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Reading Ambient Literature: Immersion, Distraction, and the Situated Reading Experience

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ABSTRACT

This article considers the experience and process of reading works of ambient literature, a form of situated literary experience delivered by pervasive computing platforms, responding to the presence of a physically situated reader to deliver a story. This form of situated digital work does not need to be bound by a material form, such as a printed book. Without such a framing device, and its position embedded in the physical world, this narrative form has boundaries that are often in flux. It can shift and respond to the presence of the situated reader, and its beginning and ending can become blurred. This article addresses the specifics of this fluid literary form, open to distraction and unpredictability for the reader, and examines the potential of a reading experience informed by pervasive and ubiquitous computing practices. In doing so, it draws on Ulrich Schmidt's notions of distraction and immersion in relation to the position of the reader. In particular, it addresses the idea that attention can dissolve in two opposite directions, toward a lack of concentration or toward an absorbed trance, a time of focused concentration and immersion, and explores how in ambient literature these become literary devices that lead and shape the reader's experience.

A work of ambient literature is a situated literary experience delivered by a pervasive computing platform, such as a smartphone, that responds to the presence of a physically present reader to deliver a story (Dovey, Abba, and Pullinger 2020; see also the Ambient Literature project, ambientlit.com). Such a work can take many forms, building on earlier digital and print based traditions, but involves a reader engaging with place in a particular

context and time and a writer using pervasive digital technologies to tell a story. It differs from earlier forms of locative media (Hight 2010; Raley 2010; Wilken and Goggin 2015; Farman 2015) in that it focuses on engaging with the ambient data that can be found all around us (Dovey 2016). Jon Dovey (2016) recognizes that it relates to the work of Malcolm McCullough (2013) and his interest in the flows of data in the physical architecture of urban space. GPS may be used to create effect, as well as other ubiquitous functions of the smartphone, including sensors such as the gyroscope, which can tell whether the phone is being rotated and in what direction; the accelerometer, which detects vibration, tilt, and acceleration; and the proximity sensor, which recognizes how close the phone is to another object. Such forms of data, including not only locative and mapping functions of the smartphone but also data gathered on weather conditions or details about landscape and time, offer creative potential for authors wanting to tell stories and for a new reading experience for mobile readers.

This article examines this specific type of immersive, mobile reading experience. With smartphones in their pockets, readers are able to engage with immersive, and often interactive, stories that rely on their presence. To access a story, these readers must engage with a place and perform a particular function, which may involve gesture, movement, or listening. In return, they experience the feeling of tuning into an ambient story that is in the air, waiting to be discovered. This experience differs from literature focused on an exploration of place: in a work of ambient literature, readers are physically located *in* place. The experience offers them an alternate literary experience where they not only read a digital text, an experience analyzed by N. Katherine Hayles (2010), but also read place. This article considers the experience and process of reading works of ambient literature for its readers. A situated digital work does not need to be bound by a material form, such as a book, although a printed element may be a part of the experience. Without such a fixed framing device, and its position embedded in the physical world, the boundaries of this narrative form are in flux. A work of ambient literature can shift and respond to the presence of the reader, and its beginning and ending can become blurred, drawing on traditions of ambient music, such as the work of musician Brian Eno.

This article addresses the specifics of this fluid form, open to distraction and unpredictability for situated, active readers as they often navigate or come into contact with elements or locations of the real world as part of the story. It examines the presence of ubiquitous data and the potential of a reading experience informed by pervasive and ubiquitous computing practices. In doing so, it examines the peripheries of this form of storytelling and takes a literary approach to understanding emerging digital technologies, drawing on the work of Hayles (2005), who recognizes that digital reading is an experience and that a digital work

cannot simply be "read." In particular, we examine how story, rooted in place and accessed using a smartphone, may be about not only the authored words that are presented to readers but also the subtler language found in the real world around them. For example, a reader may read a story on a smartphone screen or listen to an audio work in a busy location, such as a city street. The real world around readers can influence their experiences of a story as much as the words written by the author. Although elements of the physical world may become part of a story, this influence is not easily controlled by an author of an ambient work. This article questions how readers experience the peripheries between the two experiences, reading at the edges of both the authored and the real, and how the interplay between these languages creates immersive literary works.

To examine the nature of these peripheries and to reach an understanding of these languages, this article draws on Ulrich Schmidt's (2013) notions of distraction and immersion, specifically related to the notion of ambience in music, to make sense of the position of the reader. In particular, we address the idea that readers' attention can dissolve in two opposite directions, toward a lack of concentration or toward an absorbed trance where they are immersed fully in the work, and explores how in ambient literature these two types of immersion become literary devices that shape experience. I identify two forms of language that the reader experiences in a work of ambient literature: the narrative written, crafted and controlled by the author, and the "language of place," with its inherent uncontrollability and unpredictability. We argue that it is the interplay between these two forms of language, the constructed and the real, that contributes to an immersive, situated reading experience.

1. THE AMBIENT LITERATURE PROJECT

Ambient Literature (ambientlit.com) was a research project funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council that examined the poetics and form of this pervasive form of literature. The two-year project ran between 2016 and 2018 as a collaboration among three universities: UWE Bristol, Bath Spa University, and the University of Birmingham. I was employed as a postdoctoral research fellow on this project, which as a form of practice-led research commissioned three works of ambient literature to understand both the form and how it was written and produced. The project connected to my own interest in digital writing as both an academic and a writer. However, my role within the project was as an academic, and I critically examined both the work of the three commissioned authors and the responses of their readers. To develop an approach to collecting these responses, I often reflected on my own experiences of the works.

Each of the three works commissioned by the Ambient Literature project took the form of a smartphone app; each was rooted in a place, and each needed the reader to be present in a physical location or in a particular context to engage with the story. These three works serve as case studies to examine aspects of ambient literature and to reach an understanding of how ambient literature might be read by a situated reader.

The first commissioned project was *It Must Have Been Dark by Then* (2017), created by composer and sound artist Duncan Speakman. This a book and audio experience uses music, narration, and field recordings to reveal stories of environments that are changing and disappearing, predominantly due to climate change, such as the swamplands of Louisiana, empty Latvian villages, and the edge of the Tunisian Sahara. As situated readers experience this work, they are given a printed book and a pair of headphones, and they are asked to download the work, as an app, onto their smartphones. When the work begins, an audio narration begins and readers are shown a map on the screen of their smartphone, which appears to be a Google map with all the visually identifying marks of locations removed. The readers are given points on the map to follow and are asked, by audio narration heard through their headphones, to walk toward these points on the map. When the readers reach the various locations, they are asked to read chapters in a printed book. There is no prescribed location for this work; a reader can experience it anywhere in the world, across concrete pavements and cliff tops. There is no preset route to take; the app builds a unique map for each person's experience. What is experienced, however, is an interplay among the printed word, the stories that readers are told through audio, and the real places around them. There is a boundary that readers need to cross between fiction and reality to reveal the story of vanishing landscapes.

The second commissioned work of ambient literature was *The Cartographer's Confession* (2017) by writer James Attlee. This narrative is a fictional exploration of London, based on the history of Attlee's own family, and explores the themes of immigration and loss to reveal hidden family stories spanning the city. Through an app downloaded onto their smartphones, readers are asked to follow a physical route across London on foot and experience real locations, each tied to an unfolding story. As they follow, their attention is drawn to what they see around them. Through the app on their phone, they are shown photographs of previous Londons, and through audio, which they access through headphones, the city's stories are revealed. Some elements of the city are still recognizable, and other parts have vanished into history. The readers experience a sense of a story overlapping with reality and the uncanny feeling that they are present in several time periods at once. To experience this

sense of time travel, they must be in a particular place at a certain time through their engagement with the story.

The third commissioned work of ambient literature was *Breathe* (2018) by writer Kate Pullinger, developed in collaboration with Visual Editions and Google Creative Labs. This work is a ghost story told through a reader's smartphone, designed to be experienced in any location in the world. The reader experiences the story through the character of Flo, a young woman who is haunted by ghosts, by technology, and by her phone. The story uses location APIs (application programming interfaces), functions of a smartphone that know where the reader is physically located, as a literary device as well as a gestural interface to tell the story. The ghosts haunting Flo know where the reader is located; they know the weather, the season, and several locations that are close by. The feeling this knowledge creates in the readers is uncanny and haunting as the text of the story mirrors aspects of their own geographical context. If the reader were to read the story in another location, parts — some subtle, and some not so subtle — would be different. The work and the readers' experiences of it leave space for the real world, their personal worlds, to interrupt them as they read.

2. EMBODIED READING PRACTICES

As I begin this exploration of ambient literature, and a reflection on the three commissioned works, I want to distinguish between place-based writing, which includes forms such as the realist novels, narrative nonfiction, and essays that explore place, as well as situated narratives (of which ambient literature is a form). In particular, we must understand the difference between the act of reading in place, which is an immersive act, and being part of a situated narrative, which offers the addition of an embodied experience. Such place-based writing includes the work of Teju Cole, who in his 2011 novel *Open City* positions his reader in Manhattan; the writer Rebecca Solnit, who explores the experience of being lost; and Iain Sinclair, who reveals London to his readers. There is also the tradition of nature writing, now rising in popularity, which engages readers in place. However, in works of ambient literature the reader is physically present within the work, within a specific location or context, and the work responds to this presence. *It Must Have Been Dark by Then, The Cartographer's Confession,* and *Breathe* each situate readers in physical and temporal spaces. Readers do not simply read about a time and place; they experience it and are immersed within it. In return, these places respond to the readers' presence in various ways: through the location those readers occupy or the data they produce. However, the reading experience produced can only ever be incomplete. Given the text's responsiveness to factors such as weather, time, and season, any particular reader will find it impossible to experience all versions of the

story due to the infinitude of these data-supplied options (Marcinkowski 2019). A different perspective is offered to a reader engaging with a print-based text, which raises questions about the resulting literary experience.

However, is this rich literary experience of being embodied within a physical location and within a narrative different from other types of locative storytelling, where writers and artists use GPS to tell stories through tagging locations? There is a history of such practice in the fields of arts and performance by artists such as Janet Cardiff, who creates immersive audio walks, and writers such as Eli Horowitz, Matthew Derby, and Kevin Moffett, who in *The Silent History* (2011) tagged stories to GPS locations, meaning that the reader has to move between spaces to access the story with the use of a smartphone. Countless others have explored this terrain and experimented with the idea of situated readers, who engage with a physical location through their movement through time and space, to engage with a narrative and bring a story to the surface.

For these readers, the act of reading resembles an encounter with a performance. We can see how it can operate as a temporal form, where a reader is drawn into a narrative for a specific length of time, often through interaction with a physical location. In *It Must Have Been Dark by Then* and *The Cartographer's Confession*, this encounter is an engagement with the physicality of city streets readers pass through as they engage with each work. In *Breathe*, the physical location where the reader experiences the work is present and shapes the reading experience. Kim Solga, Shelley Orr, and D. J. Hopkins (2009: 6) recognize the value of this type of performance in the urban space, believing that "performance has been forced to crowd the margins of urban discourse without being fully recognized as essential to the work of the city — why the sometimes vexed, always multi-layered relationship between 'writing' the city (a seemingly private, often intensely individualized exercise) and performing (in) the city has been so unevenly represented." This sense of performing the city, of reading physical spaces, has a history of earlier locative media works. For example, in the performance piece *Britglyph* by Alfie Dennen, which took place between December 2008 and March 2009, participants were asked to travel to specific locations within the United Kingdom, carrying with them a stone or rock taken from where they lived. On reaching the requested location, they were instructed to take a photograph or video of themselves with the stone or rock and to contribute this to the project's website, leaving the rock at the location. This project, despite not using language as its primary mode, other than through the use of instructions to participants, creates a literary experience through performance, an experience of reading landscape.

Through such performances of physical spaces, the reader's attention can be choreographed using ambient materials, such as physical landmarks, locations, or the use and repurposing of data from software such as APIs, as in *Breathe.* Drawing on work of Schmidt (2013), we can view readers' experience of a work of ambient literature as being one of distraction and immersion. The reader's attention can be orchestrated using these ambient materials, like the fabric of a city street, alongside pervasive technologies. This process is evident in Attlee's (2017) work as readers navigate a space while he draws their attention to various physical urban elements, such as a market, buildings, and statues, to create a story. The real world of London and the fictional world of past Londons are each brought into the foreground and then moved into the background again. For Schmidt (2013), this choreographed process is how ambient music operates; there is a shift in the listener's attention from paying close attention to the music followed by the music fading into the background. In works of ambient literature, we can see that the reader's attention is drawn toward particular features, constructed through ambient materials, and is then moved away. This attention, either immersive or distracting, can dissolve in two opposite directions, toward a lack of concentration or toward an absorbed trance, where readers are fully engaged in the work, as they navigate a physical space.

For an understanding of this process, we can draw on Schmidt's (2013) reflection on how Brian Eno's approach to ambience, exemplified by his 1975 album *Discreet Music*, recognizes ambience as an encounter between subject and environment. In ambient music this process involves listeners moving between engaging with and ignoring music as they shift between giving it their attention and focusing on their surroundings. These two states can be entered and reentered repeatedly. The process is similar in works of ambient literature as the reader's attention moves between different aspects, for example, from playing close attention to an element of an authored story to specific details of a physical landscape and back again.

This ambient experience for the reader is also evident in Anne Mangen's (2008) identification of two types of immersion in the digital reading experience. She argues that one of these types involves entering a "technologically enhanced environment," such as those found in virtual reality experiences and computer games, and "phenomenological immersion," which enables a reader to travel to a fictional world through experiences, such as reading. Ambient literature offers a dual form of immersion, where the reader is able to move between technology and story.

Authors can play with techniques of immersion and distraction to shape the reading experience for the reader. In *It Must Have Been Dark by Then*, we are drawn into the

physical location of the environment we are in and then shifted to thinking about another place, located farther away. For example, the reader is instructed by the narrator to find a piece of the natural world, and connections are drawn between this and specific locations in other countries where the landscape is under threat due to climate change. Multiple locations, and the interplay between them, exist at the same time for the reader, and the reader must read both a narrative and a place. In *The Cartographer's Confession*, the readers experience multiple time periods in London's history as they are shown a collection of photographs on the screen of their phone. For example, as they are instructed to move through Borough Market, they are given evidence of the same city scenes that are both familiar and overlooked, such as a statue of William Shakespeare in Leicester Square. In *Breathe*, we are rooted in a place through the use of data that locates us as readers but also drawn into the fictional story of Flo's navigation of the world without her mother. For example, the app gathers locational information about the reader and uses this to shape the story through personalized textual elements, including the insertion of details about the reader's location. This approach connects the reader to the protagonist, Flo, as both of their worlds are brought together and they each experience a sense of their phones being haunted. Such a literary technique can be evident in a print-bound narrative, but there is something different about the experience of being located in a physical and temporal space and of embodying a place. The difference here comes from the use of technology that creates immersive narrative experiences, where what is seen as part of a story and elements that surround it are brought together.

3. AUTHORED MOVEMENT

The use of physical, authored movement guides the reading experience of works of ambient literature. For example, this can be movement through a physical space but also, as in *Breathe*, through the physicality of an interaction with a smartphone in the form of the specific gesture of a finger against a screen to reveal hidden or concealed textual elements. The act of movement here is crucial for accessing the story and brings the reader into close physical contact with the narrative. In both *It Must Have Been Dark by Then* and *The Cartographer's Confession*, the process of walking is used as a form of literary device. Readers are physically present in a location, and they are asked, by the audio narrator or the text, to walk as a process through which they engage with story. Through this act of walking, readers are asked to physically act out elements of the story. For example, in *It Must Have Been Dark by Then*, readers are given a series of tasks where they must locate specific aspects of the landscape in front of them. The act of walking is what connects them to the

people whose stories are revealed to them in printed form as they are prompted to undergo similar challenges.

There is a wide history of literary walking, including the figure of Walter Benjamin's (2002) *flaneur* and Guy Debord's ([1967] 1994) experience of the *derive*. However, Benjamin's and Debord's views of walking are typically enactments of a particular kind of walking and a celebration of wandering and of moving through physical space. Through the act of reading, readers can imagine they are in a specific location even if they are hundreds of miles away. However, ambient literature goes further. Here, in contrast with Benjamin's *flaneur*, the reader is physically situated in a place rather than experiencing a literary encounter, and a writer is able to draw connections to context and time. For example, in *The Cartographer's Confession*, the reader is able to physically experience moving through locations in London, such as Borough Market, which connects them to the experience of characters in the narrative. In *It Must Have Been Dark by Then*, a connection between reader and character is achieved through an audio piece told to the reader through headphones, an intimate act of oral storytelling that closes the distance between physical bodies.

In some works of ambient literature walking can become a narrative feature of the work, and a reader becomes physically engaged in a work. In *It Must Have Been Dark by Then*, readers are prompted to walk through abstractions of maps that appear on the smartphone they hold in their hands, and through the printed book they also hold, they are asked to engage in stories about places far away. The place where they are physically located, which may be a city street or a rural location, and the places they have conjured into their imagination become connected, and the reader embodies the narrative and, in part, its characters. This connection between real and represented place frames and alters readers' experience of other aspects of the narrative. The narrative cannot be experienced without this physicality and the interplay between locations. For example, in the first section of *It Must Have Been Dark by Then*, readers are asked to visit a series of physical locations, such as somewhere there is water or a place where they can find a hint of the natural world, and this experience frames their experience of the narrative, both figuratively and literally. Through these locations, readers construct their own personalized map of physical space, and this becomes a unique route through which they experience the second section of the work as they are asked to retrace their steps back to their starting point.

However great the sense of freedom for readers of such works, the experience of moving through space is mediated and authored. Michel De Certeau (1984: 92) wrote that "walking in the city is an acting out of place." Both walking and language are creative acts, with which you can improvise and make connections. Such an experience of walking is evident for the

readers of *It Must Have Been Dark by Then* as it becomes a creative act where they are given a degree of freedom over the route they take and the opportunity to shape the narrative as it is being experienced. Speakman explains this interaction with the physical world, as experienced by his reader:

> We are invited to construct a journey where we are asked to locate dwellings, a tree, a rock, water. These sites are captured as markers on a map with no other features, which then generates further destinations for the walker. Each of these generated destinations may involve crossing roads or walls, and in identifying locations that cannot, with safety, be reached, the "walk" becomes a challenging process of navigating the environment. At the outermost point of the journey, the walker is invited to retrace their steps; this time, however, each of the marked locations automatically offers spoken documentary content from the inhabitants of the distant, climate threatened locations that the piece is based around. (Dovey and Speakman 2018)

Although readers are given agency through their exploration of place, they are not as free as they may think they are. They are asked to navigate a physical space in any location in the world, but wherever they are, there will always be boundaries and borders in place. They will not always be able to pass entirely freely from one place to the next, as the physical spaces, particularly cities, control movement. As the work is designed to be experienced in any location, these controls are unpredictable. There may be rivers, commercial and business zones, fenced off areas, and dangerous, unsafe places. In this work, the reader's inability to access certain areas of a location, as part of the situated narrative, serves as a metaphor. Readers experience a work about physical global borders while experiencing borders in front of them. Through the process of walking, the reader unlocks aspects of the narrative, and a hidden world is revealed.

In Pullinger's *Breathe*, engagement with physical movement at first appears subtler. The work is designed for a reader located in a single location, rather than a movement through place, but the reading process is informed by the physical presence of the world outside as APIs collect location data, which personalizes their reading of the narrative. Through the story the protagonist, Flo, is haunted by her smartphone, and through their own phone, readers experience this haunting. In addition to a linear narrative, ghostly text appears on their phone, and some parts of the text become hidden. Readers must use particular gestures and movements, such as swiping a finger or tilting a hand, to reveal what has been concealed and, in doing so, engage with the narrative through movement without being promoted to leave a single location. This contrasts with *It Must Have Been Dark by Then* and *The Cartographer's Confession*, where the act of walking is required as part of an

engagement with narrative. However, borders and boundaries are still in place as readers must engage with physical movement to experience a story.

4. READING UNPREDICTABILITY

In works of ambient literature, unpredictability can be read as part of a narrative. As these respond to the presence of a reader to deliver story, a sense of unpredictability is inherent in this literary form. The experience for the reader differs from the traditions of fictional narratives where, despite the reader not knowing what will happen next, the text has already been authored and the story is fixed. Neither the world nor people always behave in predictable ways, and this is often a feature of this type of situated literature, where elements of the narrative are not always fixed. This unpredictability can be read, and it could be considered a form of language in ambient literature and how the reading experience is designed and shaped.

When I experienced one of the early experiments in ambient literature at the start of the two-year-long Ambient Literature research project, I began to recognize unpredictability as a type of language experienced by the reader and part of a mode of reading. I was listening to the story told as an audio narrative through headphones and was directed to walk and then stop to look at the nearby river. As I sat on a bench facing the water, a stranger approached me asking for spare change. Wearing headphones I felt separated from the world, but as I took off the headphones to speak to him, I was jolted away from the narrative and back into the real world. Although I knew that I could return to the story by simply putting the headphones back on, I realized that this encounter became a part of the narrative experience that the writer could not control. This type of unpredictability was later evident in *The Cartographer's Confession* as readers found themselves moving away from the narrative, for example, by getting lost while following the route displayed on their smartphone or by interacting with a stranger. Such interruptions will change the narrative experience for the reader and are outside of authorial control.

Such spontaneous interruptions that influence how the narrative is experienced are fragmented and ephemeral. The reader can be interrupted when reading a printed text, but in works of ambient literature, particularly those that rely on a reader being located in a public space, these operate differently. When reading a printed book in a physical location, sitting on a bench half aware that the world is passing by, readers' attention may wander. They might look up from the page, note a disturbance, decide it is not worth their attention, and look back down at their book, starting where they left off. In a work of ambient literature,

the boundaries of the narrative are more porous. Instead of being printed on the pages of a book held by a reader's hands, it might be more nebulous, and the edges between story and reality may blur.

In works of ambient literature, the reading process is mobile and the book is unbound. There is not the same set of restrictions imposed by a solely bound narrative, and there are fewer material constraints. For example, in Speakman's work, *It Must Have Been Dark by Then*, he leads the readers, through the voice of the narrator, speaking through headphones, to find a place where they can find something growing. This can be a shoot of a plant peeking through a piece of tarmac or a tree surviving among the concrete. This moment of recognition might feel to the reader as though it is a moment of coincidence, as if the unseen author knows exactly what the reader can see in front of them. The two languages, the external real world and the internal world, connect for a moment. The effect of this builds a degree of trust between author and reader, despite the influence of unpredictability on the reader experience. Interviews with readers carried out as part of the Ambient Literature project revealed that several experienced a sense that the author intimately understood what they would encounter through the work. This building of trust leads to a greater connection between reader and narrative and a willingness to engage with the work, crucial when experiencing a work where the mechanics of storytelling may not be initially familiar.

Speakman develops works where these lines between reader and author become blurred in uncontrolled environments. For example, in a story told through an audio work, where the author is unable to know exactly what readers will encounter as they move through a physical space, there must be room for an interruption from a passer-by, an unexpected encounter, or a strange sight or for the technology to fail. There must be space for the language of the place to enter the story, such as through the presence of strangers, sounds, buildings, and other physical elements. The effect is to connect both the physical world and the narrative in a hybrid experience where the boundaries of each are porous. There is an orchestrated experience with room for the world to enter and space for a reader to draw connections. This involves careful authorship, the rethinking of what we understand as literary, and a space for understanding how we can challenge and reshape the act of reading by developing literary techniques.

In Pullinger's *Breathe*, the authored language and the language of place are used to evoke the sense of a haunting for both the protagonist and the reader. APIs are used to show that the text knows exactly where the reader is located. For example, on page 2 of *Breathe*, the text is able to create specific conditional text, depending on the reader's time zone:

It's: late<timing=night> / getting late now<timing=evening> / early<timing=morning> / my favourite time of day<timing=midday/afternoon>.
Around me, the city: sleeps.<timing=night> / begins to slow<timing=evening> / wakes<timing=morning> / fizzes with life<timing=midday/afternoon>.

The inclusion of such API codes in the text are almost unnoticeable by the reader, but their careful authoring, afforded through ubiquitous data, creates a sense that the author "sees" the reader, in much the same way that readers may feel as though Speakman knows what is in front of them.

Authors can use such techniques to construct the experience for the reader, which may build connections between author and reader, highlight features of a place or theme, or draw attention to context of features of plot. In *It Must Have Been Dark by Then*, readers are drawn into the physical location of the environment they are in and then shifted, by the narrator, to think about another place, located farther away. Multiple locations, and the interplay among them, exist at the same time for the reader. In *The Cartographer's Confession*, the narrative is interrupted by the language of physical locations, by the need to search for the next place where a fragment of story is revealed, and by a realization of the weight of history on place. *Breathe* includes details of the real world in its construction of an uncanny experience for the reader.

5. CONCLUSION

The reading experience of a work of ambient literature is constructed by its author through various elements, including the use of ambient materials, such as ubiquitous data and features of real-world locations, which are experienced by its readers as a literary device. It uses not only language of the authored narrative but also what happens around the narrative: its literary frame, the interruptions, the interactions with place, the encounters, and the unexpected features of a place. As we can see from the three works commissioned as part of the Ambient Literature project, these can tell as much of the story as the written language. For example, in *Breathe*, data such as location, weather, and season are incorporated into the narrative; in *It Must Have Been Dark by Then*, the reader is encouraged to explore physical locations; and in *The Cartographer's Confession*, London is used as a framing device. This language that draws on the physical world is often uncontrollable and unpredictable, but it can be used to create immersive, situated experiences for readers, who are challenged to read the language of context, situation, and place as well as the written word. By often placing myself in the position of the reader of works of ambient literature as part of this project, I found that serendipitous moments, where

real world and story connected, were where I most clearly understood the reading experience. I could see how ubiquitous data could be used to bring context and narrative together. I began to see how the reading experience can be embodied, orchestrated through ambient materials, data, and place, and how the processes of immersion and distraction can be used to produce digital literary works that reimagine the reading experience.

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