

44587158

Team RGB

Zhijiang Wang

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### Abstract

Communication and coordination are considered as two fundamental factors of human connection. Because of the pandemic humans have fewer chance to be together and collaborate and communicate with each other.

In repose to that, I proposed the installation, Treenecgtion, for participant to collaborate together while keeping safe distance. But during the exhibition, I find most of participants did not communicate to each other in night time. In Order to understand whether they still build a sense of human connection this reflective essay generate the research question”Is communication and coordination necessary for people to create a sense of human connection. If not, what is the most important thing to generate a sense of human connection through interactive installation?” to explore the relationship between context and human connection.

# Critical reflection

## Introduction

Due to the breakdown of pandemic, people are required to keep a social distance between each other for the interest of their safety. As a result of this, people have few chances to start an interpersonal communication with each other. The lack of interpersonal interaction pose a threat on maintaining and building human connection which is an inherent aspect of our society, and it's also highly associated with mental wellness[1]. Thus, how human being still keeping connected with others has become a significant issue needed to be addressed in current socially distanced world.

In response to this problem space, I proposed to adopt synchronised stomping as interaction mode to build human connection. The idea of doing synchronised activities was influenced by the research around cognitive neuroscience which demonstrated that the perceptual system in human brain tend to seek other mind, then adapt their behaviours. This dynamical adaption blurs self-other boundary[2], which promotes social bonds through the pleasurable feeling of connection, and enable large-scale cooperation[3]. These insights are further reinforced by our contextual inquiry with students from UQ who demonstrated that the last time he feel connected with strangers are at the movie theatre where they laugh at the same time.

After I defined the human connection, I put more attention on the implementation of our concept. This because the research around public installation artists mentioned that an installation not only has power by the quality of itself[4], but also from the context, the environment, and the structure where it implements. When design installation for the public space, the integration of the installation into the context of the place is vital. In order to maintain the aura of nature. I build little stomping rocks as input for participants to interact.

Overall the concept aim to provide momentary connection to each participants through their coordinated synchronised actions, while contemplating the natural form around then everyday.

However, according to my observation during exhibition, I find there is a change of behaviour pattern when participants engage in this installation in different time zone. This

installation was exhibited from 4pm to 8pm at campus. Most of participants tried to coordinate each other's action in the day time, and have eye contact during the whole interaction. Some of them even say "good job" to each other when they light up the tree. But when evening getting darker, more participants just sit on the rock and constantly stomping on that. As a result of this there was almost no communication between them. However they still looks enjoy the collaborative experience. As coordination and communication among participants is the vital requirements that I defined for building human connection, whether participants are still able to gain a sense of human connection is unclear.

Based on that, This essay generate the research question:

*Is communication and coordination necessary for people to create a sense of human connection. If not, what is the most important thing to generate a sense of human connection through interactive installation?*

In order to answer this question, in background survey section, this essay will review literature related to the interactive installation in public context, mechanism of human connection, and how participants feel and act on interaction that they are involved in. After that a discussion about the relationship between human connection and interactive installation in public context will be provided in main body section. Finally this essay will conclude a conclusion about how interactive installation in public context generate human connection.

### Background survey and main body

According to past design theorist[5], interaction design is defined by its concern with the embodied experience of technologies and the context of that experience. "Activity in context," . How to fit our concept in that context is vital for the success of intended experience.

During the exhibition, I did find the context could slightly vary during a day even in the same place. During the day time(before 6pm) most people are much more active when they engage in this installation, they talk and encourage each other. Yes, some of them even had a slight argument when they did not stomp at the right time. Maybe the whole interaction is not really a contemplative experience that I intended to provide, But the communications and interactions between participants are what I defined as success requirements for building human connection. When evening coming, most participants do seem more calm and relatively more contemplative in that environment. But the paradox is that they barely talk to each other, they seem put all the attention on lighting up the installation and themselves.

when they success to light up the tree they just take a picture and said “wow this cool” , then leave.

Based on that, I find two thing that really catch my attention. One is the dynamic context during a day. This what not I expect to observe at the beginning. When literature talk about the context of the public space[6][7], they studied more about spatial and social factors. The space between each participants is important and should consider the natural structure of that place. In the installation we did keep those principles , each rock safe and comfortable for participants to engage in and simulate the input into that environment. Make the the stomping board into a rock shape. But one thing it did not consider is the influence of time. The day time and night time could create different context.

Another thing is the human connection between participants. The research showed that communication play the most important role in social ties. People feel connected by talk and collaborate with each other[7]. During collaboration, synchrony pose a big influence on interpersonal relationships. In most cases, synchronised behaviour could facilitate the affiliation between individuals. The temporary coordinated movements are considered as an adaption which could reduce the boundary between strangers . By coordinating people to perform the same actions could enhance the connection between individuals as well. Most of day time interaction do match this requirement, they communicate and coordinate each other’s action. But the night time participants tend to be more contemplative. Though contemplative status is associated with positive engagement in work and well-being, whether this status could also facilitate human connection is unclear.

For deconstruct that, I did some research on human connection attributes in order to know how their brain functions and responds in different context. Previous research mentioned that most of human life consists of instinctive reactions to perceptible things and the accompanying emotions[6]. The first impression could be vital to set an aura for them. Based on their instinctive reactions, they generated different types of feeling and value standard. These attributes are the results of the brain and it was being categorised into three different level: the visceral level, the behavioural level and the reflective level. Visceral level is commonly referred to the appearance. Behaviour level could be considered as the pleasure and effectiveness of use. The final reflective level is about to achieve their personal satisfaction and create memories for them. Reflective level is all about message, about culture, their shared memories, and about the meaning of a product or its use[8].

There is an example of using shared memories to create human connection. This is a coca-cola vending machine installation which unite the people of Indian and Pakistan. Participants are invited to put their hand on the vending machine screen to do certain task. Once the shared tasks were completed, a celebration screen emerged which triggered the vending machine to dispense a free Coke for each person. This machine has been proved that provoke happiness in the world through Human connection. This is a really simple interaction , but how it connect people between two different countries? This because Pakistan and Indian are separated by their political opinion for a long time. They used to have no chance to collaborate together. This machine enable them to abandon their prejudice and political thoughts, which help them to create a sense of human connection. This public installation do consider the context of where it implement not just about the spatial factors but also the culture background, it used their shared memories to building human connection between them. Another interesting thing is that participants didn't know who they are collaborating together. They only know the person is from another country that hold opposite political stand.

The human connection is a really abstract terminology. I tried to find metrics to measure whether people connected, but those metrics are not holistic enough to measure human connection. From the background survey, we have a basic understanding of our brain. How our brain respond to certain context and interaction. For building connection, it is not really important to have a real communication , coordination and synchronisation. Yes, these strategy could help us to strengthen human connection, but it is not the core part of human connection. What matter for building human connection is user themselves. Their memories, their experiences and their beliefs. When design a public installation which aim to trigger human connection, the important thing is to deconstruct the context, the context is not just the the spatial factors and aura but also the time, the cultural background , user's memory and etc. Then based on the context, to create a shared experience for participants.

## Conclusion

Man is social animal by default, and we are always surrounded by other social animals. This fact required us to collaborate and mimic other human's action in order to simulate us into the human society. Synchrony also reduces the brain's processing load with a likely consequence of reducing perceived self-other differences. However, both synchronisation and in person coordination could strength human connection, neither of them is the necessary

precondition of human connection. Through both research and my observation , I find the key part to generating human connection is using their shared experience and memories. Humans have the need to find themselves through interaction with others.

Also the most important thing I learnt about human connection is that human connection does not mean generating a sense of connection to a specific person Human connection is more like the feeling of belonging to the community, and the feeling of being needed through collaboration. People could still gain the sense of human connection without actually seeing others humans, as long as their generate a shared experience with others.

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