

Christine Liu

project proposal :: bloodbath ::

What is it & why is it interesting?

the motivation for this project was to connect two people [lovers] who live apart, people who want to relate to each other and communicate more effectively their presence, emotion, and love for the other beyond the limitations of current technology (IM, telephone, webcam, etc). i wanted to incorporate a more tactile, enveloping mode of spanning two remote bodies in a meaningful, tangible, and poetic way.

when apart from someone with which you share an intimate relationship with, many small, yet significant things are felt to be missing: the simple act of touch, a warm breath on the skin, the feeling of a heartbeat. signs which bring a lover to life are the fundamentals, the most human.

the inspiration for 'bloodbath' [i may change this name if people find it a too gory connotation, but the reasons for this will become clearer] is the basic record of a heartbeat. a heartbeat signifies life; changes in the pulse indicate periods of activity and rest, excitement and relaxation. an easy way to 'communicate' this sign is to pulse the signal of one's heartbeat to the other lover in some noticeable way, but i wanted to create a subtle, effective mapping. blinking a light or vibrating something would probably be too distracting, or over-pique the curiosity, or just confuse the mapping completely.

then i thought... the human body is the perfect 'computer', the perfect machine. at rest, the human heart beats roughly 60 times a minute, every hour of every day. that's a lot of pumping, day in and day out! at the very basic level, that's 86400 throbs; add in exercise and other heart-racing enablers, and the number increases. while living life, you don't really fathom the sheer aggregate effort of your heart's efforts.

i want to visualize + embody this fascinating feat, this priceless human energy, into something to be communicated and appreciated fully, preciously, and completely.

Usage Scenario

'bloodbath' takes this element of one's heartbeat, and translates it to a drop of water in the remote lover's bathtub. one tiny drop: 1 mL. the frequency of droplets would directly correspond to the pulsations of the other. droplets one after another wouldn't seem like much, but 86400 mL (minimum amount for a day's worth) translates to roughly 23 gallons of water, which is about half the capacity of a standard bathtub.

at the end of the day, the lover has a full bath drawn for them, and can enjoy and relax in the waters, which were 'shed' from the heart of their beloved. the bather has full control; they can supplement the water or drain it slightly, but the accumulated water in the tub is the embodiment of their lover's liveliness, the physical beating of their heart. to bathe in such waters is akin to enjoying a priceless gift. the tub, sensing that it is being used, sends

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feedback to the heartbeater, perhaps a warmth on their skin or a glow on their device [more on that in the next section.]

one might argue that the daily bath might take too much time if the other is busy or doesn't feel like a bath. however, this system enforces an implicit commitment to sensually indulge, to take at least a moment of the day to unwind and relax. in long-distance relationships, there's a dangerous tendency to take the other for granted for a day (or two, or three, or...), or obviously neglect the other for an indeterminate amount [i.e. not calling, not writing]. the act of bathing becomes a metaphor for intimacy, for sharing a special quiet time together, for wrapping oneself in the generous warmth of the other. 'bloodbath' infuses a relationship with something shared that's very ritualistic, very intimate, very enveloping.

[side note: in tom robbin's jitterbug perfume, the bathing rituals of alobar and kudra are one of the key components to their immortality.]

How will it be implemented?

i envision the heartbeat being recorded by a simple heartrate monitor (i'm currently playing with one from polar), a wearable component mounted on a chest-strap. for a female, this situates right underneath the breasts; the monitor could easily be embedded in any sort of lingerie with a bra-like strap around the chest. many innovative, sexy, and pleasurable tactile designs could be developed through this wearable interface. this device would be easy for a girl to wear, since most put on some sort of bra undergarment on a daily basis. for a guy, the heartrate monitor could be on a wristwatch, or possibly embedded within a tight undershirt. in both cases, normal perspiration would lubricate the electrodes.

each heartrate monitor would have a unique address and a unique addressable partner. these pulsation signals would be wirelessly transmitted to a server, which would route and transmit the signals to a receiver in the water valve of the remote tub. netlag wouldn't really be an issue in this system because the transmitted signal is pretty constant... drip drip drip drip.

the tub itself is mostly standard; the user can turn on the faucet or open the drain at will. even if the lover isn't wearing the heartrate monitor for any reason, it wouldn't restrict water flow in the other's bathroom or anything. there's always a way for the user to override the technology in either direction.

however, the tub would be very energy-efficient as far as heat, having some sort of covering, and possessing an effective thermo-insulative property. this way the tub would keep warm, and perhaps radiate heat throughout the bathroom and living quarters, a source of living comfort.

there would be sensors in the tub that would indicate if someone was taking a bath or not. either infrared or weight or light sensors embedded in the bottom of the tub. if it senses

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that the user is taking the 'bloodbath', it send a signal back to the wearer of the heartrate monitor. the heartbeater would definitely benefit from this feedback (knowing their 'efforts' of love are consummated through the bath], though i'm still musing on the best way to do this. since the device rests on the chest already, something subtly 'felt' would probably be best, either slight warmth or a imperceptible purring.

What parts will you complete for this class?

ideally, i'd like to get the heart rate monitor to control a water valve that's wired up to it, releasing a droplet with each throb, gushing if my heart's racing. i'll experiment with different ways in which to embed the device in a wearable garment... lingerie, belts, wristbands. i will also do some user studies, if only with paper prototypes, to see what long-distance lovers might think of this mode of communication, of a bridging metaphor. is it pleasurable? is it creepy? how much control do they feel of the system? would they be comfortably implementing it in their homes? if i have time, i can experiment with other signals such as breathing, blinking, and touch, and translating that over to... aromatherapeutic infusions? secretive tickling? tiny sparks of spice in every bite?

What do you hope to learn?

i would like to explore the intersection between human social relationships, mapping behaviors via remote delivery, and delving into the spatial architectural interaction which develops. right now there isn't much tactile long-range communications, and i want to find the tricky balance between 'this feels like we're close' and 'this feels like a technology is trying to bring us close'. i want the everyday habits and objects to reflect more of who we are, and how they reflect our values.