

Maps as Media #12: Sensory / Affective Mapping Lab



Your charge: The New School has commissioned a spatial audit team — i.e., your group — to assess whether various parts of campus are welcoming to the sensorially hyper-sensitive: people with hyperacusis (increased sensitivity to particular frequencies and volume ranges of sound), those for whom bright colors or patterns might trigger panic or migraines, those for whom particular upholstery or carpet textures might feel uncomfortable against their skin or impede mobility (my 96-year-old grandmother, for

instance, has trouble moving with her walker on high-pile carpet). [img: Kate McLean]

We'd like you to choose **two or three sensorially rich areas** in the New School buildings clustered at 13th Street and 5th Ave — perhaps the cafeteria and library in the UC, the Making Center on the second floor at 66 5th Ave., or some other site of your choosing.

You might imagine you're conducting this tour *alongside* individuals possessing these sensory sensitivities, or you could simply serve as their advocates, their proxies.

Note which areas are likely to be inviting or alienating, stressful or calming, energizing or overwhelming, etc., for individuals with hyper-acute vision, hearing, touch, olfaction, thermoception (sensitivity to temperature), proprioception (kinesthetic sense), or equilibrioception (balance).

You might consider:

- the congestion of pathways
- the “character” of various nodes, as signaled through sensory cues
- the clarity of edges and zones, as signaled through the senses
- lighting quality
- color and visual pattern
- the textures of flooring, wall treatments, seating, work surfaces, and haptic markers of transition zones
- the noises emanating from the HVAC system, kitchen equipment, tools, voices, etc.
- the smells emanating from the kitchen, woodshed, or other spaces

Think, too, about how you might synesthetically evoke particular sensory experiences that don't readily lend themselves to representation via haptic (visual and tactile) media.