248 Assignment 2 Part 2.3 – Playtest Report

We had one of our roommates playtest our game, a person fairly well experienced in interactive fiction games. He played for approximately 25 minutes, and explored the entire game in that space, with only very little input on elements he had missed.

There were a couple of key takeaways from this playtest.
The first, most obvious one was that the player took every object in the house, and carried them around, even inside the camera space. This caused him to think he needed to use these objects inside the camera to trigger other events or solve puzzles, and it took him a long time to figure out that the objects themselves were irrelevant. He also thus did not photograph objects immediately, but rather carried them around for a while before beginning to photograph them, thus not seeing the immediate memories pop up inside the camera.
Taking objects also let them circumvent the diary puzzle, as they, through picking up the potted plant, could see the nested key inside their inventory.
From this, we realized we should lock objects in the space with a simple "Instead of taking"-rule, so the player would not think to take objects and carry them around.

The fact that the player did not use the camera for a long time, but examined it, made us implement a textual hint when examining the camera on how to use it, hopefully reminding the player that they should photograph objects.

Another cause of confusion for a while in the game was how the camera scenes and settings operated, and for a while he first changed setting a bunch, without realizing he could wait in the same setting, then, after a long time, realizing he could wait and that changed the scene, falsely equated waiting with changing the setting and did not realize he could do both to reach different memories. Through the interview after, was how we realized he was falsely equating these two modes of interaction.
In order to alleviate this, we utilized the "empty picture" object, which was left inside the camera, but had no major effect at the time (a leftover from testing), which caused some confusion in the player as well, as he thought the empty picture (fairly) would be meaningful inside the camera—but seeing no change to it upon changing the setting or waiting, could not discern how the camera worked.
In the new version, the empty picture thus have hints on what objects the player needs to find in each memory setting, hopefully leading players to see that changing the setting has an effect, and helping them find the objects they need in order to fill in that part of the memory space.

A final observation was that the player did not realize when the experience was over and kept hanging around inside the camera, expecting there to be further puzzles to solve. Partly because of all their carried objects, but also partly because there is no indication that the game is "complete". By locking down items and using the empty

picture to give a sense of progress, we hope this alleviates this a little but, but there is probably still a degree to which players will stumble around, trying to solve non-existing puzzles at the end. However, creating a more elaborate ending or more complex solutions inside the camera was out of scope for now.

In the end though, it was good to see that, despite the initial hurdles, the game was completable (even if he didn't realize it was) within the time frame and without too much difficulty on how to interact with the world, and he did reach the end without any major bugs, outside those mentioned here.