs by the collar. There are unencumbered and determined grey-haired men in navy blue fleeces pounding the streets. Teeth gritted, they march up hills, arms outstretched for extra balance along uneven nascent desire lines – past the stalled mums with their hoods up against the drizzle, pushchairs and retrievers in one hand, they reach out for their straggling toddlers with the other.  

By 12.40pm, Perec has moved on to the Café de la Mairie, from where he observes ‘conversations between two people, conversations between three people, conversations between several people: the movement of lips, gestures, gesticulations’.  

Below, I’ve listed a few examples of such observations from the streets of Huddersfield over the last 15 years.

Date: 2 March 2004  
Location: St Peter’s Gardens, Huddersfield

‘Hey! it’s Brooky’s bitch, soft cock!’ he said, whilst making a wanker gesture with his right hand.  

Date: 9 July 2011  
Location: Daisy Royd, Newsome, Huddersfield

He shouts to me above the noise of his dog barking from behind the gate, ‘Don’t worry!’ he says, ‘She’s all this’ and he makes a C-shaped
gesture with his right hand, opening and closing his thumb and fingers to signify talking. ‘Just like all women’, he adds with a wink.\textsuperscript{15}

Date: 18 May 2012
Location: Huddersfield Bus Station

At the bus station, a group discussion is underway about sandwich filling preferences. The large woman in her fifties says she could never eat peanut butter and cucumber because she doesn’t like ‘sweet and sour stuff’.\textsuperscript{16}

Date: 17 April 2013
Location: Primitive Street, Huddersfield

In Primitive Street, a gust of wind blows an empty lager can from one kerb to the other while two drunks discuss the whereabouts of Amber. ‘Where is she?’ asks the one in the faded blue anorak with the saggy pockets. ‘I don’t know’, says the other, ‘she spat in my face about two years ago’.\textsuperscript{17}

Date: 2 November 2014
Location: Leeds Road, Huddersfield

I walk down Leeds Road behind a girl in skinny jeans and a black puffer jacket. She’s talking loudly on her phone in Polish, emphasising key points with wild, histrionic hand gestures.\textsuperscript{18}

Date: 13 December 2015
Location: Station Road, Lepton, Huddersfield

‘What is it?’ says the customer, cleaning a stripe through the greasy dust that coats it with her thumb and wiping the residue on her bulging pocket. ‘It’s wine’, explains the proprietress. ‘Is it dry?’ ‘Yes, I think so.’ ‘I don’t really do wine, what’s it like?’ ‘Apparently it’s very nice; it’s what everyone has now.’ ‘I’m not sure, I don’t really do wine.’ ‘No, me neither, it makes me drunk.’\textsuperscript{19}
An old man who smells of weed stops me in the street to wish me a happy Christmas. He puts his hand on my shoulder and hums a short tune. ‘What’s that then?’ I ask. ‘Music’ he says, and he wanders off over the road.  

Still at the Café de la Mairie, Perec notes, ‘A young woman is sitting on a bench, facing “La demeure” tapestry gallery; she is smoking a cigarette.’

This puts me in mind of the following scene from February 2015 in Huddersfield and I freely admit to enjoying the irresistible contrast between Gallerie La Demeure, a mid-century modern tapestry gallery in the centre of Paris, and Lockwood Taxis, a ‘highly affordable’ taxi hire operation in a run-down back-to-back terrace on the outskirts of Huddersfield town centre.

Things are slowly drying out in the first real sun of the year. Snowdrops and crocuses are appearing on the verges. The big woman in a dirty pink onesie on the bench at the side of the main road inhales from her cigarette with her eyes closed. She adjusts her posture, unfurling like an enormous pink fleecy rose, stretching out her arms across the backrest. She tilts her head back to absorb the warmth of the sun on her face and exhales a long thin wisp of white smoke vertically up and over Lockwood Taxis.

In between his meticulous documenting of the comings and goings of various bus services, Perec notes, ‘People stumble. Micro-accidents,’ and I’m reminded of his quote: ‘To live is to pass from one space to another, while doing your very best not to bump yourself.’ Below, I’ve listed some of the stumbles and micro-accidents of the people of Huddersfield (myself included) as they try to navigate life and space.
The wobbly, 1980s New Romantic man who hangs about outside the phone box on Market Street is looking particularly wobbly today. He’s trying to show off in front of his younger, Burberry wearing companion by walking along a row of concrete bollards but he keeps falling off. His waistcoat is cool though.

I trip over a yellow plastic cone with a silhouette of a man tripping printed on it.

Earlier, in Bradford I saw a similar cone wedged under the wheels of a roll container.

A drunk couple with grey hair, blotchy skin and bleached-out black jersey and denim are trying to help their companion up from the floor of the children’s playground where he’s fallen. After several attempts they give up. They hand him a cigarette and sit on a bench a few yards away while he lies on the floor, smoking.

I trip over the wellington boot belonging to the man who is practising the drums with the window open and Mrs Sykes says she’s glad it’s a nice day and that junk mail is a bit of a pain but she supposes it keeps me in work.

A woman in a big black coat rounds the corner and crashes her buggy into my ankles. She doesn’t say anything or even look up, she just reverses a bit and goes around me.
Date: 2 January 2011
Location: John William Street, Huddersfield

5.30am: I follow a tall thin man in a hooded top down John William Street, his hands deep in his pockets. He’s drunk, and on several occasions staggers the full width of the generous pavements and trips off the kerb into the road.  

Date: 22 June 2014
Location: Walpole Road, Crosland Moor, Huddersfield

Two fifteen year old Vauxhall coupés driven by young snapback wearers sped past. The silver metallic one in front hit the speed-bump by the bus stop too quickly and its wide-arch body-kit came off in one piece. The following coupé, a red one, ran over the body kit and dragged it up the road for about a hundred yards, smashing it to pieces. The elderly man with the Scottish accent and the spaniel asleep in the basket attached to his walking-frame said, ‘There’re some right fucking idiots about, aren’t there?’

Across the road, an old man in synthetic fibres rustles past the upturned push-chair. The sun has yet to coax him from his tightly secured drawstring hood, despite its low glare turning his Reactolite lenses black, opaque. His vision must be impaired because he almost bumps into the woman in the grey hooded top, black tracksuit pants and enormous pink fluffy slippers as she comes out of the off-licence.

Date: 15 August 2016
Location: Acre Street, Lindley, Huddersfield

The weeds between the flags on the narrow pavements are knee deep on some of the back streets; mainly long grasses and ragwort. I graze my knuckles on a concrete lamppost as I squeeze past the man with the slicked back nicotine hair. He falls backwards into a hedge but rebounds upright again and continues on his way.

Date: 6 November 2016
Location: Quarmby Road, Paddock, Huddersfield

A single rubberised reddy-brown glove with off-white cuffing lies in the gutter: by far the most commonly discarded style of glove
in the Huddersfield area. I once saw one fall from the back of a builders truck as it rounded a corner which perhaps explains the phenomenon.\textsuperscript{34}

Perec observes the sartorial: ‘Two men with pipes and black satchels […] A man with a black satchel and no pipe.’\textsuperscript{35} Black satchels were evidently a common accessory in central Paris in the autumn/winter of 1974 whereas, in spring/summer 2016, Breton caps are the season’s must-have accessory in the small town of Holmfirth, seven miles to the south of Huddersfield.

Date: 28 April 2016
Location: Holmfirth, Huddersfield

In Holmfirth where the streets are lined with cars and enormous laurel hedges, there are ducks in the car park, dippers in the river, and men in Breton caps.

The notice attached to the ticket machine blows off in a squall as I approach. I ask the woman in the purple anorak whether she knows what it said. She tells me it was about paying for your parking with your phone. She says she doesn’t know about me but she’s not going to be giving them access to her phone and all her bank details.

The cherry trees are in blossom.

The young women in windcheaters and fluorescent trainers are running three abreast in the road.

Bamforth’s postcards building is still being derelict and there’s a big hole where John Gill’s garage was too.

The line of yuccas next to the post office has gone.

Outside the public toilets, there are pansies in pots, a defibrillator, a needle bin, and the stone memorial to the eighty-one who died in the flood of 1852.

I carry on, past the grey pony-tailed man in the Breton cap.
Past the hi-vis builders with their white paper-bag sandwiches at 10.15am.
Past the suit of armour on display outside Lionhart boutique.
Past another man in a Breton cap.
Past the painted purple charity shop filled with women in purple anoraks.
Past the navy blue railings with gold tips outside the solicitor’s office.
Past another man in steel toe-capped boots who is carrying white paper bags full of sandwiches.
Past another man in a Breton cap.
Past the shop selling nautical gilets; photos of a smiling salt-and-pepper beard man modelling all the colourways.
Past another man in a Breton cap.
Past the cow in the trailer at the traffic lights.
Past the shop selling appliqué felt owls.
Past the woman with no socks and ballet pumps who is saying it’s sad that the cat has died.
Past the ironmonger’s shop where the man in the boiler suit is asking for a lock for his gate: ‘Nothing too fancy, mind’.
Up the aubretia hill past the vertiginous hard-standings for high-altitude Astras.
Past the steep terrace with the model boat in the UPVC window.
Past another builder eating a sandwich from a white paper bag.
Past another man in a Breton cap.
Past the hipster with the big ginger beard and the sunglasses hooked over the ‘V-neck’ of his Fairisle sweater.
Past the elderly couple on the bench who are eating sausage rolls from white paper bags.
Past anoraks with hood-stuffed collars, baggy corduroy and twill.
Past Clarks Nature Originals and walking-boot/trainer hybrids.
Past a black pea coat and a man-bag, too long jeans and a pair of brown chisel-toes.
Past Reactolite lenses and black slip-ons with the slightest heel – ‘… like a brogue with a sporty twist’.
Past gold-rimmed specs and a long straight bob, asymmetrical cardigans, leggings and a vest top, calf-length boots with the cuffs turned down, puffa coats and parkas with tight jeans.
And on into the park with the unusual arrangement of daffodils, where Lauren loves Shane and nothing much has changed. 

Perec notices an undertaker’s van in front of the church and speculates that the people who are gathering there will be taking part in a funeral procession. Forty years later, I watch a funeral procession snake through the estate of park homes on the moor.
A funeral cortège led by a man in a top hat and a cane passes through the estate. Mrs Perkins adjusts her vest top and puts out her cigarette, ‘I don’t know who that was’, she says, ‘but you should always pay your respects, shouldn’t you?’

Still located at the Café de la Mairie, Perec watches as ‘in splendid unity, the pigeons go round the square return to settle on the district council building’s gutter’. He wonders what triggers their regular unified tours. In 2007 in Huddersfield, I watch as a council worker scatters a flock of pigeons that have gathered outside the home of an elderly man.

An elderly man in a thick woolly hat stands on the the front step of his small terraced bungalow throwing birdseed out onto the grass. A flock of fifty or so pigeons gather before a council worker on a green ride-on mower comes around the corner and scatters them. The old man looks up and shouts to me ‘You got owt for ’ere?’ I say I haven’t and he goes back inside without saying anything more.

Perec moves on to La Fontaine Saint-Sulpice (Café). Another sartorial commentary. This time, there is more variety:

A priest in a beret (another one)
Capes, turbans, boots, sailor-like cap, short or long scarves, policemen with kepi, furs, suitcases, umbrellas.

Over the last weekend of September, 2014, I made an inventory of the sartorial preferences of the residents of the suburb of Netherton who were engaged in outdoor chores on or around their property.

Sartorial preferences of those carrying out outdoor chores in the last week of September:
Male, 40s, watering potted annuals: t-shirt, jeans, sandals.
Male, 70s, scrubbing hose reel with stiff brush: t-shirt, trousers, sandals.
Male, 60s, clipping fingernails: t-shirt, jeans, sandals.
Female, 60s, digging out couch grass: fleece jacket, jogging pants, walking boots.
Female, 70s, taking seedlings round to a neighbour: blouse, trousers, sandals.
Female, 40s, walking Labrador: t-shirt, jeans, trainers.
Female, 70s: weeding between driveway setts with special long-handled tool: fleece jacket, trousers, sandals.
Male, 60s, loading garden cuttings into a Fiat Punto: fleece jacket, jeans, black shoes.
Female, 40s, re-pointing a garage wall: fleece jacket, tracksuit pants, slippers.
Female, 70s, walking Highland terrier: fleece jacket, knee-length pleated plaid skirt, flat black shoes.
Male, 60s, re-pointing wall: polo-shirt, jeans, black shoes.
Female, 30s, putting out bins: large knitted striped jumper, jogging pants, one slipper, one bare foot.
Female, 70s, popping to shop ‘to get bits’: knee-length skirt, knitted cardigan, flat black shoes.
Male, 60s, sweeping yard: fleece jacket, trousers, welly shoes.
Male, 60s, washing Fiat Punto: navy-blue overalls, black shoes.
Male, 60s, clearing guttering: shirt with collar, v-neck sweater, suit trousers, slippers.
Female, 60s, sweeping pavement outside house: cardigan, trousers, slippers.
Male, 80s, polishing Kia Picanto: shirt with collar, v-neck sweater, suit trousers, black shoes.
Female, 70s, sweeping driveway with brand new yard-brush: sweatshirt embroidered with floral display, trousers, welly shoes.
Male, 70s, re-applying window putty: knitted cardigan, jeans, slippers.
Male, 50s, shouting abuse at a neighbour in the street, ‘Don’t fuck with me!’: t-shirt, jeans, socks.
Male, 70s, telling the postman that a neighbour has died, ‘Yep, they’ve buried her and everything’: baseball cap, cardigan, jogging pants, trainers.
Male, 20s, hiding door key under mat, ‘You never saw that, did you? There’s nowt worth nicking anyway, it’s a right shit-hole’: motorcycle helmet, tracksuit, trainers.
5.10 pm on 18 October 1974: Père has made his way back to the Café de la Mairie from where he continues his close reading of place Saint-Sulpice.

A yellow postal van stops in front of the mailbox, which a postal worker relieves of its dual contents (Paris/Out of Town, including suburbs)
It’s still raining.\textsuperscript{42}

In October 2005, I am relieving the mailbox on Mountjoy Road of its contents.

Date: October 2005
Location: Mountjoy Road, Huddersfield

I was crouching to empty the pillar box on Mountjoy Road when I noticed a Royal Mail van parked on the other side of the street. I waved as I dislodged some stubborn flats from the cage of the box. When I stood up again I realised I’d been waving to my own van; I’d pulled up on the opposite side of the road to usual.\textsuperscript{43}

The next day, Saturday 19 October 1974, Georges Père is at the Tabac Saint-Sulpice making a note of the distribution of litter outside his window compared with the day before.

Weather: Fine Rain, Drizzle
Yesterday, there was a metro ticket on the sidewalk, right in front of my window; today, not exactly in the same spot, a candy wrapper (cellophane) and a piece of paper difficult to identify (a little bigger than a ‘Parisiennes’ wrapper but a much lighter blue).\textsuperscript{44}

Below are the results of the litter survey I undertook in Huddersfield in June 2015.

Litter Survey
Fitzwilliam Street to Church Street, via Greenhead Park, Heaton Road, and Branch Street
Date: Wednesday, 17 June 2015

Weather: Warm, dry, still
Duration: 24 mins
Costa take-out cup.
Coca-Cola plastic bottle
Mayfair cigarette packet
Greggs take-out plastic cup
Richmond cigarette packet
Greggs take-out paper bag
Benson & Hedges cigarette packet.
Kinder Bueno packaging
Train ticket
7up drink can
Pile of cigarette butts of indeterminate brand
Coca-Cola plastic bottle
Polystyrene takeaway container
Dairy Milk wrapper
Haribo sweet packet
Benson & Hedges cigarette packet
Wheat Crunchies packet
Richmond cigarette packet
Rizla packaging
Kelloggs Coco Pops Snack Bar wrapper
Ribena plastic bottle
Benson & Hedges cigarette packet
Benson & Hedges cigarette packet
Expired DVLA tax disc
Capri Sun carton
Till receipt
Pages from The Huddersfield Examiner
Polystyrene cup
Capri Sun carton
Two wet wipes
A child's seaside fishing net
Mayfair cigarette packet (20)
Mayfair cigarette packet (10)
Pile of cigarette butts of indeterminate brand
Coca Cola can
Costa portion control sugar wrapper
Boost Energy Drink can
Pepsi can
Maoam sweet wrapper
Mr Freeze packaging
Rubicon mango drink can
Walkers Cheese & Onion crisp packet
Mayfair cigarette packet
Plastic fork
Polystyrene cup
Polystyrene cup
Paper serviette
Plastic water bottle (indeterminate brand)
A hair roller
Snickers wrapper
Lucozade bottle
Wrigley’s Extra chewing gum wrapper
Paracodol packaging
Lambert & Butler cigarette packet

After a brief spell on a bench among the pigeons in the square, Perec is back in the Tabac Saint-Sulpice from where he makes this observation: ‘A man walks by with his nose in the air, followed by another man who is looking at the ground.’ And I remember the time in 2010 when I harassed the poor man with the tartan Thermos with my persistent early morning greetings.

Date: 23 September 2010
Location: Branch Street, Paddock, Huddersfield

The man with the tartan Thermos, the pea-coat and the all-year-round woolly hat has started crossing the road when he sees me. We pass each other at 6am every morning and he’s often the only other person I see as I walk into work. After a few weeks of ignoring each other, I let on and said ‘Morning’. He didn’t reply. As time went by and I persisted, he started to respond but never seemed very comfortable with it. His eyes would start flickering nervously at me from about twenty yards away, I’d say ‘Morning’ and he’d emit an awkward choking sound accompanied by a twitchy sideways glance. Now he crosses the road and keeps his eyes fixed on the pavement.

Still at the Tabac Saint-Sulpice on Saturday 19 October 1974, Perec observes ‘A woman with two baguettes under her arm’ and I am immediately reminded of the time in March 2015 when I saw ‘A woman in a pinny with four bottles of squirty cream under her arm’. I’m always cautious not to read too much into such comparisons but this one seems significant in the way it exemplifies social and economic differences over time and geography.
The geese on the canal are overtaking the traffic on the A646.
The big-bum lycra cyclist is overtaking too – on the inside, past the
builder’s tipper truck with the upturned wheelbarrows in the back
and the plastic pipes strapped up over the cab like rocket launchers.
The man in the silver Espace is picking his nose.
The reinforced concrete fence has been repaired with bailing twine.
There are spaces to let on Moderna Way.
Hugo has defaced the bus shelter.
The sensors on the traffic lights are pointing at the floor.
The heavy-set man at the bus stop with the match in his mouth is
wearing a black biker jacket, black jeans, black steelies, black beard,
and a black wide-brimmed leather hat. Next to him, the short
woman with the highlighted crop has a leopard skin coat, boot-cut
distressed denim jeans and chunky black heels.
In Hebden Bridge there’s a group of small men with paint on their
trousers.
A Morris Traveller.
A woman in a pinny with four bottles of squirty cream under her
arm has just come running out of the Co-op.
The briefest jackdaw picks over the lawn in the methodist garden.

On Sunday 20 October 1974, Perec is back in the Café de la Mairie (it had
been closed on the Saturday) eating a camembert sandwich. On Friday
17 March 2017, I am in the Co-op car park eating peanuts.

Mouldy windfall apples line the slippery stone steps to the back-
to-backs. I walk head first into the hanging basket of dead twigs
next to the front door with ‘fucking crack bitch’ scrawled across it in
marker pen. I curse and make my way back out to the Co-op where
I sit in the car park eating peanuts while the man with the Father
Christmas bag-for-life hugs a spaniel.

Perec notes the ‘Rarity of complete lulls: there is always a passerby in the
distance, or a car passing by’. 
9 July 2017: I pause for a moment in a quiet semi-rural spot on the outskirts of town when it occurs to me that I can see nothing moving. It’s a warm, still day with no breeze to move even the leaves of the trees. It’s as though the world has stopped, except:

Date: 9 July 2017
Location: Healey House, Huddersfield

An idling diesel engine.
The amplified telephone bell from the office of the cardboard box factory.
Distant power tools.
Crows, starlings and sparrows.
Distant traffic from the main road.
The Labrador’s bark echoing around the new builds.
A distant police siren.
The reversing alarm of a wagon in the yard of the cardboard box factory.
An aeroplane rumbling overhead.
The bleating of sheep and lambs.
The sound of flowing water draining under the manhole cover.  

Georges Perec’s vigil in place Saint-Sulpice concludes hopefully at 2.00pm on Sunday 20 October 1974 when he observes simply ‘Four children. A dog. A little ray of sun’.  

The last line of my journal entry of 25 February 2016 is perhaps a little more ambiguous.

Date: 25 February 2016
Location: Burton Acres Lane, Highburton, Huddersfield

As they walk into the early sun, both the man in the lumberjack shirt and his golden retriever, are haloed by its glare. The dog stops to piss on a holly bush and the resulting cloud of vapour rises to combine with the mist of their breath, swirling around them until they almost disappear from view.
Notes

36. Boniface, ‘Recorded Delivery’.
41. Boniface, *Round About Town*, 76.
43. Diary entry (unpublished).
49. Boniface, ‘The Rookery’.
52. Boniface, *The Most Difficult Thing Ever*.
Bibliography


