

Men's perfume- Calvin Klein

Baby wipes

Petrol getting stronger



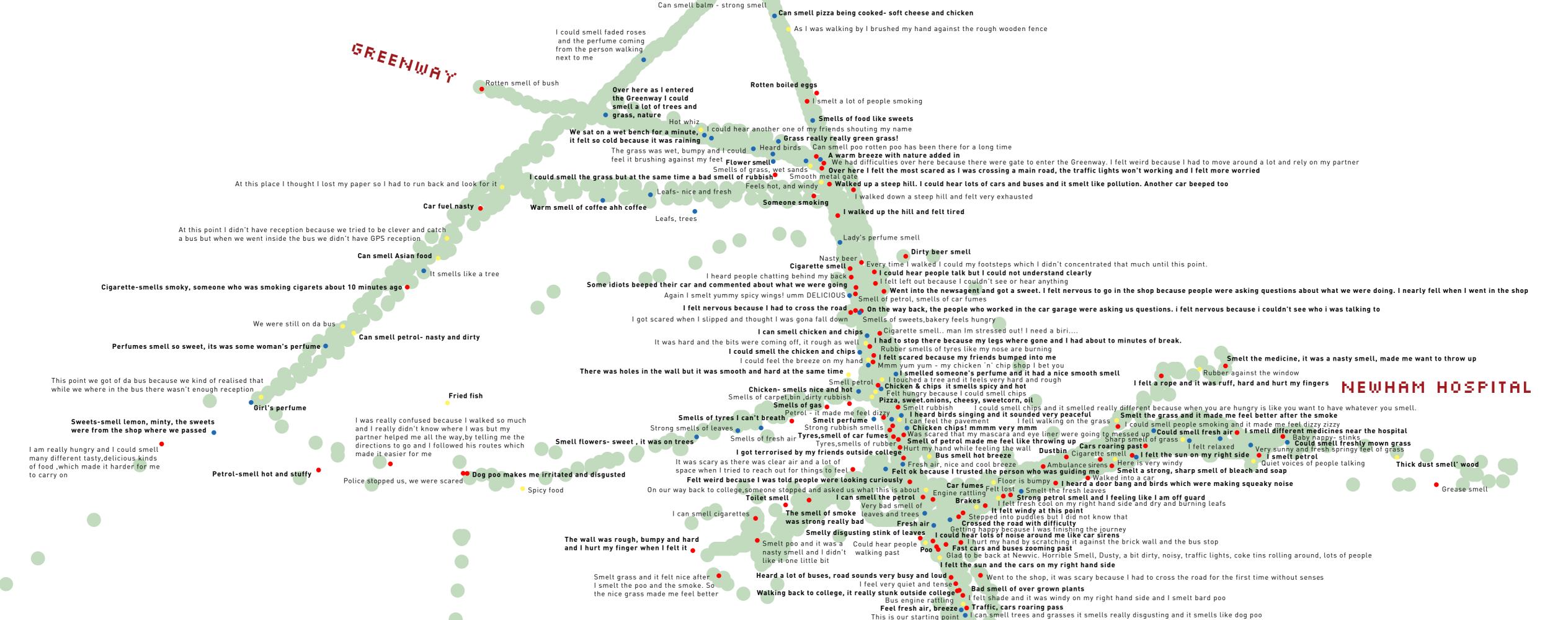
Newham Sensory Deprivation Map

by Christian Nold

Smell burnt cigarette Something getting burnt I smelt petrol and bumped into more friends. Felt awkward as Smell rubbish likes its been there for two or three weeks I was wondering who was there

heard a lot of construction work, drilling, hammering, motors and banging

Categorisation of all the participants' sensory experiences



For time reasons this is the furthest I could go before walking back to the college

Participant's walks recorded with GPS

Positive sensory experiences

Kaison makes us crazy. Hard Trees , Soft small leaves, Warm sun light, No dog poo

Feeling dizzy from the turn •

NEWHAM SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

and a bit chilly

Echoing of aeroplane engines Felt very uncomfortable near the car park because of the foam from cars Fresh in the Rain I felt the sun and it felt like paper was burning Generous Bumped into an empty phone box started getting confused where i was walking Familiar but strange Burning Tango, I touch the box Sunny Street. Warm, Feel the pavement, crackly feeling wobbly Car horn made me jump lol small leaves, hard edges, I can smell leaves, fresh smell Calm Still rain, rain it felt sparkly hard, sharp, spiralling

Starting Point It smelt very bad here as it was raining and it smelt like something died in the bushes

We crossed the road to go to the shop, I was screaming because when I had to get off the pavement I felt like I was going to fall

railings, rough tress Started to get mad feelings, start shouting, feeling hungry couldn't help it Before crossing the road, Burning, windy and weird touch the hedge, felt wet, Smell the car steam and the exhausts Scared Traffic I can smell dog-poo • Hear traffic 60t confused Step on plastic. The noise like soft glass I smell the cooking, make me feel hungry

Feel wind

Feel wind

Feel more relaxed

Bad smell

Feel lost Confused Felt weird and embarrassed

Hear voices & footsteps Make me feel hungry _ It was very quiet Painful ears, loosing my eyes I can hear my own foot steps sounds I can smell something that died in the bush Weed, petrol and cool End of Palmer road, Masud Food, normal, windy and people looking at me smells of sweets from flowers

I felt very nervous because we got lost and I couldn't see anything A girl passed us, she smelt nice so we followed her Stinky bins that smelt like a dead rat had been left in there for a long time Poo, spray, wet tree, bin man - uncomfortable

> We stopped and started talking on da phone I felt relaxed here because of the fresh air

Normally we perceive our surroundings using 5 senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, taste. What happens when we explore our environment without sight and sound?

The Newham Sensory Deprivation Map is the result of an intensive workshop with 34 students from Newham Sixth Form College in London. The students were divided into pairs, one of whom was blindfolded and given ear defenders so that they could not see or hear. The other student was given a Global Positioning System as well as pen and paper. Together the two explored the local area around the college for up to an hour. The idea being that the blindfolded and deafened student verbally relates their sensory experience to the other student who is taking notes and making sure they are safe during the journey. On their return the geographical data from the GPS is downloaded and all the sensory observations made during the walk are spatially recorded. This map here shows the combined annotations of all the students and forms an alternative sensory map of Newham.

Sensory Language

With the two primary senses of sight and sound disabled, the often neglected senses of smell, touch and taste come to the fore. Looking at the map we can see that the vast majority of the comments refer to the sense of smell. Whilst the human nose can apparently differentiate between 4,000 - 10,000 smells our verbal language for smells is very limited. The naturalist Diane Ackerman goes as far as to suggest that smell "is the mute sense, the one without words". The students had the difficult challenge to find descriptive words that capture the essence of the sensations as well as their feelings towards it.

Sensory Pollution

Examining the comments in more detail it is interesting to note how 50% of the sensory experiences were negative whilst only 28% were positive. In addition many of the negative sensations seems to be man-made. Whilst with taste and touch we can make active choices about our sensory experiences with others we are the passive recipients. For example with hearing it is hard to avoid loud noises. We have a recoginised way to measuring sound levels which allows a legal safety limit of 85dB to be set. Yet we have very few measurements for other sensory pollution. For vision there are no accepted measurements for visual pollution. Whilst some people consider graffiti to be horrible others worry more about the billboards and litter. How for example might we measure the sensory pollution caused by the animated adverts currently being introduced on the London Underground? For smell the measurement system is even more very complex and subjective. In fact most of the volatile substances that are actually harmful to our health, have no odour, so we can't detect them with our noses.

Sensory Politics

The current political language and legislation for sensory experiences of the body is very crude and unevenly focused. Whilst painfully high levels of noise seem to be permissible on the London Underground, the British police have just been given new powers to evict people from their houses in just 48 hours for causing nuisance noise. Most of the political language appears to be focused on the traditionally identifiable 'polluter' and not on systemic sensory pollution. For example, a study in the Lancet suggests that living with the air pollution and passive smoking in cities cuts life expectancy by more than the radiation exposure of emergency workers sent into the 19 mile exclusion zone around Chernobyl.

A very extreme example of our lack of sensory choice are the bizarre sensory torture techniques being employed in Guantanamo and Abu Graib. Detainees are restrained and forced to endure loud music at unbearable levels. This is interspersed with detainees being deprived of all sensory experiences. This technique first developed by a Dr. Hebb in 1953 involved taking people and placing them in comfortable air-conditioned cubicles whilst making them wear goggles, gloves and ear muffs. After 24 hours these participants started having hallucinations and after 48 hours suffered a complete personality breakdown.

These examples imply that the enforced removal of bodily sensations can be as physiologically damaging as the enforced exposure. This suggest a space for a body-centred politics that advocates the human right to sensory choice for our own bodies. This 'Sensory Politics' starts from the subjective basis that each person experiences stimuli very differently, and thus claims an absolute right for people to modulate their own sensory microcosm.

Christian Nold, 2007

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