

Revolutionizing Experience of Building New Relationships

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CULTURAL CONTEXT

Relationships in A Society

Society is made up of individuals who have agreed to work together for mutual benefit. No matter the size, and no matter the link that binds a society together, society is shaped by the relationships between individuals (Edmonds, 2010). Relationships are no doubt the crucial elements that make a society unique.

Relationships may refer to connections between family, friends, colleagues, or even, strangers. In average, an individual may physically meet around 80,000 persons in lifetime (Vital, 2013) among the world population of 7.3 billion, while there are only around 150 people with whom an individual can maintain stable relationships (Dunbar, 1992) (see figure 1). This indicates that in the society for an individual, 99.999% of the population and 99.9% of people s/he meets are strangers. The relationships with strangers turn out extremely initial to shape a society due to its biggest proportion.

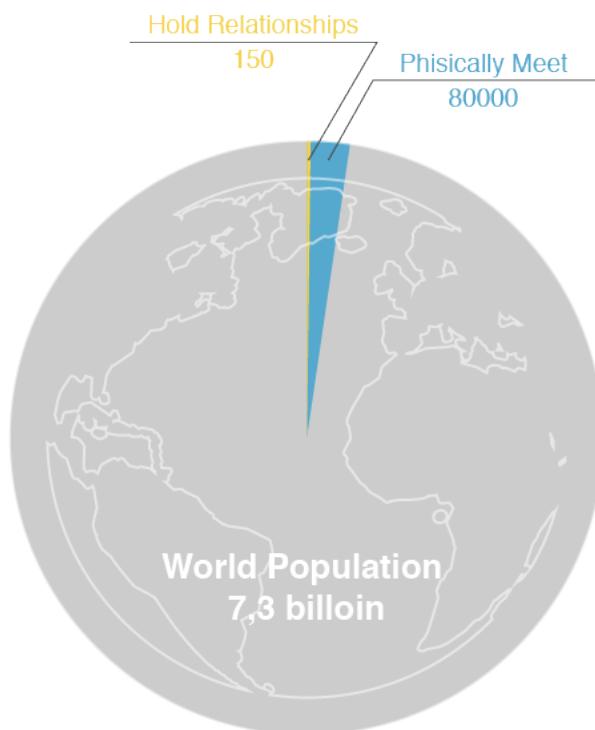


Figure 1. Proportion of population

Current Situations

It is a general phenomenon that few people pay attention to strangers they meet in public places. An example is there are two street artists playing music on the Princes Street in Edinburgh and everyone passes them by without a glance (see figure 2). Obviously, the current relationships between strangers are lacking communication even they are face to face. Another phenomenon is every time referring to social, people tend to go to pubs instead of communicating with people around.

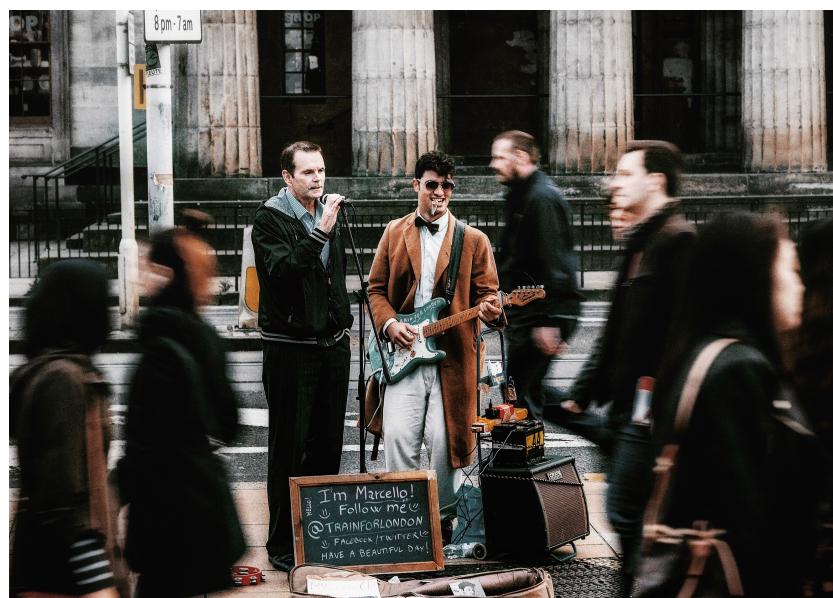


Figure 2. Street artists on the Princes Street in Edinburgh

Technology

Recent technological advancements have had a drastic impact on the way individuals communicate (Drago, 2015). People are addicted to their phones so that they do not talk to each other even they are face to face. Nevertheless, living with technology is an irreversible trend. We should not get rid of but take the advantages of technology. Therefore, the following research question has been proposed.

“Can technology help to create new social models to enhance communication with people around?”

RESEARCH

New Social Model in The Movie *Book of Love*

One Chinese movie named *Book of Love* tells a story about how two strangers become soul mates because of one book. They are matched randomly and exchange mails, which creates a possibility for them to communicate with each other and finally become soul mates. The movie proposes a new social model between strangers that they are provided with opportunities to know each other.

Case Study – 20 Day Stranger

20 Day Stranger is an app developed by MIT that reveals shared connections between two anonymous individuals. It's a mobile experience that exchanges one person's experience with another's based on picture exchange for 20 days. User will never know who it is or exactly where they are, but it will reveal enough about someone to build imagination of strangers' life (20 Day Stranger, 2016) (see figure 3).



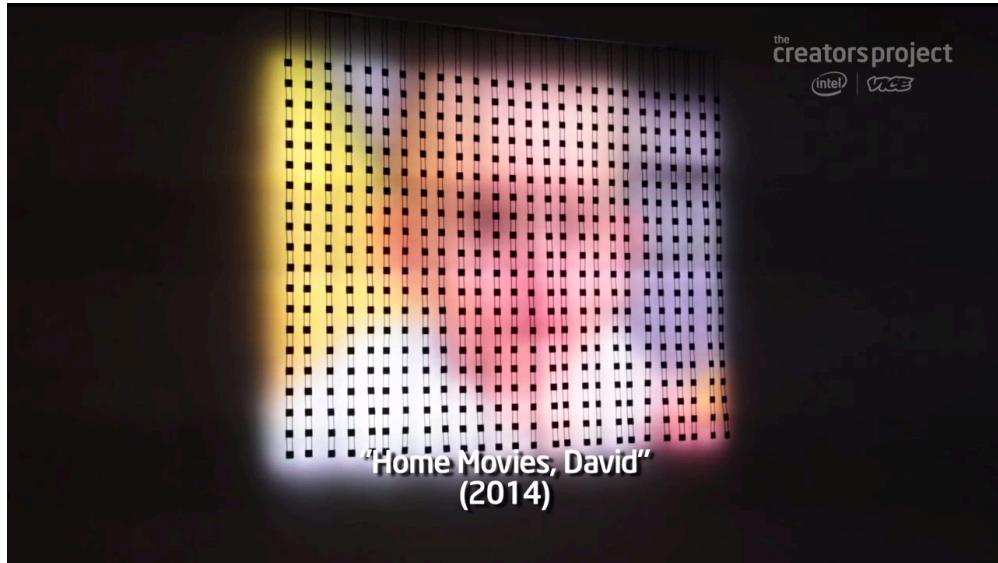
Figure 3. 20 Day Stranger

Ambiguity

Privacy is a crucial factor to considerate when referring to communication with strangers. I want to enhance the communication between strangers which means they need to reveal something. Meanwhile they need to hide something because they are still strangers. Therefore, to what extend to reveal or hide something between strangers is one core question to consider.

Inspired by Jim Campbell's sculptural LED light installations (Campbell, 2014), I propose ambiguity as the design concept. As shown in the video, through pictures people can know a baby is in a picture but have no idea about who it is (see video 1):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIYHmbM0UA&t=9s>). It is clear enough for people to get acquaintance of a stranger, as well as ambiguous enough to keep the privacy.



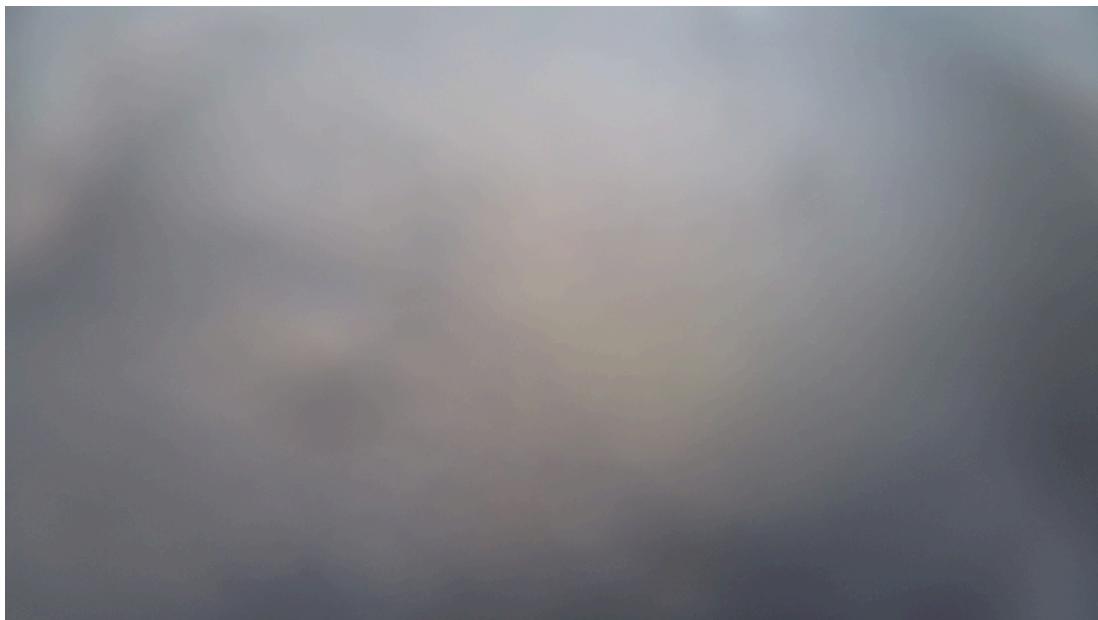
Video 1. Jim Campbell's sculptural LED light installations

Water experiments

I choose water as a media to convey the ambiguity concept because water is changeable. It can both be clear and ambiguous. It may change depending on the container and temperature. Two experiments are implemented related to water. In the first experiment I throw a GoPro into a bottle of water to see if there are any changes when the camera is getting into the water (see video 2: <https://youtu.be/UxQsfZrFgNw>). It turns out nearly no changes in the whole process. The second experiment is putting a piece of ice in front of the camera and recording the melting process (see video 3: https://youtu.be/GWjkG_fQbiA). With the ice melting, the picture becomes clear gradually. The process from ambiguous to clear is attractive.



Video 2. Throw GoPro into water



Video 3. Melting ice experiment

Back to Relationships

Think back of the relationships between individuals, one person holds different relations with different people (see figure 4). Take myself as an example, generally I am closest to my parents most, then my best friends and normal friends, then my other relatives and classmates. But I may keep closer relations with some of my relatives than some of friends. The factors that impact the distance between one another are time and communication. Longer time to get along and more communication will bring closer relations.

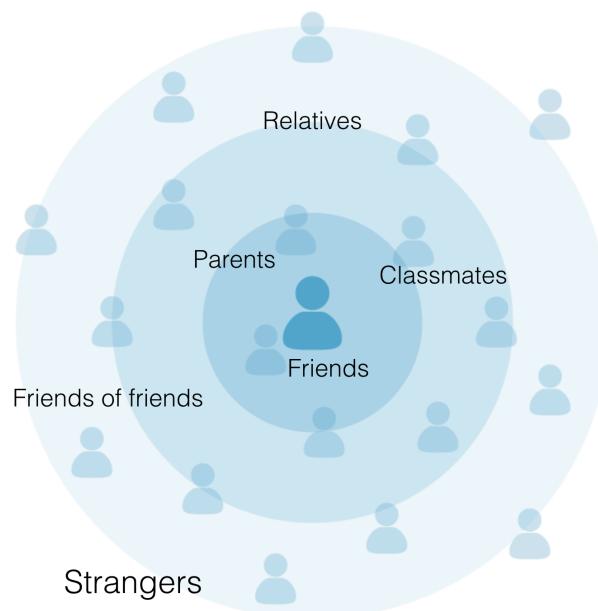


Figure 4. Relations with different persons

PROPOSAL

Design

Based on the research, the design opportunity is defined as to create an experience of getting closed to someone, something, or somewhere. So I designed a device looks like glasses (see figure 5). The front part is made of two layers of transparent acrylic with water in the middle. Before using, the device needs to be put in refrigerator to transfer water into ice. Imagine in a new environment such as the first day of first year students, everyone wears this device with ice because they know nothing about one another. With time going by the ice will melt and the image will turn clear gradually, which represents the experience of knowing something. When user is communicating with others who also wears this device, the device will heat the ice to make it melt quickly, which represents that communication will help to know the new class.

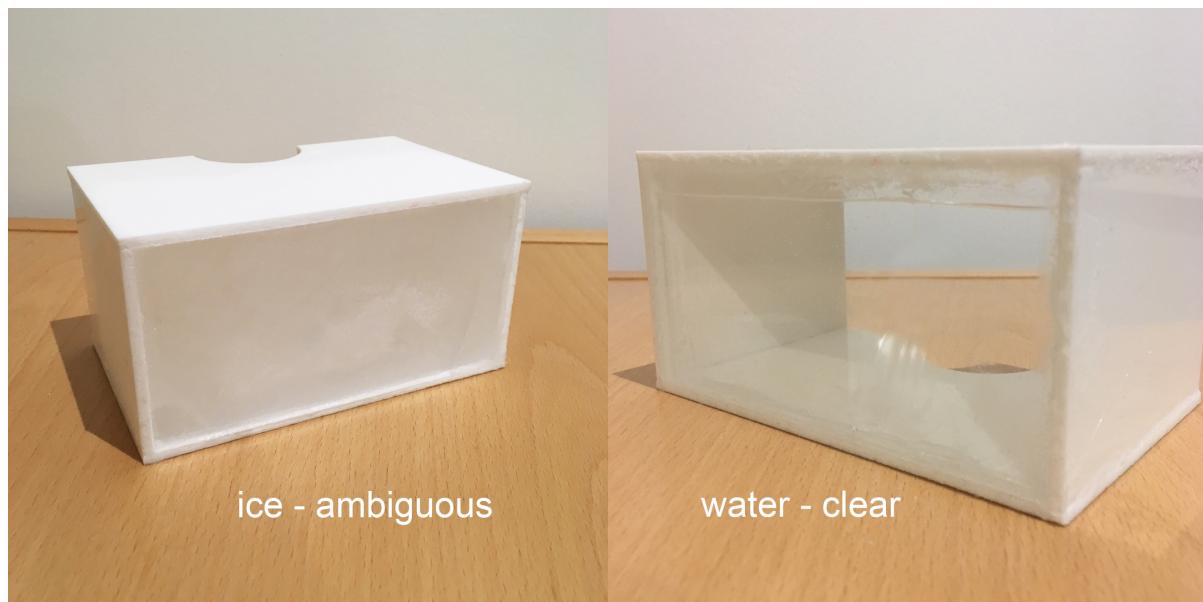


Figure 5. Experience device design

Technical Practice

The devices can communicate with one another using Arduino Uno and Bluetooth module (see figure 6). Connected through Bluetooth, Arduino can talk to each other about their current distance according to Received Signal Strength Indication (RSSI). The heater which is actually a heating resistance will be triggered according to the distance indicating user is talking to others. The shorter the distance is, the warmer the heater will be.

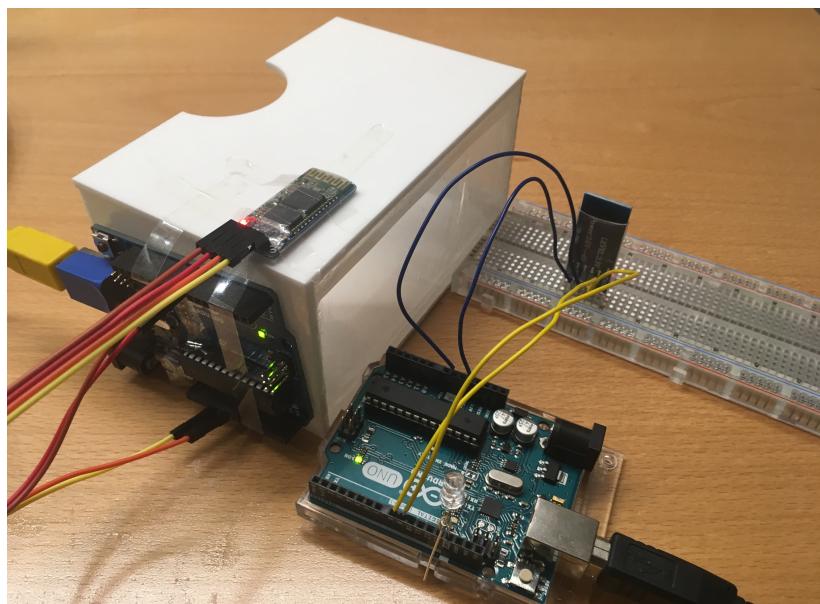


Figure 6. Two Arduino Uno connected by Bluetooth module

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