peephole

A voyeuristic approach to human impulses

New Media project by Bike Kefeli

REVISED PROJECT PROPOSAL

_Project Definition

Peep Hole is an interactive installation trying to create a certain amount of curiosity on people in order to direct them to an action where they will try to find out an event that is actually hidden from his/her view. Peep Hole is a new media project to show constant change of power and annoyance of being watched by an unrelated subject.

_Conceptual Description

Peep Hole is a project takes its root from the concept of Voyeurism and Gazing. Voyeurism is a psychosexual disorder in which a person derives pleasure and gratification from looking at people indiscreet or observing the psychosexual acts. The voyeur is usually hidden from view of others. Voyeurism is not only a psychosexual phenomenon consisting of an action, and a pre-defined, solid roles for the viewer and the viewed one but those roles are interchangeable and reversible. Gazing the unconsented one is alluring yet its an egocentric urge that denies the fact of being gazed can be the most disturbing action in return. The viewer never totally admits that those social roles and positions are reversible without announcing in advance and how disturbing the gaze may become. So, the viewer can easily change the position with the viewed one without even being noticed and this phenomenon can be referred as a sort of vicious cycle. I will try to emphasise the ambiguous annoyance behind the term itself.

Although the base of Voyeurism grounds on Freudian psychosexual theories, the word derived with the appearance of modernity and evolved in time to have a new connotation. It is not only a way of observing the sexuality of others in discreet but to gaze surrounding in general without the consent of the viewed ones.
The gaze for Lacan is an object desire. It is in his seminary on four fundamental concept of the psychoanalysis, that Lacan develops the question, by differentiating the eye and the gaze, the schize of the subject being between these two terms. So for the author, for the gaze, he claims "there is not only the eye, but complete intentionality.

With this intentionality, in the term "mirror stage" defined by Lacan, the ego develops, therefore with seeing, "gazing" to his/her own reflection on the mirror, identification of the child begins to form. So, gazing connects with formation of self and the act of being gazed can actually lead to an imaginary intrusion to the self.

In his book Surveillance and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison, Foucault talks about the structure of prisons created by the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham: Panoptic structure of prisons are consequently constructed according to circular plans allowing the supervisor located in a central tower to observe without ever being seen, the silhouettes of the prisoners breaking loose in backlighting on outside windows via other windows overlooking an inner courtyard. This implement

has to create a feeling of invisible omniscience towards the prisoners. It allows going with the supervision, the only feeling of being noticed likely to acquire a form of obedience from captives. So, besides not being costly from an economic point of view, the modern prison is a concept of feeling of guilt driving individual consciences towards an all-powerful look from other.

The concept of prison, therefore, expands the gazing factor to a new level. It gives the viewer the omnipotent position where the viewed one become the passive object and the viewer holds all the power.

Another aspect to "voyeurism" issue can lead to the other states such as "forbidden" and "shame". People tend to look what they think are contradictory to what is considered as moral, this is why when gazing happens, it's a secret action. You hide what you are doing and if by any chance you get caught, you just deny the fact that you are watching someone on their intimate business. There comes "the shame". Sexuality is a ever-accepted taboo to many eastern societies including Turkey, what is happening between a couple is their own business and shouldn't be intruded by any means. Yet it doesn't prevent the fact of tendency toward to know what is hidden from our view but actually face the viewer to his/her actions.

In "Peep Hole" I'm trying to give all these aspects of "voyeurism" but mainly focus on the unbalance between the viewer/the viewed. Also, I'm aiming to increase the feeling of molestation to privacy and its easiness. While creating an interactive installation, the participants will question the notions of shame, intimacy, privacy and forbidden, and hopefully will feel powerless and naked in the end.

_Target audience/user

Everyone who has a blog, a Facebook/Twitter account, who can't control himself/herself from commenting on others live, open duplicate Facebook accounts, watch Big Brother over and over again, or even everyone although they don't relate to anything technologic, but who slows down his/her car when an accident happens just beside to see what is going on, listens to neighbors fight; but above all to all who feel they have all the power if they have the opportunity to watch, to gaze, to comment everyone around them...

_Background Information

In past years, with the emergence of reality shows such as "Big Brother", or "Survivor", people open their private living areas to unknown eyes, becoming at the same time "exhibitionists" and let the unknown watch them, becoming "voyeurists". We like to watch others as their intimate moments, private facts, secrets, and dirty laundry are revealed.(http://www.perseusbooksgroup.com, n.d). Voyeur Nation, a book about the evolving societies inevitable tendency towards voyeurism and its effects in daily, economic and political life, Clay Calvert argues that although spectatorship and sensationalism are far from new phenomena, today a confluence of factors-legal, social, political, and technological-pushes voyeurism to the forefront of our image-based world. "We've become a nation of voyeurs, Calvert writes, "obsessed with the mass consumption of information about others apparently real and unguarded lives."

The new internet phenomena "Facebook", "Twitter" and "Youtube" where people exchange their private life pictures, videos and informations which in fact, are all actually the implementations

of another form of voyeurism. With the popular culture, we are all surrounded by all kinds of gazing without our permissions. Subsequently, I come up with this project the emphasize one more time the not-so-evident fact: The inevitable disturbance of being watched yet unbearable urge to be willingly victimized by this social phenomenon.

With Peep Hole, I tried to make people realize that watching the prohibited one is an impulsive action but they should be aware of the fact that the interrelation with the subject can change in the blink of an eye. Also, my main aim is to make people question themselves to what extent they get pleasure from sharing their private affairs on social networking sites. This recognition can raise the awareness towards multiple unintentional voyeuristic actions that everyone does in their daily life without noticing: watching a car accident on traffic, peeking neighbors fight, gazing a woman undressing behind the semi-transparent curtains, or even looking someone's Facebook account constantly unintentionally.

As for the challenges, I think the most difficult part was to be able to create the intended effect on the participant. Would it be a one time-one shot event? Would people understand the message clearly or struggle to get it? Should it be repetitious or the impact could be sustained with one experience only? Also the difficulty of forming a new media project that is highly related to technology but meanwhile trying with great effort to involve emotions. The usage of physical space is another challenge that I worked on.

With the end of the project, i realized for the first time an installation that has a solid statement behind that aims to raise awareness among people to support my argument for the project. Additionally, form the technological point of view, I learnt how to use necessary softwares that are all compulsory for "Peep Hole" and witness the progress of bringing something into existence physically as I compelled me from various angles.

"Voyeurism" is a common subject in many different fields of art and design. So many names used or related their works to the term; some by using explicitly, some by using indiscreet. From Shakespeare's sonnets about a male friend where he depicts his allure and actions while contemplating him but also raising the curiosity in minds of the reader whether he gazed him privately, or even the famous balcony scene of "Romeo and Juliet" where Romeo with a great desire watches Juliet underneath her window, to Hitchcock' s "Rear Window" where a photographer spies on his neighbors and suspects a murder from his observations; to Degas' s bathing women that he continuously kept painting the most intimate moments of women bathing -and they don"t look at the painter, therefore the viewer- or to a more contemporary use: HBO channel's award winning outdoor advertising campaign, a voyeur projection installation realized by BBDO.

So far, in my researches i found some similar artworks to my project. First one is "Dollhouse". It's an animation of a fake room where various actors and asked to perform daily activities. It aims to emphasize the exchange of roles between voyeurs and exhibitionists. The fake apartment room is under surveillance so that the viewer can observe every activity in it. The execution is different from what I brought to life yet the concept stayed within my boundary.
http://www.perpetualartmachine.com/component/option,com_gallery2/Itemid,50/lang,en/?g2_view=core.ShowItem&g2_itemId=67360

Another installation although its still in progress is "Untitled Looks: An installation about human exploration". The concept again base on the phenomena of watching and being watched in return. The

creator uses a female mannequin where he installs a web cam on the genitalia and tries to attract the attention of the viewer to that part where the voyeuristic tendency most likely to be attracted so that the traditional relationship between the seer and the seen is compromised." The captured image of the spectator is projected on a golden framed screen in a removed area and shared with all other spectators. What is different from Peep Hole project is that I tried to create a fake reality for the audience to attract them and I'm not directing them towards a specific area but to the action itself while Peep Hole's aim is criticizing benevolent victims of social networking sites.
http://labs.radiesel.com/?page_id=135

Skin Peep is an architectural structure at St. James Centre for creativity that is made upon the notion of peeping. For the commemoration of their 5 years, the Chris Briffa Architects office moved into a concrete-block room within the St. James Cavalier Centre for a month and visitors to the museum could peep through holes in the installation to watch the team work. The creator, Chris Briffa of the practice said, "It will probably be a bit like working in a site office, only that here we are not the ones watching, but the ones being watched" The project slightly touches the problematic of being watched.
http://www.arplus.com/9679/skin-peep-st-james-cavalier-centre-for-creativity-valletta-malta-by-chris-briffa-architects/

EYE Voyeur AGAPORNIS (EVA) is an interactive installation "consisted of curious inaugural participants looking through a small window into an adjoining room that contained two lovers on a bed along with a pair of lovebirds in a birdcage and two live feed video cameras. One camera focused on the lovebirds and lovers; the other camera focused on the eyes of the people looking into the room. These real time video recordings were presented on two monitors in the main hall of the event, beside the voyeurs looking in the window." It's a very courageous installation from the aspect of its interactivity and physicality of the scene.
http://www.marcusbowcott.com/installations/eva.html

Watcher is one of the most common examples of voyeuristic installations. It's a multi-building video installation where on the windows of the building you see the silhouettes of people doing different kind of activities just like you peek your neighbors from semi-transparent curtains. It addresses to the most obvious desire to sneak into lives of others. "It is this "compulsion" to watch that drives us into becoming voyeurs, knowingly and unknowingly."
http://nuitblanche07critique.blogspot.com/2007/10/of-environmentalists-voyeurs-and.html

_Detailed project description

Peep Hole, as cited above, is an interactive installation aims to create an awareness while disturbing the audience with feeling of being watched. The spectator make an attempt to see what is happening behind the closed door yet figure out that s/he is actually gazed by others/ by himself. Structure

In the beginning, Peephole would be a small black cabinet made of plexiglass. It wouldn't made for people to enter inside yet it aimed to give the impression of doing so. In course of time, I decided it would be more suitable to use an empty room instead of a cabinet.

Outside, there is a speaker and a motion sensor. The sensor perceives the movement of the person passing nearby and play three different sounds and related videos randomly, playing only one

at a time. On the front panel placed in door's place, there is a hole, not too big but not too small either, with a size that can be peeked by the passing person, so s/he can actually see a certain amount of video that is playing inside. Assuming that he gets curious, he looks in the hole and sees his real-time webcam image on the screen with a writing on.

The webcam is placed behind and on top of him/her. The participant is never sure what is going on-inside, as s/he never has the opportunity to see the whole video yet annoyed by his own image and question the notion of gazing.

Meanwhile, a single image capture of that surveillance camera (also considering the disturbed position of his/her body in order to see what is going inside) will be put to a website.

_Website

When the project Peephole first started to be realized there was no idea of a website. It would be only created to form a physical disturbance. However, when the project takes its shape in the course of time, it occured that if the aims is to criticize the increase amount of voyeurism on Web 2.0 websites, then it should have a web component too. Consequently, a webpage is created basing on that busted feeling.

Parallel to the project, the aim of the website is to criticize the increasing amount of unnecessary curiosity towards people we barely know in physical realm yet we pretend to know online. Websites, such as Facebook and Twitter directs people to gaze others lives with/without their consent. Although everyone (well, nearly...) gets pleasure from intruding others live, when it comes to our own live we start to pretend like we are not watching others, or even more, we get annoyed by people who comment on our own private life. It's a vicious cycle, like a disease. There are people who states that they are sick and tired of Facebook and close their accounts claiming that but in truth, it turns out those people have duplicate accounts with different names, all done in order to peek through others live without getting themselves on the window.

Basing my idea to all those who love to follow but keep their privacy setting very high, I come up with the idea of posting images captured from surveillance camera to a live stream website. Videos and related sounds must be chosen to attract people and raise curiosity but also they shouldn't be personal videos as the installation aims to attract and criticize everyone. Therefore, both considering videos on Facebook and people's opinions, it is decided to use only three videos to address the general public.

First video contains a couple fighting over a professional issue. As a personal choice, I decided not to use a conjugal fight as it is not interesting for all. Second video is a couple having sex and moaning. Interestingly it is most attractive one which instantly attracts people to peep through. Lastly, the third one is a bribary scene.

_Scope of the project

Peep Hole is be a physical project therefore, without people interacting, it doesn't mean so much. All the exhibition visitors have to chance to try it. As physical existence is a must, the main point was not to create a wholly digital experience but to mix it with physicality. Critics to augmentation of tendencies towards digital and physical voyeurism are primary facts behind the project. Peep

Hole is not a didactic project, it does not demonstrate something stating that "voyeuring" or "gazing" is a really bad things but instead tries to raise an awareness and realize that a subjective pleasurable action can be an annoying action for another. It's not a reciprocal action. It won't target Facebook or Twitter users but somehow aims that everyone can take a part from the action and identify it to themselves.

_Required know-how and resources

For the technical part of the project, An Arduino Board,a single-board controller is used. The hardware consists of a simple open hardware design for the controller with an Atmel AVR processor and on-board I/O support. The software consists of a standard programming language and the boot loader that runs on the board. Best programming language for Arduino was Processing as it is very easy to use and compatible with it.

In order to capture motion and then activate the videos, in Peephole project two types of sensors are used: A motion sensor (PIR in technical lexicon Passive Infrared Sensor) and a photoresistor (LDR, Light Detecting Resistor). PIR gets data when a person pass by the door and with Arduino, certain ranges are detected in order to give either values of 0 or 1.

LDR works similar to PIR yet it is a much more sensitive sensor and although connection to Arduino is very easy, the placement plays a very important role for setting the ranges. LDR is used for detecting if a person is peeking through the hole on the door. In the case of doing so, LDR stops the video and activates the webcam image that is placed on the ceiling.

For website, Adobe Flash, therefore Actionscript 3 was used. Whole website was built using AS 3 and XML gallery. Update of the images taken, was provided using Apple Script and Automator. To screen the videos inside the room, i needed a projector.

_Difficulties & Risks

Most important challenge of the project is time. Being unaware of the softwares needed for Peep Hole, without a computer engineer's help, coding part was nearly impossible to learn in that given specific time period. Also, without people participating, the project doesn't have any impact. Therefore, it should attract people's attention to go and peep the hole.
Not knowing exactly which sensors should be used and their range of recognition before the installation challenged me a lot. Because even if a single sensors sensitivity is not high enough to recognize the eye on time, the project would fail and/or that person wouldl walk away before his/her image is captured and put on web.

_Phases of the project

-Shooting the videos/decide on videos to be shown. Record the sounds.
- Controlling and connecting motion and light sensors physically. Electric circuit construction.
Physical construction (Speakers, spot light etc.)

Necessary coding for live stream image upload on web from a webcam.
Design of the web page.
-Mock-Up
-Prototyple
-To install and test if all parts are working.

_Criteria of success

By the completion of the project, I learnt how to control and program Arduino board, got to know different types of sensors and their technicality, Processing 1.0 as a programming language different form my previous experiences, also basic Flash website and coding for web. Apart from those, physical construction, working with different materials such as wood, metal, electric circuits etc were additional learning outcomes of the project. And lastly, challenging with time was a primary difficulty, therefore being able to finish the project on time is another success for future projects.

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