Commentary by The Holy Biscuit

In en_counter, we are invited to explore the hidden and unseem: the lost and the found; the familiar and the obscure; the personal and the communal. In these intimate maps, videos and installations, we are confronted with comments and critiques of how we view our city and our community. We are invited to enter into a dialogue with the participants of en_counter and to ask how the city might be viewed by people in our communities who often don’t have a say in how the city is portrayed and how it is talked about, as well as adding our own voices and experiences to create new maps during the exhibition. Whether from the perspective of homeless people, students, young people or skateboarders we are invited to ask questions of the place we are a part of and how we can build a future together.

Over the past year, The Holy Biscuit has been exploring its values as an organisation in an urban environment. We’ve considered what it might mean to be a community which is committed to hospitality and open to all. We’ve explored the tensions of fragility, incompleteness and contradiction and the possibility of hope, truth and faith in an often fractured and unjust world.

In this exhibition we see truth and faith being explored through the process of mapping our physical and emotional geographies. In the work we are invited to go on a journey with the participants to explore their personal stories, experiences and circumstances. We are also reminded of our own internal maps and our sense of self and of our self in relation to others and perhaps to God.

In these maps there is also a sense that we are all on a journey. We are all seeking out some kind of purpose and looking for direction and guidance about how we might (or might not) live our lives. In recent years, we have seen a resurgence of pilgrimage in society as people seek to journey to places which have gained emotional or spiritual importance either for them personally or for their communities. Pilgrimage is about remembering what has come before and seeking to be transformed by that remembrance in the present and for the future.

What might it mean to be on pilgrimage in your own city? How might we retrace the steps of others and seek significance in their stories and journeys? What do we miss when we are going about our daily life? How do we mark sights and moments of loss and celebration? And how might we do these things together with others - discovering (or rediscovering) who we are and who we’d like to be?

This exhibition also raises questions of what we might put our faith in. Should we place all of our faith and trust in the city branders and town planners and their version of Newcastle? Should we trust Google to be the source of all our knowledge? Or should we seek to put our faith in something else, something more substantial? Moreover, should we seek out alternatives, interpretations and stories, perhaps ones which have been sidelined, ignored or discarded by society? In Liberation Theology, a movement which originated in Latin America in the 1950s, there was a move to read and interpret the Bible and Jesus’ teachings from the perspective and lived experience of the poor and marginalised and to critique the structures of power in society from below rather than from above.

It was a move, mainly by priests, to build communities where every person might be able to live with dignity, to be agents of their own destiny and as Jesus said, “to have life in all its fullness”.

This exhibition is an invitation to encounter our city in a new way; to perceive it through the eyes of others, who may not usually be given the platform to influence how we view our environment or experience our communal spaces. We hope this stimulates questions and reflections on your own experience of the city and of the accepted public narratives around our perceptions of space and meaning and power.

Take part with games and participatory mappings in the Activities Room

* NewcastleGateshead?* by Ben Jones, pupils of Walker Technology College and The Late Shows visitors...

You are invited to reflect on the tensions and misconceptions that colour the views we have of each other on either side of the Tyne...

* Secrets* by The Late Shows visitors...

Share a secret about a part of the city and then tweet what others have written. Let’s reveal a hidden city!

* Heat Map*

The Holy Biscuit would like to know where you find faith, solace, memory and pilgrimage in the city...

* Dungeons and Shopping Malls* by Mike Jeffries

A mysterious map beckons you, irresistibly, to a vast entrance. Somewhere in this cavernous temple are clothes, food, fancy goods and tech. But dare you go in? All you ever wanted is here but beware the monsters: “Customer announcement, undead ahead.” What are you waiting for, you’ve got the map...

...and back by popular demand, the “Toon Nights” board game also returns to The Holy Biscuit...

What next?

Juice Festival 2016

For the 2016 Juice Festival in October we’re planning to produce an atlas of maps about, for and by young people. It will form part of a young person’s manifesto for the city, a series of statements on how people under 24 understand NewcastleGateshead.

Getting Involved and More Information

If you want to get involved there are a number of ways you can do so. First check out our blog for more details of what we’ve been up to:

https://accidentalyouthclub.wordpress.com/juice/

If you want to be send details of the resources packs, email jon.swords@northumbria.ac.uk and we’ll keep you updated.

We have secured funding from Northumbria University’s Widening Participation fund to pay for artists to run mapping workshops in schools and youth groups. The maps from these workshops reveal hidden worlds and perspectives on the city, and have prompted the artistic responses which form this exhibition.

The academic team have collaborated with artists Christine Egan-Fowler, Ben Jones, Jessica Dolby and Adam Goodwin to provide mapping workshops in schools and youth groups. The maps from these workshops reveal hidden worlds and perspectives on the city, and have prompted the artistic responses which form this exhibition.
This piece places counter in the wider context of recent exhibitions using maps as their surface slick enough to slide over. The residual wax leaves evidence of the hidden amenity in the object - the alternative functions - of this kerb, this bench, or that handrail, which can be read by other skate-boarders. Lynn encourages the participants to use the wax to highlight aspects of their environment they perceive as having alternative, potential use-values. By drawing attention to the unconscious markings left by skateboarders, participants gain a different understanding of the objects and materials by which we are surrounded.

Sounding Off

Sounding Off is an interactive sound-walk curated by Oliver Moss and Adele Irving (2015) The studentville map is compiled from 27 individual maps made by final year geography students at Northumbria University. It captures the intense buzz of student life, swirling around the black hole of the library. The students' experiences of Newcastle are intense but not without their moments of – homelessness, as well as their experiences and concerns as to how this impacts their pathways into – and, in some cases, out of – homelessness, as well as their experiences and concerns as to how this impacts their pathways into – and, in some cases, out of – homelessness.

Spaces of Homelessness

Produced for the ESRC Festival of Social Science 2014: “Imaging Homelessness in a City of Care”, Lovely Jojo’s mapping brings together the life-histories of 30 homeless people who participated in a project led by Adele Irving and Oliver Moss in the Department of Social Sciences and Languages at Northumbria University. The work seeks to highlight the spaces, places and experiences of homelessness and to give a greater voice to the homeless population, still largely marginalised from mainstream decision-making processes.

Studentville

The studentville map is compiled from 27 individual maps made by final year geography students at Northumbria University. It captures the intense buzz of student life, swirling around the black hole of the library. The students' experiences of Newcastle are intense but not without their moments of – homelessness, as well as their experiences and concerns as to how this impacts their pathways into – and, in some cases, out of – homelessness.

The Outskirts of Newcastle

This work explores where the city ends in a hinterland of lay-bys, out of town outlets and new build. The promise of bright futures cuts out new territory, enclaves reclaiming the countryside from the unfamiliar and dangerous. There is no signal. Newcastle has barely begun to expand from the citadel hunkered down along the Tyne but between the great wastes of the uplands and the city's control lies a wilderness ready to be conquered. This map records the limits of our knowledge, hanging on the baton to future generations.

You Are Here

Exhibition entitled 'You Are Here'. The exhibition aimed to map the psychogeography and emotional terrain of New York City with a variety of pieces curated by Katherine Harmon. The art included Anxiety Map by Daniela Kostova, which showed unemployment rates in lights powered by sweat-powered batteries. In addition, The Loneliness Map by Ingrid Burrington was also displayed - a piece that mapped out the missed connections of lonely individuals in the city.

Acknowledgments and Thanks

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