Westminster Sensory Deprivation Map - 2008

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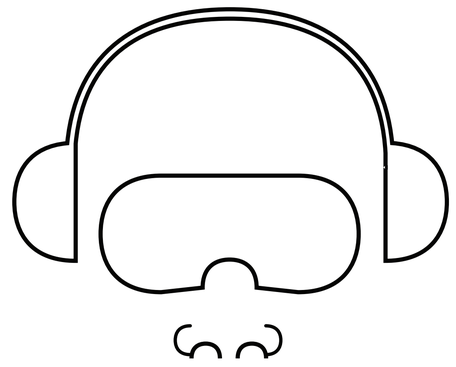

Gorgeous
Nice
Neutral
Not Nice
Disgusting

Leicester Square

I smell onions.
I like onions!! :-)

It feels bumpy on the floor with lots of hard round bumps. They're neat

It's open and airy

It smells limey, kind of sour, and it's rough under my foot

It feels rough like canvas on a fence flapping in the wind

It's really cold, it's ice cream. I think it's chocolate. That was nice!

The chair feels like a basket or a stringed instrument

I can feel glass. It's smooth, not as cold as metal and really big

The table feels like an ice skating rink

I can smell a choking smoke smell and feel uneasy in the constant crowd of strangers. I feel like I'm observing from above

The ice cream is so cold and tastes of lemon

I can feel thin wire like a railing but it's mesh

I can smell food, it's burgers or KFC. It smells of chicken

Touching the window of Burger King feels slippery. I feel unhealthy and fat just from the smell

The restaurant place smells sweet like warm summer fruits

It feels like a glass box with a phone, cable, shelf and picture

It smells of cigarettes

I can feel a square with my foot, it's hard and smooth, there's a little hole in the middle

I am aware of every step as if I am on a tight-rope walking on a slippery surface

Wow, I can feel my hair moving with the wind which is like a person caressing me coy and playful

It smells smoky and dirty

It feels windy

Smells like bananas that have gone bad

It feels prickly to touch like massage equipment. The top feels smooth like a bald patch

What is it? Will it eat me? I feel unsafe

I can smell chips and burgers

I can feel a bush, it's spiky. Oh, there's another one. Is it a hedge?

Smells sugary, oily and sensual

Too strong.
Too spicy.
Too intense.
Too close to me

I smell burgers with tomato relish and onions

I smell like a bin or a homeless person's home

It's dark, has a weird smell, spicy, boot polish or cinnamon

Smells like communal food which reminds me of my student days. Food that you can pig out on

WOW! It's really warm. Is it an air vent? It smells of flowers. I can hear a beeping noise

Warm air and paint smell hits my face as I enter the door. My foot sink into the soft carpet giving a homely feeling

I can feel cobbles

Smells of cinnamon bun while crisp, cold air is whipping my face. Now I feel warmth

The ground feels like a puzzle of building blocks

I can feel cracks in the pavement

I can feel metal, it's cold, it's hexagonal. Is it a lamp post ?

I can hear foreign languages and keep bumping into people. It feels like I am intruding

The cold has numbed my senses

It feels open and windy

I can feel the cold metal gates

It felt bobbly and big, it's a tree and I can put my arms around it

The floor feels unstable. I feel like a toddler who is taking their first steps and constantly being confronted by unexpected things

I can reach high up. It's cold and square with swirly patterns. I think it's a railing

Something swept by my left side and my hand touched something which felt harsh, metallic and strong like a leg bone

Busy with pedestrians and the smoke of cigarettes. A violin is being played in a whispery way by not using the full length of the bow

Traffic noise. The floor is bumpy and feels unstable. I feel the heat of the sun and cold icy breeze on my face

Smells fresh and feels cold

Someone brushed past me. I feel the cracks in the pavement

Smell of motorbike fumes

Ambiguous and confusing sounds. I feel like I am not in London but in an unfamiliar foreign location

Smoking - smells like my dad

Cold and windy

Smells musty and damp like a taxi. Its uninviting like a pub. Its actually a church :)

It smells of cigarettes

It smells of KFC, YUM!

It smells bad, cigarettes and bus fumes

Scaly, fractured and fragile feeling. It sounds like thunder and smells industrial. I would imagine a factory to smell like this

It's steep and smooth. It's frightening because I don't know where to step

Smells of piss here

It feels warmer as if the sun has come out

Tastes of mucky tobacco. I felt like I am suffocating in polluted air

Flapping, cooing, pigeons. I feel dirty and scared by the overwhelming noise which is like a nightmare where I am completely powerless

It sounds like birds. I can feel them flapping their wings near my face

I can smell cigarettes!

I feel like I'm taking giant steps with no energy. Playful surface, nice!

It feels like rough wood with lots of dents

It smells of gone-off cheese

I just smelt my sister's perfume

It reminds me of an African musical instrument from primary school. It feels skeletal and deformed with bits missing

I think I can smell car fumes

I can feel small squares on the pavement

It feels like a smooth pole and an upside down U-shape

Unstable and not inviting. It feels like diseased cracks in sore skin

Warm, lovely and less busy here. Feels like a living room, no traffic noise. Someone dropped a pencil which sounded like a 'D' (musical note)

There are shapes sticking out but it's quite smooth. Maybe a sewage cover

I can feel the cracks close together on the floor like small squares

I feel friction between my glove and the object. I don't want to touch it as it will leave a trace

It's smooth glass and warmer than my hand

It feels smooth, slippery and glossy. It feels protected and seductive and I want to eat it

Trafalgar Square

It feels like grass

Food smell

I can feel myself going downhill with the pull of the gravity without control. I feel like an ant. Really small in comparison to the surroundings

Fool rain

I feel scared of walking down the steps

I wouldn't want to eat it. Its very bumpy and I would be worried if this was on my skin. I feel specks of water on my face

Smells of bitter rotting food and decay. I also feel water as if a giant was spitting on me

It feels bumpy on the floor and it's windy

It feels cold, hard and bumpy and I smell chips

I feel like I am being censored. I am only being presented with little visual clues which stimulate feelings of alienation. I feel like I am living on a knife edge like an unpredictable abstract painting

Garbage or food smell

I can feel a round stone object. Is it a monument? It feels rough

I am more aware of my feet. The flooring is seductive, rough and rigid. Strangely, I feel more safe and excited here

Rain. Floor slightly dented

I can feel bumps on the floor which must be for blind people

I feel overexposed and vulnerable as if recoiling into my inner space

I feel like a small animal which can only feel the presence of others from the wind shadows of people disturbing the airflow

Smelt other people's perfume, very floral. Someone bumped into me which was a strange but nice feeling to have human contact

It feels airy and fresh

The Sensory Commons

The Westminster Sensory Deprivation Map is the result of an intensive workshop with young people organised at the National Portrait Gallery in February 2008. The participants were divided into pairs, one of whom was blindfolded and given ear defenders so that they could not see or hear. The other person was given a clipboard and pen and paper. Together the two explored the local area between Trafalgar Square and Leicester Square for up to an hour. The idea being that the blindfolded and deafened participant verbally related their sensory experience to the other person who was taking notes and making sure they were safe during the journey.

On their return the all sensory observations made during the walk were then geographically annotated where they occurred. Apart from the textual descriptions of the sensations the participants were also categorising each experience according to a scale of pleasantness. This map shows the combined annotations of all the participants and forms an alternative sensory map of Westminster.

Looking at the map it is possible to look at the different experiences in the two squares as well as the journey in between. Overall the most positive sensations were about taste and touch, while the disgusting sensation often refered to the smell of cigarette smoke. Curiously the mild sensations seem to trigger longer descriptions than the extreme points of pleasure or disgust.

In Trafalgar Square most of the experiences were negative and tended towards claustrophobia. Leicester Square in contrast, evokes much more positive sensations of food smells and touch and taste sensations.

Trafalgar Square is the most famous public space in London and yet it seemed to trigger very few positive sensations. Whats going on? One reason may be that the square is just a concrete enclosure with very few sensory stimulations.This is compounded by the restrictive local byelaws that forbid any kind of aspeeches, music or performative behaviour. In fact apart from looking at the famous surrounding there is little to do there.

Instead of public space a better metaphor might be the idea of the Sensory Commons. Historically common land gave only limited rights to random passers-by but allowed full usage rights to the local commoners. This concept of space was not a property that could be carved up or sold but existed only as communal active usage. Seen in this way we can assess certain spaces as being Sensory Commons such as parks where local people can create and receive sensory experiences for and by others. In this way we can analyse which spaces are designed to encourage this type of Sensory Commons and which spaces actively constrain people from playing, performing or assembling. Seen in this way Trafalgar Square is a very poor example of a sensorial space while Leicester Square provides a wider range of passive sensory experiences.

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The full quality PDF is available from :

www.westminster.emotionmap.net

National Portrait Gallery