

Cultral Probes

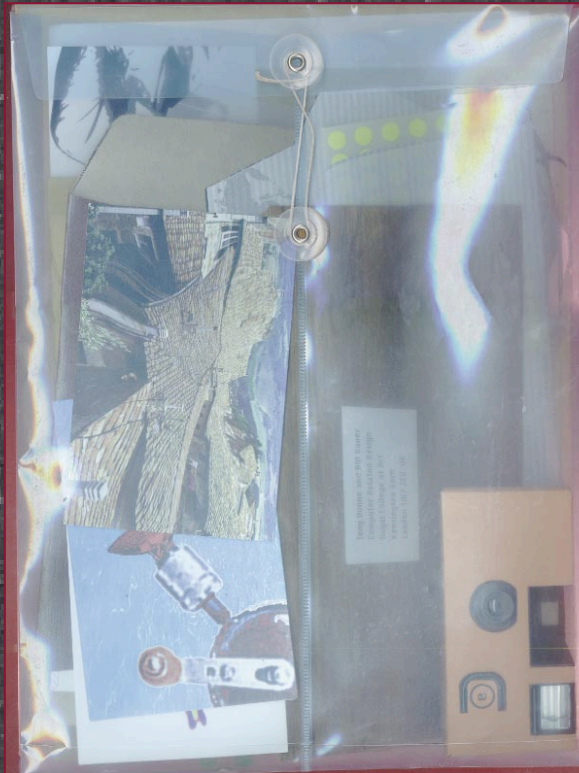
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So what is a cultural probe?

It's all about the response.



Cultural Probes allow you to get inside the mind of a person. What they are thinking, what they are doing, what they are feeling.

Through cultural probing, this article looks at the response of elders from the cities of Bijlmer, Oslo, and Peccioli.

“The probes were part of *a strategy* of pursuing experimental design in a *responsive way*.
They address a *common dilemma* in developing project for *unfamiliar groups*.”

In the case of this article:

Packages of maps, postcards, camera, photo album and a media diary designed to provoke inspirational responses from elderly people in diverse communities.

Context



The project itself was very free and open.

The diversity of the given sites was of essential importance.

“The sites themselves constrain the sort of design explorations that might be meaningful...Our task was to better understand their particularities.”

Artist-Designers Approach

Don't emphasis precise analyses or controlled methodologies

It's not about commercial products.

Aesthetic control matters.

Think about the cultural implications of your design.

Explore ways to open new spaces for design.

It's about new understandings of technology.

“We work to provide opportunities
to discover new pleasures, new
forms of sociability, and new
cultural forms.”

Be **inspired**.

Don't be a doctor.

Don't be a servant.

Be a provocateur.

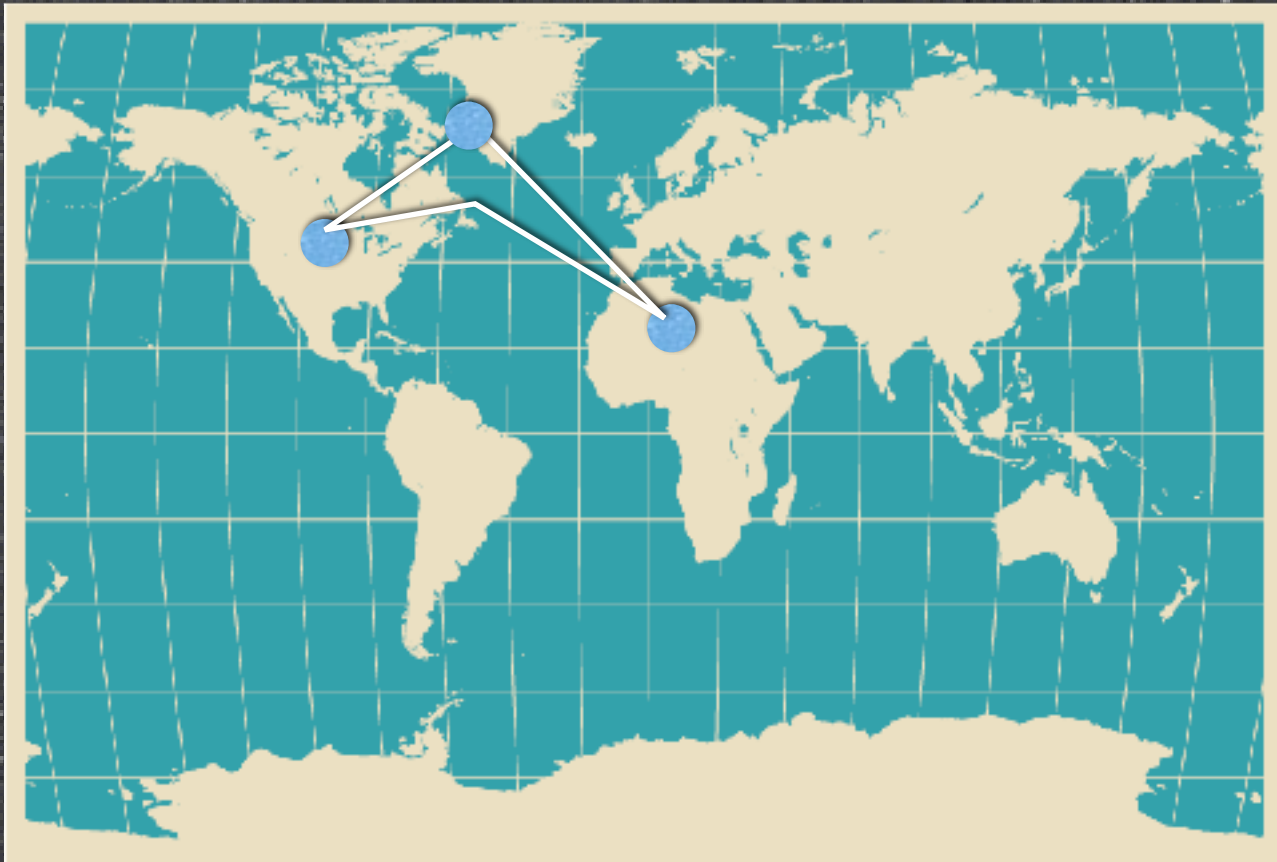
“a person who provokes trouble, causes dissension, or
the like; agitator.”

...in the good sense of course.

Seriously though, it's important to remember that it's about the **inspiration** and not the information.

Problems you may encounter

- Geographic distance
- Cultural distance



How to get remedy those problems:

- Design materials to be posted separately to acknowledge your distance and your ongoing lives
- Try making the materials as visual as possible to bypass language barriers.



Homo Ludens

Humanity as defined by it's playful qualities.

Functional Aesthetics

Aesthetics as a part of functionality + pleasure = a design = efficiency or usability

Bottom Line: Don't work on aesthetics for appeal or motivation.

What functional aesthetics did for them (the real purpose of it)

- Lack of professional finish gave the materials an informal feeling so they weren't really seen as official forms or of commercial marketing
- Still showed the energy put into the materials.
- Expressed their tastes and interest to the groups of elders.
- Reduced the distance between the designers and groups.
- Through images, materials, and requests they tried revealing themselves to the groups and the groups revealing themselves in return.



Because of this the probes were enjoyable and communicative. Gave insight as to what the elders might expect from the designs.

Different art movements influenced their design.

Specifically their conceptual concerns and techniques.

Examples: Dada, Surrealists

It informed their designs. More importantly, the designers hoped it would cause the elders to think differently of their environment differently.

Launching the probes

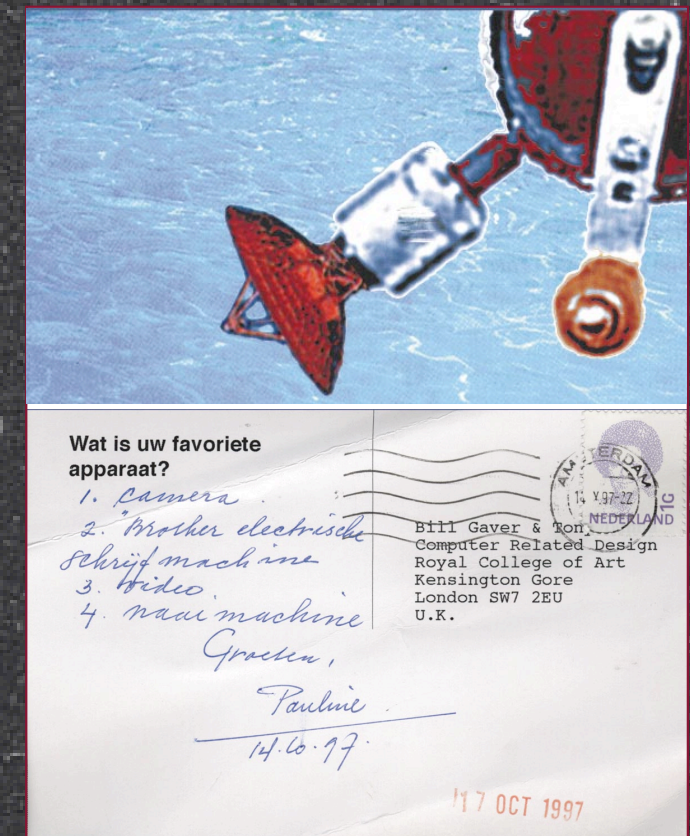
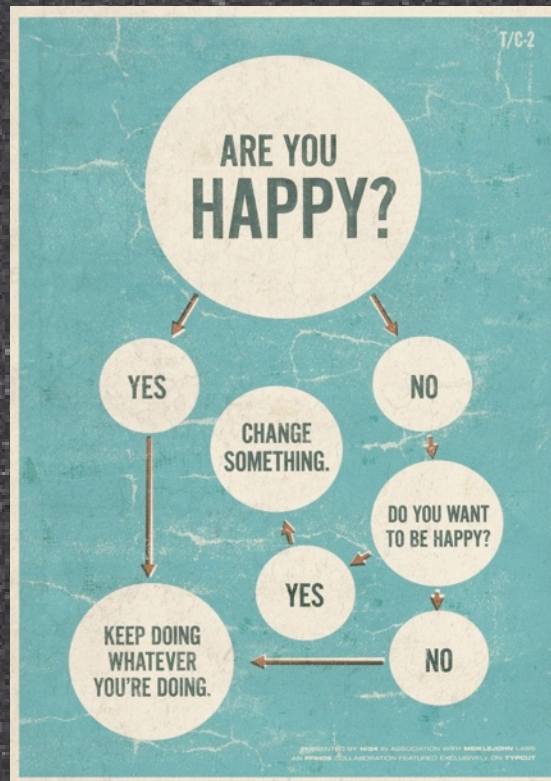
Done through a series of meetings.

Presented the packages in person.

Returned Items

Some items left blank or included notes.

Captured “particular facets” of the different cultures.



Items with a long return time represented that elders were enjoying every day life.

Design proposals

Acted as a reflection of what they learned from the materials.

	Bijlmer	Oslo	Peccioli
<i>What the found:</i>	Ideas responded to a paradox of strong community in a dangerous area	Elders are affluent, educated and enthusiastic	Elders enjoy a relaxed social life in a beautiful setting.
<i>What they proposed:</i>	Build network of displays for elders to better communicate their values and attitudes about the culture.	Lead a community-wide conversation about social issues. Publish questions for social	Amplify their pleasure by creating social and pastoral landscapes. This allows them to create flexible communications networks and listen to the sounds of surrounding country side.

“The best evidence the returns from the probes spurred valuable insights into the local cultures was that the elders clearly recognized themselves in the proposals.”

User-Centered Inspiration



Made the designers familiarize themselves with the sites.

Elders provided them with a rich source of material inspiration



Through probing they had on-going conversation with the elders through the project.

Strengths of Cultural Probing

Through probing they had on-going conversation with the elders through the project.

Caused groups to think about their roles and the pleasures they experience, suggesting new roles and experiences.

“The real strength of the method was that we had designed and produced the materials specifically for this project, for those people and for their environment.”