Artistic Presentation

Recent Thoughts on Panoptic Cruft (fragments)

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Artist, Carbondale, Illinois, August 14, 2009

Panopticon Cruft (fragments)

The following note fragments have been arranged from ideas written in my sketchbook as I was creating the original software code that developed into the Panopticon Cruft late in 2007.

Cruft

According to Wikipedia:

Etymology

The origin of the term is uncertain, but it may be derived from Harvard University Cruft Laboratory, which was the Harvard Physics Department's radar lab during World War II. As late as the early 1990s, unused technical equipment could be seen stacked in front of Cruft Hall's windows. According to the student body, if the place filled with useless machinery is called Cruft Hall, the machinery itself must be cruft. This image of "discarded technical clutter" quickly migrated from hardware to software. Cruft may also be a play on the old typeface form of the letter "s", rendering "crust", "cruft".

Another possible origin is that the word evokes the words crust, fluff and scruffy.

[\[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cruft\]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cruft)

Panopticon

According to Wikipedia:

The Panopticon is a type of prison building designed by English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham in 1785. The concept of the design is to allow an observer to observe (-opticon) all (pan-) prisoners without the prisoners being able to tell whether they are being watched, thereby conveying what one architect has called the "sentiment of an invisible omniscience."

Bentham himself described the Panopticon as "a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example."

[\[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panopticon\]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panopticon)

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Department of Homeland Security

According to Wikipedia:

Homeland Security In the United States

In the United States, the concept of "homeland security" extends and recombines responsibilities of several government agencies and entities, including the United States National Guard, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the United States Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, the United States Secret Service, the Transportation Security Administration, and Civil Air Patrol.

The George W. Bush administration consolidated many of these activities under the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS), a new cabinet department established as a result of the Homeland Security Act of 2002. However, much of the nation's homeland security activity remains outside of DHS; for example, the FBI and CIA are not part of the Department, and other agencies such as the Department of Defense and Department of Health and Human Services play a significant role in certain aspects of homeland security. Homeland security is coordinated at the White House by the Homeland Security Council, currently headed by Frances Townsend.

Homeland security is officially defined by the National Strategy for Homeland Security as "a concerted national effort to prevent terrorist attacks within the United States, reduce America's vulnerability to terrorism, and minimize the damage and recover from attacks that do occur". [1] Because the U.S. Department of Homeland Security includes the Federal Emergency Management Agency, it also has responsibility for preparedness, response, and recovery to natural disasters.

The term became prominent in the United States following the September 11, 2001 attacks; it had been used only in limited policy circles prior to these attacks. The phrase "security of the American homeland" appears in the 1998 report Catastrophic Terrorism: Elements of a National Policy by Ashton B. Carter, John M. Deutch, and Philip D. Zelikow.

Homeland security is also usually used to connote the civilian aspect of this effort; "homeland defense" refers to its military component, led chiefly by the U.S. Northern Command headquartered in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

The scope of homeland security includes:

- Emergency preparedness and response (for both terrorism and natural disasters), including volunteer medical, police, emergency management, and fire personnel;*
- Domestic intelligence activities, largely today within the FBI;*
- Critical infrastructure protection;*
- Border security, including both land and maritime borders;*
- Transportation security, including aviation and maritime transportation;*
- Biodefense;*
- Detection of radioactive and radiological materials;*
- Research on next-generation security technologies.*

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homeland_security/]

Origins

I have borrowed the computer hacker term “Cruft” and have applied it to my current code based art. These works are generated by a computer, following my written instructions. This automated system runs the software code and downloads selected source material from the Internet, and then processes that information into a CRUFT, generating images and videos 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

I created the Panopticon Cruft at the very end of 2007 while living in New York City. Having lived within one mile of the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001, I am acutely aware of the consequences of terrorist activities as well as the consequences of the fear of terrorism.

New York City implemented a policy of randomly searching subway passenger bags in the summer of 2005 in order to make the subways safe, or at least make us feel safer after the train bombings that had recently taken place in London. After being randomly selected multiple times to have my bags searched by the New York Police Department before I was allowed to travel by subway, I did not feel safe, I only felt angry and frustrated. I then began to think about surveillance and coincidentally I began to notice the number of CCTV cameras now located between the subway stop and my apartment.

Conceptual Background

Information regarding the Bush administration's monitoring all phone conversations and emails of all the citizens of the United States began to be talked about in the mainstream media. I began to imagine the sheer quantity of information Homeland Security was collecting. So much of it must be just a record of mundane lives. Due to the fear of terrorism, our citizens were asked to keep a watchful eye out for suspicious activity. The New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority began a campaign to remind its' passengers to keep an eye on each other looking for suspicious activity.

From the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority's web site:

If You See Something, Say Something

Call 1-888-NYC SAFE

The vigilance of all New Yorkers has kept MTA buses, subways, and railroads safe.

The MTA thanks our passengers and reminds them to:

Be alert to unattended packages.

Be wary of suspicious behavior.

Take notice of people in bulky or inappropriate clothing.

Report exposed wiring or other irregularities.

Report anyone tampering with surveillance cameras or entering unauthorized areas.

Learn the basics of safe train evacuation.

And remember, if you see something, say something. Alert a police officer, train or bus operator, station personnel or call 888-NYC-SAFE (888-692-7233).

<http://www.mta.info/mta/security/index.html>

Instead of George Orwell's Big Brother, as depicted in the book 1984, we now had millions of “Little Brother's” vigilantly watching each other while creating an environment of fear and self-censorship. The suburban neighborhood depicted in the Panopticon cruft reminds us that no one is safe from terrorists, and that everyone is suspect. The American Dream location of a safe home in the suburbs is suspect in the post 9-11 world.

So I wanted to create a CRUFT video that used as its source a web cam located on the Internet. One that watches continuously at a location where basically nothing happens, while juxtaposing a scrolling row of poetry that I create by transforming text downloaded from the Department of Homeland Security website. Because of this collaboration, I consider this Panopticon Cruft to be a collaboration with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). This video subverts the original intent of the information from DHS, and changes the context of the original web cam video footage. The cruft reminds us of all the CCTV cameras that watch, waiting for something to happen. The Panopticon Cruft is a warning that we are not safe, not even in the suburbs. It is a reminder that someone is always watching, so we should consider carefully our behavior because we are always seen, observed and considered.