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A Field Guide to Ethnographic Experiential Futures

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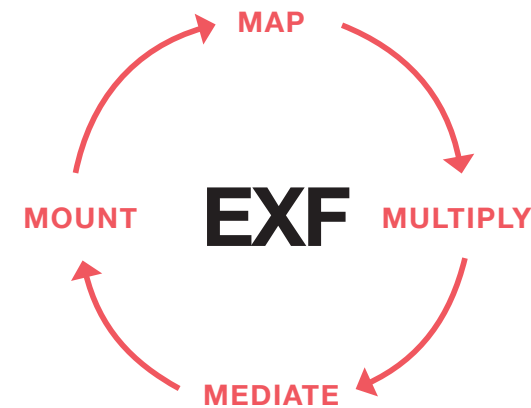
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A Field Guide by Stuart Candy and Kelly Kornet

ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPERIENTIAL FUTURES

MATERIALS NEEDED

- An individual, group or culture whose images of the future you are interested in understanding, surfacing and deepening.
- Media for the creation of rapid and/or high-fidelity prototypes.
- This may be 2D (video; animation; digital images; print matter; even pen and paper), 3D (basic construction materials; found products/objects to hack), or 4D (live performance).



Ethnographic Experiential Futures is a design-driven, hybrid approach to foresight aimed at increasing the accessibility, variety and depth of available images of the future.

INSTRUCTIONS

1

MAP: Inquire into and record people's actual or existing images of the future (e.g. possible; probable; preferred; a combination)

- Choose an individual or group to work with: scale could vary from personal (e.g. Greyson, Making the Futures Present) to large groups such as a neighbourhood (e.g. Candy & Dunagan, Foundfutures Chinatown), company, or country.
- Select a suitable time horizon for inquiry (between, say, 10-50 years).
- Images of the future may be elicited via formal and face-to-face processes such as Textor's Ethnographic Futures Research interviews (e.g. Kornet, Causing an Effect).
- Alternatively, less formal processes could be used, such as unstructured interviews (e.g. Foundfutures) or direct observation (at a corporate strategy conference for instance).

2

MULTIPLY: Generate alternative images (scenarios) to challenge or extend existing thinking (optional step, but recommended)

- Here you may choose to diversify the researched images of the future through generating alternatives, such as by complementing the usual EFR categories by adding 'unexpected' on top of 'expected' (e.g. Making the Futures Present).
- This might be done in collaboration with the research subjects or by the futurist/researcher herself.
- Omit if primary research goal is to deepen existing futures (e.g. Causing an Effect) or if diversity of original inputs meets requirements (e.g. Situation Lab/Extrapolation Factory, 1-888-FUTURES).

3

MEDIATE: Translate these ideas about the future/s into experiences: tangible, immersive, visual or interactive representations

- This step is about moving from vague ideas about the future to more specific ones. You could use a tool such as the Experiential Futures Ladder to get from a Setting (scenario concept) to a Scenario (particular hypothetical), and onward to ideas for 1:1-scale Situations or Stuff (artifacts).
- You may opt to serve as a 'facilitator' such that participants produce their own materials (e.g. 1-888-FUTURES).
- Or, you may serve as a 'designer' and do the translating yourself (e.g. Causing an Effect; Foundfutures).
- A hybrid approach is also available; co-creating artifacts or prototypes with the participant/s (e.g. Making the Futures Present).

4

MOUNT: Stage experiential scenario/s to encounter for the original subject/s, or others (or both)

- In steps 3 and 4, for impact consider diegetic integrity (realism and polish in the finished product; fidelity to the hypothetical): how would this thing/scene really look and feel if this future were happening?
- The experiential scenario/s may be shared in a relatively scripted environment like a public exhibition (e.g. Causing an Effect) or a workshop (e.g. Making the Futures Present).
- Alternatively, the encounter could be staged on an unsolicited basis, such as a 'guerrilla futures' installation in a city street (e.g. Foundfutures).
- Mixed contexts of encounter are also possible, such as the posting of future artifacts in the mail or online (e.g. 1-888-FUTURES).

5

MAP: Inquire into and record responses to the experiential scenario/s

- This iteration of the mapping stage completes a cycle. It is not identical to the first mapping task, as this time you are recording responses and reactions to design outcomes that you have shaped, rather than just describing what is found.
- A formal version of this process might involve interviewing the people whose images were mapped originally (e.g. Causing an Effect; Making the Futures Present).
- A more informal process could use something like direct observation of people encountering the experiential scenarios (e.g. Foundfutures), or online conversations and responses.
- You could continue the process again from here, or even institutionalise it as ongoing.