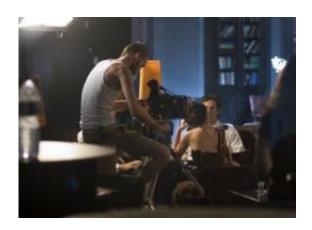# Choose a movie's plot -- while you watch it

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This image is from on the set of Turbulence. Credit: AFTAU

Will Rona and Sol kiss and seal their fate as a couple forever, or will Sol answer the ringing phone and change the course of history? A new movie format developed by Tel Aviv University lets the viewer decide.

Utilizing complicated video coding procedures, the new format provides smooth interaction and transition between scenes as audience members watch — and determine the plot of — Turbulence, created by Prof. Nitzan Ben Shaul of Tel Aviv University's Department of Film and Television. Made with his unique scene-sequencing technique, Turbulence recently won a prize at the Berkeley Video and Film Festival for its technological innovation.

"The film gives people the suspense and thrill of multiple outcomes like those of the films Sliding Doors or Run Lola Run, but it also gives them

the power to really choose and influence at a number of key points how the plot of the movie will proceed," says Prof. Ben Shaul. Curious viewers can backtrack, too — they can go back to a narrative crossroads to see what might have been, never seeing the same ending twice.

A happy American ending or tragic European one?

Using Prof. Ben Shaul's innovative format, the viewer watches the film on a regular or a touch-screen monitor, and an iridescent glow appears on certain "action items" at pivotal plot moments. The viewer can choose whether or not to interact. Should Sol send the text message? If the viewer thinks so, he clicks or touches the screen and activates the cell phone held by the actor.

Turbulence comes with an attractive plot, however it's played out. Three Israeli friends, Edi, Sol and Rona, meet by chance in Manhattan. Twenty years in the past, a protest over the Lebanon War led to an arrest, and the three friends went separate ways. Now, in present-day New York, they say goodbye to the past and two of the characters rekindle a love affair.

How will it end? You decide. Without any viewer interactions, it lasts 83 minutes; with interactions it varies from one hour to two. Whatever choice the viewer makes, Prof. Ben Shaul says, the end leads to closure and viewer satisfaction.

"Sliding Doors and Run Lola Run inspired me. They make you think about options in life, but they don't let you experience what responsibility feels like at crucial decision points," says Prof. Ben Shaul. "In our film you decide where the character should go, and you can decide to return to the point where the plot flipped. It's gripping."

Fit for an iPad

Funded by the Tel Aviv University Technology and Science Committee, the movie is perfect for new touch-screen technologies like iPads or personal airplane movie players. But the movie can also be seen in groups. An individual can be chosen to make the choices, or majority vote can rule.

"It develops optional thinking and can change the way people consume media and advertisements," says Prof. Ben Shaul, who received his Ph.D. from the Cinema Studies Department at New York University.

He hopes to inspire a whole new paradigm of filmmaking and is currently writing a book with the working title What If: Optional Thinking and Narrative [Movies](#).

Provided by Tel Aviv University