

Erase Yourself

Media Technology, Leiden University

By: E. Isguzar, H. Ding, M. Theelen

Theme: ESCAPE

Coach: Maarten Lamers

Date: January 18 2017

1. Introduction

Even though ESCAPE is largely imprinted in the collective mind as being *the* emergency-exit button on every physical keyboard since its invention in the 1960's [1], many more definitions can be attributed to this single term. Past half year our research, contributing to the Semester Project of the Media Technology department at Leiden University, has led us to consider many different sides of this preselected term and view it in the light of the overall theme: RETURN. This section will guide you quickly through our process of coming to a statement that we want to convey at the upcoming exhibition.

In the course of four months we have researched many topics as part of the verb: "escaping". At first, we figured, people always have the urge to escape; since everyone's daily life is just so boring. All activities used to relax are focused on leaving the here-and-now for a moment and dive into a different world. Consider: watching a movie, doing drugs, adhere to a religion, having sex, or exercising.

Then, as a follow-up, we took a step back and contemplated what 'life' really exists out of, in terms of escapism: *what are we essentially escaping from?* All of a sudden Time and Space started playing a part in our research and the first concept started taking shape. We wanted to offer people a way to control these aspects of life and escape from the exhibition. Either by letting them control time with an hourglass, opening a door to another location on the globe, or having a garden to sit in and enjoy the sound of birds. However, we did not want our concept to become too complicated to grasp.

In the third part of our research we evaluated all products people use on a day-to-

day basis to escape from the aspects mentioned two paragraphs back. In our opinion the smartphone is one of the devices used most for this. Whenever there is a moment of boredom or inefficiency we grab our phones and fill the void with likes, swipes and tweets. People want to get away from all their busy lives and look for their own, personal space. Rather sooner than later. This, we decided, will be the main focus of our statement and give form to our work for the exhibition.

People isolate themselves from the rest of the world and hardly pay attention to their surroundings anymore [2]. You can change your place, you can hide yourself from people, and you can watch a movie or read a story, but you will always be with yourself; therefore our statement is:

"You cannot escape from yourself"

In this paper we will expand on this statement and show how we got to our exhibition installation. In the next section we will discuss the theoretical framework that explains our statement more in-depth and will view it from different angles. In section three: Concept and four: Implementation; we discuss how we want to convey this statement, and with what concept we want to do so, respectively. The last section will serve as a reflection on our work and how we would like to improve it in future events.

To support the research process and keep track of our own progress, we have kept record of our meetings, discussions, inspirations and literature via a blog. The blog can be found here:

escapereturn.wordpress.com

2. Theoretical Framework

In this section we will elaborate on our statement more in-depth and discuss our findings in literature. We will answer the following questions: what do we mean? And why do we formulate our statement this way?

There is a colossal amount of people who are so unfulfilled with everyday life, that they need a way (seemingly anyway) to escape from how they feel physically, emotionally, mentally or spiritually [3].

To escape from these undesirable feelings, people are in front of their computer, TV screens and smartphone hours and hours at a time. Some people take anti-depressant, painkiller or drugs. Other ones are having sex or masturbate to assist themselves in “leaving the here and now”.

But by this way, we cannot refer to the reality, which doesn't include us. According to Spinoza philosophy, we start to understand and think/interpret the world from our body [4]. We understand only our bodies when the bodies interact with other bodies or things. This means that every reality is dependent on our own minds. The world is a manifestation of your minds.

So whatever action people take to get to escape their feelings, in the end it will not matter since the feelings are all internal. According to Camus: “This heart within me I can feel, and I judge that it exists. This world I can touch and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is construction” [5].

Concept

This next section will serve as an overview of our concept. We will discuss how we want to create awareness for our statement and look into several examples we have found.

We want to lure the visitor of the exhibition into using our installation out of curiosity. We want to build something that they would like to try on or play with. While using this instrument, the users should experience solitude and privacy, like they are in a space, isolated from the exhibition. This

space will be a wearable box which you could put your head in. However the isolation is never permanent. There is a switch the users can use, to shift between cruising and escaping from the exhibition. When they choose to escape from the exhibition, they will be reminded they are not alone, since they are still with themselves.

We want the installation to be wearable and the user to be able to experience the rest of the exhibition while being submerged in our work. This also requires it to be relatively comfortable and doesn't need any wires, so it can be worn around for longer.

Implementation

Now we still need to implement our concept. What is it going to look like and how is it going to work? We will answer these questions in this section.

The wearable box should look a little weird and it should reflect everything around. In figure 1 and 2 two different prototypes are depicted to give an idea of the form of the instrument. The wearer should escape from the exhibition floor due to a mirrored effect. We implemented this concept with the help of a two-way mirror. When they are cruising in the expo, they can see through from the front box side. Two-way mirrors makes it possible to look outside the box but impossible to look inside the box. They are very dependent on lighting conditions. The inside needs to be darker; otherwise the outside will not be reflective.

Whenever they want to “escape,” however, they can use a switch and the lights inside the box turns on. Now the two-way mirror effect is reversed. With the lights on the wearer will not be able to see out of the box, instead a reflection him/her shows in the mirror. To make it more comfortable to wear and steady, in figure 3 we made adjustment to the shape and size of the box in our second prototype.

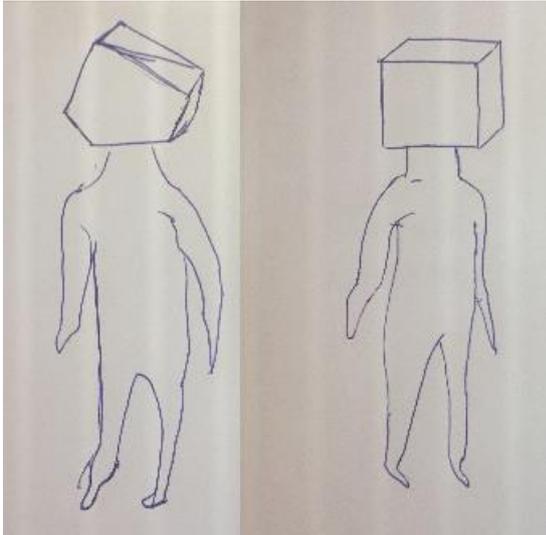


Figure 1: Sketches of prototypes

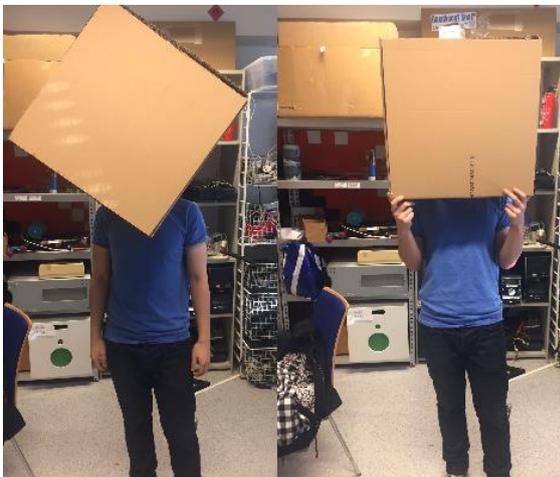


Figure 2: First iteration prototypes for form and fitting purposes

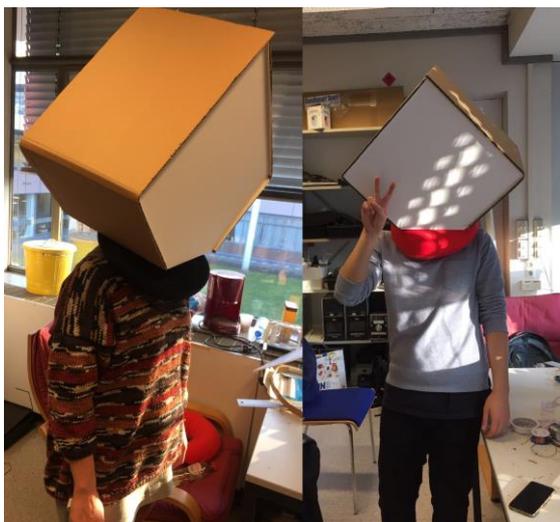


Figure 3: Second prototype

Reflection

With the prototypes that we built, we already made some adjustments to the box to improve the comfort. Furthermore, we conducted few try-out experiments with other Media Technology students to get feedback on the project. More importantly with the special light condition properties of the two-way mirror, we still need to experiment our installation in HUBspot to test the final effect of our project.

We did not think about a way to lure the visitors of the exhibition to start wearing the box. We should give them an incentive to put it on, however for now we hope visitors will be curious enough to do so. One way to lure people is to make them a promise; ideally we would want the box to speak for itself. For now, however, we are content with just putting this promise in the description of the project in the hope that people will be curious enough.

We would also like to reflect on the project's process. The process of talking about what the statement should be about took way too long. Also, our first concept turned out to be a no-go and too complicated to program. This made for a very late conceptual design and doubts about the statement. However, we don't want this to show in our exhibition work, therefore we put a lot of effort to construct the boxes thoughtfully and durable. Furthermore we have taken the effort to make them comfortable, which is important since we hope this concept is hit with the visitors, they would want to wear it the whole day.

Bibliography

1. Kennedy, Pagan, "Who Made That?", New York Times Magazine, October 7, 2012, p. 20
2. Sherry Turkle, *Connected, but alone?* TED2012.
3. Nicholson, E.F., "Millions Of People Feel The Need To Escape, But From What?" 2014.
4. Uslu, A., "Ulus Baker ve Hissedilebilir Filmler Yapmak / Ulus Baker and Making the Perceivable Films", *Teorik Bakis* 6, 2015.
5. Camus, A., *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1942