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SM 4102 Final Year Project
Research-theoretical Text

Title : Tele-phonision

Category : Extended form of Narrative

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Introduction
　　　　Tele-phonision is a narrative work, where structure and connectivity of the narratives are the main focus.

　　　　Through their full exploration within the frames, the story is unfolded by users. The narratives will not be obvious and straightforward. Information is disclosed bits by bits, and needed to be gathered and to be connected to understand the whole picture.

Concept & Research Development
　　　　At the beginning planning stage, I tried to jump out of pre-defined or pre-formulated narrative and planned to try some other interesting or playful methods of story telling. I started with the direction of thinking of a structurally more complex, less linear video work, and how to make use of phone conversation as the main focus and the source of attraction within the work.

　　　　Though the only perception we can get on phone, is hearing. However, it's not that simple of just understanding replies from the other side. We are rapidly receiving many sounds, including languages, tones of speaking, and from very obvious to not very obvious background sounds. We instantly interpret these sounds, even without notice. Images of the space, expressions and actions of the other party we actually can't see, are shaped and formed in our minds, as if becomes very visualized and lively. It's like through electrical transmission thorough phone lines or electrical waves of our mobile phones, the two spaces involved, are temporarily spatially connected. This special way of connection of space will be use as the main connectivity of the story.

　　　　In daily life, I noticed that to be the third person of a phone conversation between 2 strangers in public, I could only hear and know just one side of the conversation at a time. The limitation of hearing of one side makes the whole story becomes partially understood. Sometimes I found it quite interesting to guess what the other side, the side that I can't hear, how may he or she is replying and talking to the person in the same space with me. The limitation of disclosing information partially and bits by bits can become a main role of telling story in the work.

　　　　Then I aimed to set up an ambiguity of connectivity or relation within a group of related characters by phone conversations, and by getting clues by exploring around step by step within a few key venues leading by the phone conversations, the

story will be understood slowly. At first, I thought of a detective story, where the aim of understanding the story behind is very straightforward and clearly goal-oriented. A person is found murdered and the task is to investigate in order to achieve the obvious goals, find out the murderer and the weapon used. I took a look at the board game **"ClueDo"** as reference. It's a traditional board game and now still popular. Players row a die to go into rooms, and ask for related clue cards only at the particular rooms players are staying at. With the clues, players make logically guesses by deduction. This reminded me of a very important element, some particular rooms, or a few key venues, where related information can get only when user is locating at that certain place. Although later I changed the aim of setting up a detective story, as an ambiguous opening and less clear goal oriented can leave more space for interpretation, investigating and exploring around the venues and phone dialogues. An unclear and mystery opening leaves a limitation on understanding what's happening and have been set up. Users are not going straight ahead a clear target, without knowing why, but just explore to find out more, in order to clear the mystery and understand what's happening behind. The atmosphere set up with this way of opening, giving the on-going source of attraction will probably be less easy to exhaust, and making the whole piece more interesting.

As part of the research, I was given advice to have a look at the video game **Silent Hill.** How it set up an opening, how clues are unfolded throughout the game and the story structure. It's surprising the game is so successful in gradual build-up of suspense throughout the game, which leads to an on-going journey on finding out what's happening. The attraction of keep searching and tension of wanting to understand more so as to figure out what's going on throughout the game is very strong.

Besides, the tricks of clues gathering in order to understand what should do, is also a very good reference. Sometimes, information in words and weapons get along the journey, instead of knowing straightforward what the game is trying to tell and instructing, logical decision and combinations of the useful information and objects are needed. This is just like when listening to a phone conversation, we gather all different sources of sound information to interpret the picture. Pieces of unknown information get may not be useful or understood immediately, but when other related pieces are gathered, the story will be unfolded.

Going at the direction of thinking of how to visually structure venues and make connectivity among them, I did some research on the web, and found the website of a science fiction film, **"Donnie Darko"**. The site is based on the narrative of the film. There are 3 stages, through the stages, user need to click to explore and read information popping up carefully, so as to get the passwords or keywords for entering the next stage. Information are given by video clips on some key incidences in the film, as well as some 'props', pop-ups of quite real online news pages about the reports of incidences and characters involved. This makes the whole piece more real and the aim of active exploring around to get useful information is a very good reference. Besides www.donniedarko.com, there's another recent work http://www.channel4.com/entertainment/tv/microsites/L/lost/index.html, by the same creative group, **Hi-ReS!**, from London . It's based on the narrative of the first episode **LOST.** This site is more branching navigated than the linear stage following by stage in Donnie Darko's, and as well as more visual based. The related clues are high lighted by high lighting on particular objects or people within a place. The high light

is either by animating arrows, circles, lines or bright illumination on objects. Those spaces to be explored are set up and well designed by layers of montage of good quality still photographs. The visual style and navigation there are a good reference and inspiring.

Continuing on the structure of the narrative, I studied on *Switching,* a loop base narrative interactive film especially developed on DVD video. The story behind is just an ordinary love story. However, it called itself "NoodleFilm", where the complex structure are with lots of small film clips that can be consumed in different orders. Noodlefilm demands the user not only watches a film but uses it. Each scene is a film clip. The clips are like circles, they over lapping each other in an order, where the over lapping points are the junctions where user may jumps through the structure if they press enter. Thus, switching at different time could simultaneously disrupt the story. Even if user doesn't switch by himself, at the junction points, it choose on its own, it may continue with the looping of the same scene, or jump to other scenes, but less vigorous than external switching by user.

Not only its structure is special giving a new experience of unfolding story, the clues given of reminding where to switch are a good example too. There's no buttons on the screen to give clear and external instruction for switching. The tip is to focus on the actors' expressions. It frequently gives clues for possibilities to change the film. For example, when there's a gradual close up of the eyes of a character showing he is thinking something in the mind, or a character seems to be become dreamy suddenly, looking at the window during a conversation with a friend around a coffee table. These are daily experience of when a person is jumping away from the space he is staying at in his mind temporary. Instead of giving clues obviously, like highlighting or giving circles on the objects, I planned to develop a less obvious way, without showing the clues very apparently in the work.

The story of Tel-phonision needs to be carefully linked. The key venues will be a traffic road at night, a few rooms of a factory, the car park outside the factory and a public telephone booth. The characters are the people related to these venues. Aiming to achieve an ambiguous connection and relationship within the characters and knowing what is happening behind layers by layers, information is put within the venues. Users are required to explore around to gather the information. By hearing phone conversations or phone messages at some venues, user can switch to hear the other side, or seeing close-ups of certain objects or body parts of the other side simultaneously according to the sounds. The venues can be overlapped at these spots by the temperate connection across the spaces. The form of presenting will be with Flash, and mouse clicking is the method of exploring and using.