



Mapping the Chewing Gum  
Black and white photographs pasted over colour pencil drawing.  
105 x 105 cm  
2013

### **Mapping the Chewing gum** By Julio Pastor

I recently found these paving stones as I was exiting the train station of Groningen. What makes them special is the fact that they are covered in chewing gum spots that increase in density, as they get closer to the drain in the centre.

I don't really understand why is it that these paving stones get stained with bubble gum while others don't. I imagine it is related to the fact that the people who are walking around there are commonly in a rush because their trains or buses are about to leave, they don't want to miss them and they can't bother to find a trashcan where to properly dispose it.

But then, why do these people want to get rid of their gum before stepping into the train or bus?

**a) Coffee vs. Chewing Gum**

Maybe it is because many like to start their journeys with a cup of coffee, but chewing gum and coffee don't go well together.

**b) Good Manners**

Or perhaps, as Docus Van Der Made suggested, it is social conventions what prompts these people to get rid of their gum before they step in a train. Considering that the proximity of people increases in a closed space as a train, perhaps this makes “chewers” want to dispose their gum instead of receiving unwelcoming posh looks from strangers when munching it a few meters away from them.

If this is the case, then I wonder how the chewer would feel when confronted with the reaction of a passer by who sees him spitting the gum as he walks over the drain.

**c) Lack of a proper chewing gum disposal device in the train**

Trains do have trashcans. There's a tiny box in front of every seat where you have to squeeze a can in order to fit it in. But no one likes to open it and find a chewing gum stuck to it. It can be as nauseating as finding a wart when undressing your lover.

So perhaps it is in consideration of the people who will be travelling in the train after them, that the chewers decide to throw it in the drain, before they have no other chance but to pollute the purity of the trashcan in the train.

**d) The flavour of a chewing gum does not last for hours** (Regardless of what advertisements tell us.)

Perhaps my assumption was wrong from the start. Maybe the hypothetical chewer hopped in the train in The Hague. Perhaps he started chewing on his gum in the same moment the train left the station. Five minutes later he realized his candy was losing its flavour but didn't feel like placing it in the trashcan for the same reason discussed in option c). He therefore, had no other option but to keep on chewing a tasteless viscous plastic for hours. By the time he gets to Groningen (2 hours and 35 minutes later) he can't spend one more minute with this thing in his mouth and has to spit it in the first drain he sees.

**e) The Game**

Could it be that the chewers are just having fun, playing some sort of game?

Allow me to explain:

In his work *This way Brouwn*, the artist Stanley Brouwn asked a number of strangers to draw him maps that would guide him to a particular place. The collection of drawings is interesting because they show the different

interpretations that people have of a place. Things like distances or references are shown from a personal perspective.

However, if one would want to make a single map that could be useful for a large amount of people, a photograph could be a useful tool. The camera is a machine that, when used properly, can reduce the amount of inconsistencies present in a hand drawn map. It is because of this that cartographers have been using satellite images to make maps that depict an area (as seen from above) in a more proportional way.

When I was asked to write an article for an art magazine whose number was to be dedicated to maps, I thought about discussing these series of photographs because my aim with them was to show the spatial arrangement of the spots of gum.

Although I am more experienced in mediums such as drawing, print making or painting, for this particular project I chose to include the photographs because I was trying to convey reality as faithfully as possible. But, reality is something that can never be captured precisely. It is something that will always lie beyond human reach. The appearance of something, in the other hand, is something that a camera can prove to be useful in capturing.

Sometimes, however, the appearance of something is not enough. Occasionally, when we create images, we want something that can help us see beyond appearances. That is where the real value of a map can be found: in its diagrammatic representation of a space.

My aim with the drawing over which the photographs were pasted has to do with this diagrammatic representation of a space. It involves taking the process of mapping into a further stage. If countries in a world map are represented in different colours that do not match reality, perhaps a bull's eye could work as a map for the distribution of the chewing gum spots.

Perhaps the hypothetical chewer scored 100 when he finally managed to get his gum inside the drain.

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