

I hate robots

....but I | ITP

« [A quick note on a recent event that I find very telling as to the state of this country's views on law enforcement 6 years after 9/11.](#)
[I heart Tumblr!](#) »

Amsterdam & Picnic '07

So I'm in Amsterdam at this festival called [Picnic](#). It is very corporate and very heavily-sponsored...but also incredibly well-organized and just, well, beautiful! As far as conferences go. There was definitely some extra effort put into making sure the food is good, the setting is lovely, the tech is there...all the extras. Here I am sounding like a petty American wondering how much money they put into this thing and why, then, is it so damned expensive to go. (About 1,000 Euros for the whole 4 days!) Of course it doesn't matter...it's lovely nonetheless. And, while one of the stipulations of tagging along with Josh for free is that I only had an attendee pass for one day, I still got to see a few things. Here they are, and then I'm off to attend the rest of the [Come Out and Play](#) Festival, where Josh is presenting his [phone-to-screen video game](#).

It was a slow morning, and we got here late, meaning that I didn't so much "see" the first two presentations as I "overheard" them while doing my first email check of about two days (the internet has been flaking out in our apartment, and Amsterdam coffeeshops aren't exactly known for their WIFI). But I did find myself perking up a bit for [Christian Nold's](#) presentation on participatory mapping, a concept that I find pretty interesting, Nold's [emotion maps of Stockport](#) were not so much about mapping physical structures as they were about mapping emotional responses to given locations, something that, he seems to hold forth, should be taken into consideration when building new architecture. As you can imagine, it's not anything terribly scientific, but it is telling. I really enjoyed the pictures that his subjects, mostly teenagers, drew of their surroundings - they aren't great art or anything, but you can't help but imagine that they are genuine. My first criticism of the project was determining whether asking someone to become hyper-aware of their surroundings doesn't totally skew their opinions. Typical Christin, I know. But, looking at the actual maps, it occurred to me that these kids had been living in these towns all their lives, and that these reactions were not just a result of being asked for them. They were solid and pre-meditated, and I had to wonder how validating it must feel to be asked to put onto paper the random thoughts about a place that enter your mind involuntarily when you walk through it everyday. These are thoughts that one generally keeps to oneself. The whole thing brought back to mind a project I was considering once, which involved meta-mapping personal experiences onto a real-world map, sort of creating a map out of your own experiences, your own names for things - all fantasy but also rooted in fact and totally navigable in the real world. I love the idea of your own personal world floating above a real city, and being able to share that world with others.

Next up was a guy from [Blast Theory](#) who talked about urban gaming, specifically, his game "[Can You See Me Now](#)" which is currently being played in the CO&P tent just across the park from the cafe where I'm sitting. I zoned in and out of his talk a lot (so many RSS feeds gone unread these past few days!) but a couple of things caught me which I know I'll be thinking about for the rest of the weekend. 1) Do all games have to be fun? and 2) Is it right for urban games to incorporate innocent bystanders? A comment about how the Dutch are culturally united against closing their curtains, even at night, sparked this one, and I could understand his temptation to use this social feature in his game design, even while I found it totally indecent and irresponsible. Regardless, there is a danger in saying that all urban games SHOULD incorporate some aspect(s) of their cultural surroundings. It goes without saying that in doing so, a game designer severely limits the portability of his game. And I suppose that this was his point - that big game designers are having to make these kinds of trade-offs and decisions while they attempt to discover where there art (or design, or technology, or whatever you want to call it) fits into our historical, cultural perspectives on play. (After watching a dozen twenty somethings roll around in the mud dressed like bunnies and tigers, I can't help but think that it's all just some fad of the Wes Anderson/Peter Pan generation we gen-Xers have turned out to be. What ever happened to "being cool?")

[Ben Cerveny](#) gave an excellent talk which I don't feel entirely licensed to summarize here. There was just too much to think about! But the crux of it was something we've been hearing more and more about recently — how to use gaming elements to improve user interface experience in computing. "Games," he said (and I'm totally paraphrasing here) "are how we learn to test the limits between ourselves and the physical world around us" his enduring example of this being kittens at play. ([Awww...](#)) But more than just pose the same question that all interaction designers have already been thinking about, he got beyond the general postulating about games and interactivity, mentioning the Dutch architect Van Ijk, whose preoccupation with the spaces between physical nodes (very Jane Jacobs when she talks about the importance of sidewalks) could be compared to the way an interactive designer has to think about not just what the user sees when a task has been completed, but what they experience along the way. It's about designing those spaces which were earlier seen as undesigned, to create a total experience. (I'm suddenly reminded of my music mentor's analogies of music to architecture, calling musical phrases the arches and their resolutions the pillars. You need the pillars to keep the damn thing up, but that's hardly the most interesting part.)

Last, I was disappointed to see that [Stefana Broadbent](#), whose research (what little of it I could find, anyway) was pivotal to the early stages of my thesis project last year, didn't make it to the conference for her scheduled talk. Actually, I'm not sure what the story on this is except that her name was in the program, yet she did not present. Maybe I will catch her some other time! (Updte: Damn! It looks like [she did present afterall.](#))

Well, that's a whole lot of post for so little conference! Amsterdam has been absolutely wonderful, our apartment in De Pijp is gorgeous (right on Albert Cuyp market), we finally got to experience real, old-fashioned Dutch food (thanks to Josh's friend Marc, a Delft student who he met at the Microsoft Design Expo competition last year), and I am so lucky to have had the chance to come here for the first time! (Pictures coming soon...)

PS: Dutch men are very nice. The cheese is sharp and crunchy and amazing. Everyone here speaks perfect English. The weather sucks. There's nothing good on tv. Ever.

PPS: Untranslatable English phrases that pop up in Dutch conversations include: "Fuck it" and "Google it."

PPPS: [Hamsterdam](#). Huh.

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