THE SECRET GARDEN

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Abstract – *The Secret Garden* is an interactive narrative potential space, which aims to be a hidden rest area in urban space and a site to interrogate and reflect on the human experience. A digital image of the tree with its ‘will’ to grow stands in the space. A spectator’s secret will feed the tree. JeeHee’s *The Secret Garden* installation suggests a cross-art form. Sound, light and visualisation will describe a ‘secret’ with poetic, abstract expression. With contemporary computer technologies and artistic content, the potential place will help to communicate the anguish of a city dweller.

INTRODUCTION

Today, there is a widespread view that new media art is superficial because there are many high technology arts, but rarely do they create emotionally touching art. This essay will attempt to address this issue as I think the new media arts could go a step further into where it gives more space for ‘empathy’. I believe now is the time to look back into the early part of the 20th century, a time of radical change for art and architecture which were inspired by psychological analysis like that of Sigmund Freud [1]. The purpose of the first part of the essay will be to understand what the psychological aspect of human secrets are by relating it to ancient myths and the book *The Psychology of Secrets*.

I began the research by asking, how can I create *The Secret Garden* space by analysing the relationship between the psychology of secret, the secret spaces and the aesthetic of images for illustrating secrets? In the second part, I discuss the spatial approach for discovering potential secret space, referencing the book *The Empty Space* by Peter Brook, and a journal article about the aesthetic of imaginative play by Kerry Mallan. Thirdly, I will examine the aesthetic of light for the illustration of secrets and discuss the developmental process of integrating laser light in my installation. Finally, I will describe the technological process and operation of the installations.

In conclusion, I will describe plans to create an interactive narrative therapeutic space, which would present to the spectator the time to remember his or her own secrets and therefore to become a protagonist in my installation piece. This piece is *The 2nd Movement of The Secret Garden*.

THE 'SECRET' AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH FOR NARRATIVE SPACE

The King has Donkey Ears is a popular ancient myth in South Korea. This brief story is as follows:

The crown maker who knows the secret that the king has donkey ears should have kept the secret. Time passed, the crown maker could keep the secret until at last he became ill. Finally, the crown maker had an idea. He went to the forest with a shovel. He looked around and saw no one. There were only bamboo trees rustling in the wind. He dug a hole in the ground. Then he bent down and put his mouth in the hole. "The king has donkey ears, Ah hahaha!" The crown maker shouted this over and over. Some time later the crown maker died. Then a strange sound came from the hills. Whenever the wind was blowing, "the king has donkey ears! Ah hahaha ..." was heard from the bamboo trees.

This story is not only found in Korea but also in Greek mythology; *The Ears of King Midas* is a very similar story. These two ancient myths are the story of a man whose freedom of expression was repressed by authority. However this situation occurs not only in ancient mythology.

Koreans who were forced to work in Japan at the time of the Second World War expressed their opposition through graffiti on the wall of a colliery like this (figure 1):

Figure 1. 'I want to go home; I am hungry; I miss my mom'

In a democratic society, there is no suppression by force. However, I think some constraints of the self-expression can exist through various social positions, jobs, status, and reputation. Therefore, I began to research what the psychology of secrets is and whether the act of exposing one's secret has positive benefits or not.

The etymological origin of the word 'secret' is from Latin word 'secretus', which is also from a word 'secerno' that means 'take apart, separate'. A radix 'cerno' from the 'secerno' has not only the meaning of discriminating between good and bad, but also has the meaning of 'excretion and secretion.' The meaning of the duality of the word 'secret' is opposing or combining the two notions of maintaining the positive secret and exposing the negative secret.

Pierre Lévy-Soussan, the author of the book *Eloge du secret*, described the significant importance of separating the secret from dualism of the secret. But I think that he stressed the importance of keeping secrets the more, as described in this opinion:

“The more one has secrets, the more one has illusions about reality. And it provides more possibilities for creativity. ... Abandoning secrets have the same meaning as a backward step from the real world or the fear of the real world, which always contain mystery and newness” [2]. Marcel Gauchet also agrees in saying that the tenacity towards the transparency of the secret can be indicated as *“disillusionment with the world”* [3].

The secret also has the power to develop mature thinking as it provides sufficient time to think. Humans could develop the ability of self-centred thinking while they keep a secret. When we keep a secret consciously and wilfully, we can create an inner space to protect our self-awareness, self-absorption, and self-communion from preoccupation, judgement and blame of others [4].

When I commenced this project, the main purpose was to encourage spectators to expose their secrets and thus release their repression in the process as inspired by *The King has Donkey Ears* story; but concluded that, in my installation piece, the choice of discerning the separation of secrets should be left to the spectator to decide.

THE ‘SECRET’ AS A SPATIAL APPROACH – POTENTIAL SPACE

Nowadays, we tend to think that a secret space is more likely to be a virtual space online; but I would create *The Secret Garden* installation in a physical space, which co-exists with us. Individuals can create a real secret garden using their imagination, which can become their sanctuary from a busy, stressful life.

The 1st Movement of The Secret Garden (see figure 2) was created in three different kinds of spaces as a 3D computer simulation, and this project was mainly inspired by my own personal secret garden in my home town, Seoul, South Korea. When I was nine years old I constructed a secret garden with my friends. I lived in an area that was surrounded by high-buildings and apartments, so we found an urban private space hidden by trees behind the apartment (see figure 3). Our secret place was calm, fun and a fantasy world where we were the masters of another universe. Kelly Mallan explains this idea as *“when children inhabit their “secret” spaces, the physical place is transformed into a dynamic, socially-interactive space filled with sounds and movement; a personalized domain with its own signature rhythms and temporal dimensions. The significance of sounds and actions in the construction of space is aligned with the ways of orality and bodily communication to construct identity”* [5].

Figure 2. The map of *The 1st Movement of The Secret Garden*

Figure 3. The Secret place in Seoul, picture taken in 2009

Figure 4. The secret space in Canary Wharf, picture taken in 2008

Recently, I lived in Canary Wharf, London, and acquired a secret garden, which was situated between the underground station and an office building. One day as I sat on the bench and watched the many business people pass by, I noticed the look of anxiety and stress in their faces. This experience inspired the main ideas for *The 2nd Movement of the Secret Garden* because whilst *The 1st Movement of the Secret Garden* is based on the reminiscence of my childhood, I wanted to offer absolution for spectators like those city workers at Canary Wharf to release their stress and anxiety in the installation piece, as did the crown maker in the forest.

The genre of theatre has factors and ideas that I want to use to demonstrate 'empathy' in my work. I think there are similarities in the illustrative principles and ideas between theatre and new media installation arts, particularly in the live element.

Peter Brook, the well-known theatre director, analysed theatre intelligently in his book *The Empty Space*, and said, “*the one thing that distinguishes the theatre from all the other arts is that it has no permanence*” [6]. I believe this view also applies to new media art, as it also has no permanence, which I think contributes to the transformation of the audience. Peter Brook further emphasizes the notion of audience transformation in saying “*This is true drama because the people on their feet will be speaking about true issues shared by all present in the only manner that can make these issues really come to life. They may cry. They may laugh. They may not react at all. But behind all that goes on, they all share a wish to be helped to emerge from their anguish, even if they don’t know what this help may be, or what form it could take*” [7].

THE AESTHETIC OF LIGHT

The initial idea of the project was to create a cross-form art that would overcome the superficial issues found in new media art; there are also issues in other art formats such as the future of digital performance, the expanded space for the future of cinema and the future of art technology based on narrative. *Pepper’s Ghost* opened up the new forms of communication and creative expression for the theatre in the late 19th century [8]. In practice, it was difficult to find an innovative method like *Pepper’s Ghost*, for encoding the spectator’s secrets in *The Secret Garden* project. Furthermore, I was also eager to find a method for creating expanded space, as illustrated by Anthony McCall in *The Solid Light Film* – an expanded space, which can show my video footage beyond any obstacle, such as a wall in *The Secret Garden* project. Through the study of *Pepper’s Ghost*, my interest gradually shifted from the history of 3D stereoscopic and holographic art to light art and kinetic art. In my research I visited the holographic theatre, the Musion Company and tested the visualisation of my digital tree on the stage, which is part of my installation. However, showing 3D holographic moving images requires an expensive budget for production and set up. I am planning an alternative method for the holographic art by applying the basic principle of the reflection of light through the use of mirrors, projector, etc. at the moment. The more I studied of light, the more I became attracted to the idea of laser light, so I started to create laser-interference illustrations.

THE SECRET GARDEN : THE FOUR TRIGGER ZONE

In *The Secret Garden*, there are four different trigger zones.

1 Introduction

At the entrance will be a birdcage and in it will sit a blue bird that will narrate the story of *The Ears of King Midas* as the spectator walks in. There is a written command; which is ‘Silence.’ The spectators cannot talk to each other or anybody else present at the place. This rule will be posted at the entrance. To maintain this rule, spectators will only be allowed to enter one at a time with time difference.

2 Evoking the Secrets

As I mentioned in the first part of this essay, the initial idea for the installation started from the very simple concept that people can destroy their secrets. The installation will consist of a digital growing tree that is programmed by computer language processing attached to the shredder by Arduino micro controller. This feature is similar to the architectural structure of the music box gizmo, which operates at the spin of a handle that creates the sounds. Spectators will spin a similarly designed handle, which will be on the side of laser installation, and which will turn on the shredder. If they stop spinning the handle the shredder will switch off. The duration of the handle spinning and the switching on/off of the shredder will work simultaneously together to instigate the growth of the digital tree. There will be a screen located in-between the shredder and the spin handle so that when the spectator rotates the handle, there will be projected in the interface screen kinetic drawings created by the laser light. These kinetic patterns will be narrative in itself, as the duration of the spin rotation will encourage the spectator to evoke the memories of their own secrets.

Figure 5. The laser interference illustration by laser kinetic

3 Exposure of the Secret

There will be a private zone that will consist of a pen, paper, and another shredder; spectators will also wear specialised video recorder sunglasses, which will record the spectator's performance while they write their secrets on the piece of paper. This writing performance will offer the spectator the opportunity to record their secrets. Although the paper will be destroyed by the shredder automatically as they are writing, a digitised copy will be recorded and given to the spectator at the end of the installation space.

4 Maintaining of the Secret

A 3D i-glass will be mounted on the wall, which will show a poetic video installation and will psychologically encourage the spectator to release their secrets. The spectator will adjust their eyes to the glass on the wall in order to watch the video content.

All these active interactions by the spectator will be digitally processed to stimulate the growth of the digital tree, thus creating a unique invisible creature, which potentially knows all of the secrets in *The Secret Garden*.

Therefore, the viewers who are not participating, and the performers who are engaging exist at the same time at *The Secret Garden*. According to Peter Brook, the requirements for the theatre are now accomplished: “*I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged*” [9].

CONCLUSION

The Secret Garden space is not only for the exhibition of the three different installations, but it is also a sanctuary place for the spectators. In *The Secret Garden*, there is a shift in roles as the artist becomes a director, the space is a stage, the spectator is an actor and the installation is a subject. The relationship in theatre performance is between the actor, subject and audience. However, in rehearsal it involves the actor, subject, and director [10]. This project has given me the opportunity to explore the potential possibility of incorporating the theatre principle of performance and audience using new media technology. Through the analysis of the psychology of secrets, I integrate theatre and new media installations. The moment when the exhibition space for the new media installation transforms to a theatre; I strongly emphasize that it is the moment of achieving ‘empathy’ through the analysis of psychology. I think this is a type of cross-art form.

The 1st Movement of The Secret Garden was created in a virtual space with 3D computer simulation. *The 2nd Movement of The Secret Garden* will currently be set up in a dark room in an enclosed space at a final show in September at Goldsmiths University. Moreover, I have future plans to transfer the three different installations from *The 2nd Movement of The Secret Garden* and set it up in a public space, which would target city workers as the main spectators. This will be *The 3rd Movement of The Secret Garden*.

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