

*Memories and Conversations*

Integrative Project Thesis

Tiffany Leung

2014 -2015

## **Introduction:**

Hong Kong is where I was born and raised for eighteen years before I moved to Ann Arbor to pursue my undergraduate degree. [Living](#) abroad on my own for the past four years has precipitated in me a new concept of home. When I was still in Hong Kong, the word “home” used to refer to where I physically slept, ate and lived. “Home” was naturally linked to a sense of familiarity; the people, the language, and the city that I encountered with on a daily basis. [Since](#) I moved to Ann Arbor, I no longer speak the same language to others, see or speak to my family regularly or experience the everyday city life of Hong Kong. Being 8000 miles away from home enabled me to gain a new perspective of distance and prompted me to rethink about my connection with home, community, place and space. I wanted to explore how I cope with nostalgia and how my relationships with the people and home have changed. I was drawn to the idea of recreating a space that captures the essence of what home means to me while being away. Moreover, I have always been fascinated with the density, speed and verticality of the cityscape of Hong Kong, not only [do](#) I find [it](#) to be distinct architectural elements of Hong Kong, I am also enthralled by the chaotic yet intimate human interactions within these packed spaces.

## **Contextual Discussion:**

Being distanced from home has precipitated me to re-think about memory and displacement. In a generation of increasing globalization, artists like Do Ho Suh also explores his relationship with his homeland, Korea. After relocating to United States, he created a sculptural installation “Home Within Home”, a full size fabric replica of a traditional Korean style house. His fascination with recreating an experience that depicts the cultural, physical, psychological, architectural sensation of Korea has been a major influence for my project. “Home Within Home” comprises multi-layered panels of semi-opaque textiles that hang from the ceiling, creating a temporal and insubstantial impression. Likewise, I am also interested in transforming perception and space by projecting imageries on three layers of

translucent screens. Through these layers, I am able to cultivate an intangible, metaphorical and psychological experience of place and time. (Belcove, 2005) (Do Ho Suh, 2013)

To cope with the physical absence of home, digital communication became my only source of connection to home. Through digital technologies like Skype and Facetime, I am able to have direct and regular conversations with my family and friends in the most intimate way available. It is during these often-casual conversations I find comfort in and feel at ease. Despite the distance and formalities of speaking through a confined screen, the intimacy of my relationships with family and friends is still very prominent. Similarly, in the movie “Hank and Asha”, directed by James E. Duff, a long-distance love story is presented through a series of video correspondence. The two developed their romantic relationship solely by sending each other these “video love letters”. Globalization and modern technology has allowed us to build and sustain relationships across thousand of miles. (Hank, 2013)

Through my computer screen, I am able to peak back into my life at home and recall familiar memories. My mother especially, whom I am very close with, became my main source of connection to everyone else in my family. She regularly updates me with happenings at home and in Hong Kong, and offers words of advice and any other support to me. This is why she appears most frequently in my installation; she is also the figure who I first and last talk to.

By juxtaposing my most personal conversations with building facades of Hong Kong, the conversations [speak](#) no longer only about myself but also about the city as a collective experience of people’s daily interaction and communication with their families and loved ones.

The Skype conversations are mostly non-legible due to the layering of multiple conversations. Most of the conversations are also spoken in Cantonese. If

the audience is a Cantonese speaker, they may be able to comprehend some of what my mother is saying, however, it is not my intent to provide my audience with the content of the conversation as I just want to portray my intimate relationship with these people and not the specific things we are talking about.

### **Methodology:**

I began to collect my materials by screen-capturing Skype [and](#) Facetime conversations with my family [and](#) friends for a few months. Meanwhile, I've also initiated collaboration with four friends/photographers based in Hong Kong. I asked them to send me photographs of building facades that they have or to go out and take photographs of as many building facades as they could. I gave instructions to a few specific locations but I asked them to send me anything they found interesting.

Later, I assembled all the different elements of the collages of Skype conversations and animated photographs of buildings façade and green screen video on a three-layer video. The three layers oscillate between footages of myself on Skype, the Skype conversations and building facades. Through the manipulation in animating, the projected imageries will consist of overlapping, excursion and repetition of all the parts. Most of the video effects and transitions were created on After [Effects](#) and Final Cut Pro.

Since I am interested in transforming the space and stimulating the audience through projection, light and sound, my three-layer video projection is a site-specific installation. With the help of Professor Peter Sparling, [my](#) piece took place at a preciously built structure with three screens and three corresponding projectors. My video installation was held as a solo exhibition at the North Campus Research Center.

## Creative Work: Production & Analysis

(Synopses)

It is a five minutes video with color and sound. The video begins on the first screen with the back of me, I open up my computer and begin to call my Mother on Skype, which appears on the second screen. Within seconds, a second Skype window with my Father appears next to my mother. Gradually, more windows of Skype conversations with other family members such as my brother and grandparents also appear. One by one, more Skype conversation windows fill up the second screen and form a collage. Some Skype conversations appear on the third screen as well.

After most of the windows have filled up the second and third screen. A scrolling transition of [building](#) facades begins to appear on the first and third screen. The two facades are zooming in and out, contrasting each other. The animation of building facades [is](#) integrated with the Skype windows. The first video of the back of me fades out as the facades take over.

A third [facade](#) takes over the first screen and the circular windows fade into black one by one, signaling the turning off of the lights in the building. Once the windows fades into black, [the Skype](#) windows from the second and third screen are revealed more clearly. Then, a building [facade](#) taken during nighttime appears in the third screen, then [the](#) second and [the](#) first. The windows on these facades flicker as if each apartment is turning the lights on and off. Some [Skype](#) windows spill over to the first screen, [and then](#) slowly fade out, [with](#) the sound of these conversations [fading out as well](#). The building facade continues to flicker for around two minutes on all three screens in silence after the sound completely fades out. A Skype window of my Mother emerges into the middle screen and fills the entire screen. Simultaneously, A frontal view of me skyping in front of the computer appears on the last screen.

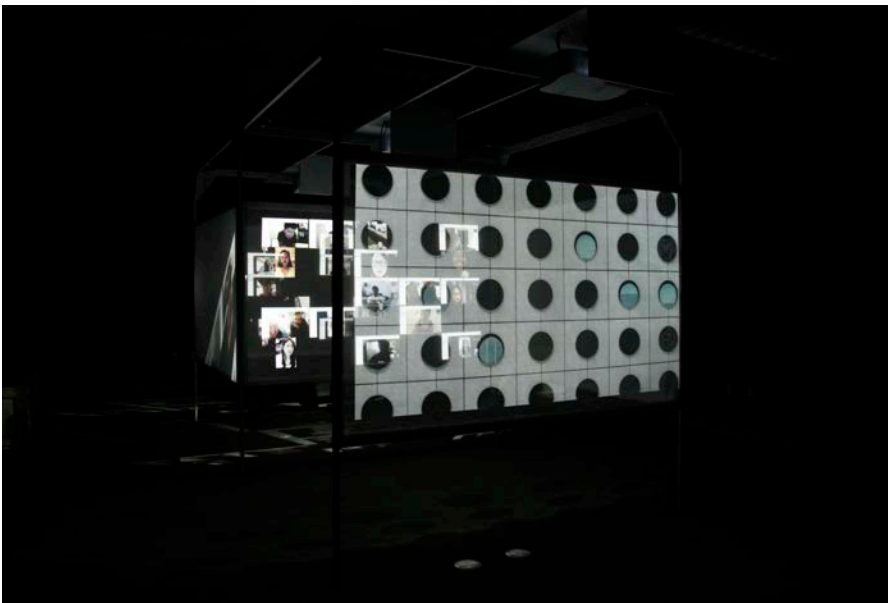
The video begins and ends with me skyping with my mother to emphasize on the importance of our relationship. The gradual built-up of the conversations in collages and transitions of building facades signify the metaphorical and temporal journey when connecting back to home.

*“Memories and Conversations”*

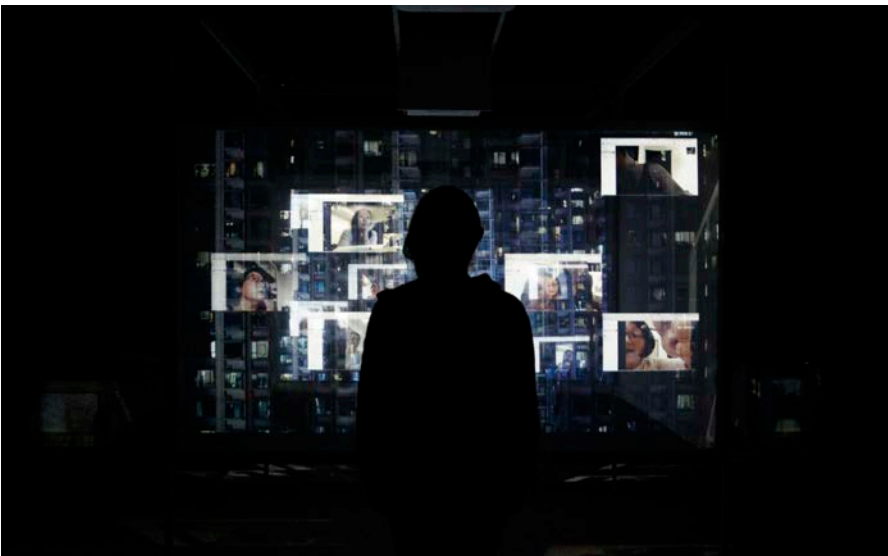
2014

Three-channel video projections, three projectors, color, sound.

Installation view 1



Installation view 2



## **Conclusion:**

“Memories and Conversations” is an exploration of the varying meanings of home and distance. The three layer video projection depicts digital communication as my means of coping with the physical absence. Through my computer screen, I am able to live vicariously and place myself right back into the nostalgia of the life I grew up with. The architecture in Hong Kong is known for its density, verticality and scale. By juxtaposing personal conversations with massive, emotionless building facades, the piece also speaks about the paradoxical relationship between physical distance and emotional intimacy in human interactions.

Audiences of different cultural backgrounds have a different understanding of my piece. People who have never lived abroad showed more interest in formal qualities of the piece, as compared to audience who understood Cantonese, expressed more interest in the conversations between my mother and I, as they resonated with my experience more. Possible directions for further explorations could be experimenting with text/subtitles and creating specific content for the conversations.

By revisiting memories and reconnecting to family and friends, the video installation is essentially a visual representation of my coping mechanism and the significance of digital technology in the meaning of home. By projecting on three screens, I am able to activate a multi-sensorial way of seeing that takes viewers onto both a physical and emotional journey that explores notions of home, physical space, displacement, relationships and memory.

## **Bibliography**

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