

October 15th, 2025

Methods of investigating; Written Response

My choice of Maida Vale station as a site for investigation was almost instant, with little hesitation. I am still unsure why. My initial investigation began on my morning commutes to work or university. To experience and research a site, one must immerse themselves. With my headphones off for perhaps one of the first few times on the tube, I was unable to separate Maida Vale's sonic identity from its visual one. In my mind, both coexisted and were equally loud. This is how I started to notice people's deafness to everyday sounds which silently shape our environment's architecture.

McLuhan's *The Medium is the Message* argues that our understanding is shaped by the media through which we sense and communicate. In his publication, he writes: "We are so visually biased that we call our wisest men visionaries" (1967, pp. 117). This provocation informed the thematic aspect of my project, as I wondered what "seeing" or "investigating" meant as designers. In this sense, I realised that my own heightened sensitivity to sound could become a method of research, embracing personal bias to create new knowledge. Through sound recordings, photographs, and repeated visits, I began to openly engage with Maida Vale station not only as a visual space but as a rhythmic and sonic one. The constant beeps, footsteps, and train screeches form an unnoticed architecture that choreographs how people move, wait, and pass through. To highlight this, I created a black-and-white, grainy video where the visual information is reduced and sound dominates, flipping the visual bias to a sonic one. The piece invites the audience to listen and to experience the station as I do as well as to recognise how we are in fact, visually biased. In McLuhan's terms, the sound itself becomes the "message"; an agent that reconfigures perception and reveals new knowledge embedded in routine.

Varda's *The Gleaners and I* influenced the process of my investigation. How much of oneself can be placed into an external work before it inevitably becomes a reflection of the self? Varda says: "But it's always the same thing, it's always a self-portrait" (2000, 0:33:10). Varda's act of gleaning; collecting discarded fragments to uncover meaning, mirrors how I approached Maida Vale Station. The sounds I recorded were the leftovers of commuting life, fragments most people discard or suppress. By gathering these remnants of daily repetition, I constructed an alternative portrait of the station built from the unnoticed. My recordings reveal as much about my own perception, my sensitivity to loud sounds, as they do about the station itself. Each act of "gleaning" became a self-portrait through rhythm, a trace of how I inhabit and interpret the same space differently.

Together, McLuhan and Varda helped shape my understanding of design research as both thematically concerned with perception and process-driven through collection. From McLuhan, I learned that shifting medium transforms knowledge and understanding, and from Varda, that collecting what others overlook can reveal quiet systems which, too, hold meaning.

Word count: 495

Bibliography:

McLuhan, M. (1967) *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects*. New York: Bantam Books.

Varda, A. (2000) *The Gleaners and I*. [Film] Ciné Tamaris.