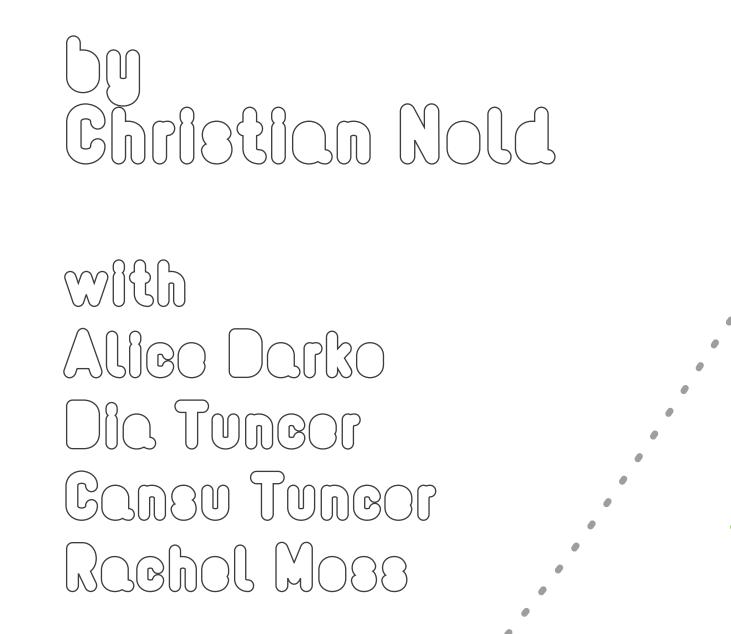
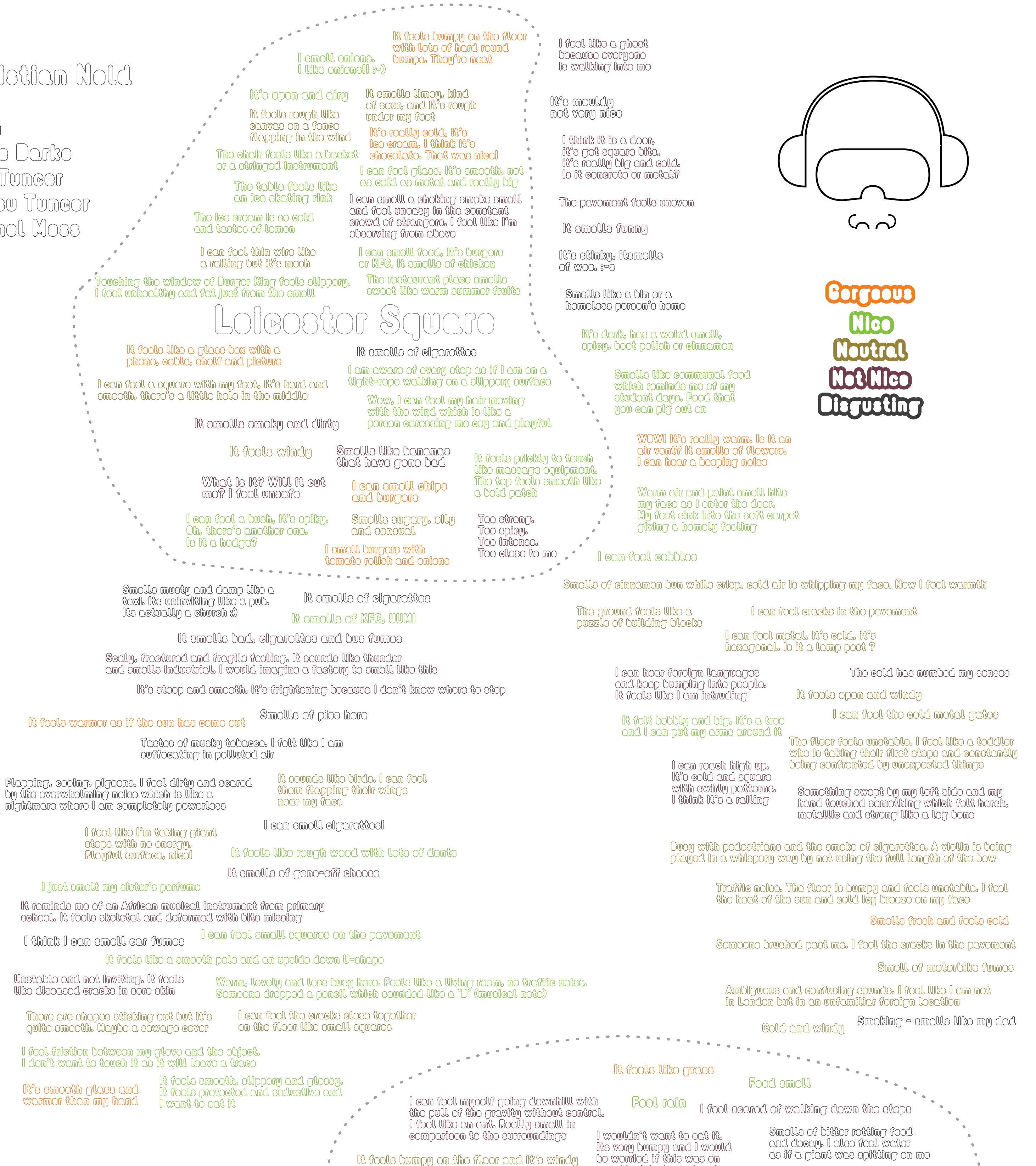
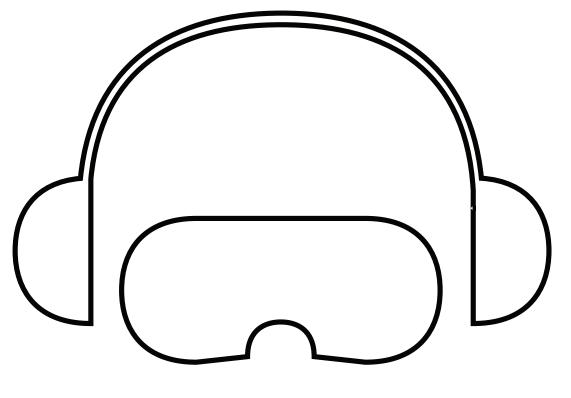
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The Sensory Commons

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.

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 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 Licence: aspeeches, music or performative behaviour. In fact apart from looking at the famous

Looking at the map it is possible to look at the

taste sensations.

surrounding there is little to do there.

different experiences in the two squares as well

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. The Westminster Sensory Deprivation Map has been released under a Creative Commons

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www.westminster.emotionmap.net

my skin. I fool spocks of I fool like I am being consored. wator on my faco It fools cold, hard and I am only boing prosontod with littlo visual cluos which stimulato bumpy and I smoll chips Barbago or food smoll foolings of alionation. I fool liko l am living on a knifo odgo liko an unprodictablo abstract painting Rain. Floor slightly dontod I am moro awaro of my fool. l can fool a round stono object. Is it a monument? It fools rough The flooring is seductive, rough and rigid. Strangoly, I fool I can fool bumps on tho floor moro safo and oxcitod horo which must be for blind people I fool ovoroxposod and vulnorablo I fool liko a small animal which can as if rocoiling into my innor space only fool the presence of others from the wind shadows of poople disturbing Smolt othor pooplo's porfumo, vory floral. tho airflow Someone pumped into me which was a strange but nico fooling to have human contact It fools airy and frosh National Portrait

Gallery