The Deep Map App Reference Tool

An introduction to the locative media maker's downloadable guide, observations on voice recording and performance, and their effect on immersion

by Dr Lucy Frears

Abstract

This article serves as an introduction to the '*deep map* reference tool' available to download free [here](). Aimed at those making immersive but embodied GPS-triggered app walks using digital content (for example sound, images and film) it can also guide those making MP3 experiences. The reference tool was developed during Lucy Frears' PhD practice-based research titled 'Unlocking Landscape Using Locative Media' (2017) that used deep mapping, geopoetics and chorography in the inspiration and creation of the award-winning *Hayle Churks* app. The guide is an accessible summary of processes, methods and tools used in Frears' practice and includes insights from others gathered through testing of work, research, discussion and conversation. The introduction includes additional and more detailed information on voice/ narration that is not included in the reference tool. The way a voice addresses the listener, is recorded and performed in app experiences effects engagement and 'immersive flux' the fluctuation between embodiment and immersion that occurs in these experiences.

Two forms of the tool have been made available to download for use by, for example, artists, geographers, oral historians, app commissioners, students and community groups. The list of insights can be downloaded or a booklet can be printed and assembled.

Introduction

The free guide, the '*deep map* reference tool' that accompanies this introduction aims to support those wishing to create GPS-triggered app experiences using digital content (sound, images and film) that connect a walking participant to a site and its multilayered stories and histories. Most aspects can be adapted to work with other ways to explore landscape – for example MP3 audio walks. In addition to the tool this introduction shares insights on how voice affects a participant's

engagement and 'immersive flux', the fluctuation between embodiment and immersion that occurs during site-specific sound experiences. Two versions of the tool have been made available to download for use by, for example, artists, geographers, oral historians, app commissioners, students and community groups. The list of insights can be downloaded or a booklet can be printed and assembled.

The reference tool was developed during my PhD practice-based research titled 'Unlocking Landscape Using Locative Media'[1] (2017) which included the creation and publishing of the award-winning *Hayle Churks* app.[2] Essentially a digestible summary of processes, methods and tools used in my practice the reference tool also includes insights gathered from others through testing of work, research, discussion and conversation. The term *deep map* references the gathering and selection of mixed materials during embodied field and archival research developed by Mike Pearson, Michael Shanks and Clifford McLucas after being inspired by William Least Heat-Moon's deep map of Chase County, Kansas.[3] By relocating *deep mapping* into locative media, deep levels of embodiment in place and immersion in stories take participants through a stratigraphy of layered histories. Two-dimensional mapping is extended into four dimensions with the fourth being time.

Overlapping digital and physical, immaterial and material, virtual and real worlds within a hybrid space has become the norm for many smartphone users who connect to the Internet while on the move.[4] The boundary between digital and physical worlds linked by the smartphone interface can no longer be imagined as a portal connecting different worlds. The boundary has become so porous that for many users it does not exist and so does not need to be crossed. This overlap between digital and physical worlds and extension of immersion, embodiment and other senses into both those worlds led to the notion of *dual embodiment* and *immersive flux.*[5] Both digital storyworld and physical material world are embodied simultaneously during *dual embodiment. Immersive flux* moves the participant between levels of immersion, for example in the digital stories, but also shifts the participant between levels of embodiment in the story *and* site. This introduction provides the opportunity to share a more detailed description of the voice and how it affects engagement in app walks, *dual embodiment* and *immersive flux* than was possible in the reference tool.

Narratives played during locative media experiences range from a single voice telling or performing stories of place, multiple characters voicing their linear, nonlinear or layered

memories of place, to an artist directing the participant, as a voice inside the head, through their story of place. My research hypothesises that a number of factors around voice and its performance through headphones while moving through space affect immersion in stories. How the voice was recorded, from which direction the voice is heard, how the voice addresses the listener (talking *to* or talking *as* or talking *within*), in what tense and with what tone the words are spoken are all relevant. Three categories have been created to explain these ideas in more detail: *Voice Performed from Inside*, an immersive artist-led story or narrative that connects physical elements in landscape with their imagined narrative and, often, binaural soundscape; *Performed Stories of Place*, performer/narrator or multiple scripted actors that mix fact and fiction of place; and *Voices from Place*, memories/first-person accounts including co-authored content.

Although different recording methods are used to capture voice, for example when recording binaurally,[6] the convention when aspiring for clarity in speech and volume is to have the microphone close to the mouth.[7] When played back through headphones the interviewee's mouth sounds close to the ear, a proximity normally allowed for lovers, family or a close friend's lips.[8] If the voice is recorded binaurally and the speaker talks from the back of the dummy head (with microphones inserted in the dummy head's ears), when played back it can sound as though the voice is speaking from *within* the head, where the subconscious voice is normally heard. Artist Janet Cardiff can often be heard in this position so that she is inside the body and mind of the participant. The CD in the back of *The Walk Book* and audio clips on Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's website illustrate this when listened to using headphones.[9]

Voice performed from the inside

In Blast Theory's *Ghostwriter* in RAMM,[10] after dialling a number the calm voice of Ju Row Farr addresses the listener as though a level of trust intimacy and friendship has already been established. The voice takes the listener on a walk as a companion, sharing thoughts and experiences. Without this friendly warmth, the listener might not go along with the stranger, moving against the usual museum ebb and flow, dropping down into the storeroom, hovering in a corridor or a dark corner. Moreover, without this immediate and unquestioned bond, the participant might not reveal to someone else, in a public space, deep, secret connections, special objects and special people they have held or lost, which the work invites.

Figure 1: Participants dial-up intimate locative media experience *Ghostwriter* (2011) in RAMM, Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter. Photographs by the author.

Cardiff choreographs a walker's movement through the ears. The tone of Cardiff's voice is soft but her directions are precise and the walker obeys and follows: 'turn left', 'let's sit down, 'wait here', 'look at the picture'.[11] Scripts are often spoken in conspiratorial hushed tones as though one is overhearing another's thoughts. Using the first person and the present tense,[12] Cardiff's words and story activate the senses and urge the walker on, deeper into the site, deeper into her story, deeper into immersion. The participant stays in step with Cardiff's recorded footsteps as she suggests, requests, demands. Responsibility is handed over but the participant does not become passive. Cardiff seems to walk into the participant's body and begins to inhabit it; her voice seems to come from within the head.[13] I embody the experience, but also her, or she me, 'you're not quite sure what level you stop existing,' says Cardiff.[14] Graeme Miller also used the present tense to record interviews for *Linked* (2003) with former residents, turning their absence into presence.[15]

A friendly, intimate, softly spoken voice at close proximity creates a trusted bond with the listener who is 'walked in and out of immersion' by a fascinating close companion. The experience is between performer and 'walker-listener-participant'[16] who become connected through reciprocal shared confidences that the latter might not have shared with anyone before. The close positioning of the recording in addition to the tone and tense used can make the listener feel the empathy and excitement of being in someone else's shoes and in their story during an immersive intimate and often moving experience.

Performed stories of place

Recorded more typically in stereo with the voice addressing or talking *to* or *at* the listener rather than talking *as* or *within* the listener, stories of place, often described in the past, mix fact with fiction (or result in the fictionalisation of fact). Acted pieces recorded as though eavesdropping on an event, such as *Riot! 1831* (2004), are also performed stories of place.[17]

In the pre-recorded MP3 walk *Carrlands* (2006) writer and performer Pearson speaks *to* the participant from the stereo recording.[18] During the live performance of site-specific theatre piece *Bubbling Tom* (2000), which the MP3 walk extends into a new medium, solo performer Pearson used his whole body, its gestures, action, mimic and movement.[19] In the MP3 walk, Pearson's body performs through his voice, animating and sharing research. The story, a collage of fragments from various sources, local press, geography, science, fieldwork, personal memory and oral histories,[20] is used to draw walkers or distant listeners to three places: Hibaldstow, Snitterby and Horkstow. Pearson uses his voice rather than those of others, which dispels the hierarchies of fact and fiction and a listener's assumptions or prejudices prompted by accent and grammar. Instead, such mixed content is interwoven and therefore equalised and anonymised in the writing and performance. Pearson's voice connects disparate elements and makes them coherent.[21] He has the authority to tell the history of the landscape and shape this spoken history as he has been shaped by that landscape. Pearson invites the participant to walk with him in 'a seemingly featureless terrain'[22] using headphones on a narrated walk that will transform the experience of the place. Without instruction of where to look that might render the participant passive, Pearson pulls the participants' bodies, minds and imagination deeper into the landscape through narrative and sound.
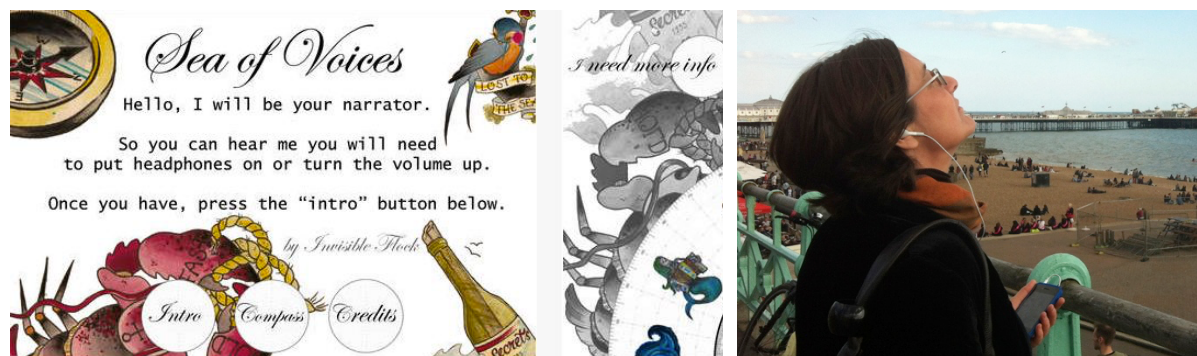

Figure 2: The nautical interface for *Sea of Voices* (2012) by Invisible Flock set in Brighton. During the piece participants are told to look up. Screenshot of app detail and photograph by the author.

Performed Stories of Place includes work such as *And While London Burns* (2007),[23] *Missorts* (2012) and *Sea of Voices* (2012 see Fig. 2).[24] Without a narrator performing close and quietly to the microphone in the majority of these works, *Performed Stories of Place* rely on a well-written script and a strong performance by the actor/narrator. The performance of the voice often uses its range to animate the text rather than keeping the monologue hushed and intimate. The performance and text are made more immersive by sound effects and music.

Voices from place

Voices from Place are first-hand accounts – oral histories that can wander between fact and fiction since memory can be vague. There is often no 'pointing to, or out'[25] of physical landmarks that are so useful in site-specific walks. The story subject anchors the memory to place. The effects of tangible emotion on the voice (a tightening of the throat or a change of breathing), or pauses when recalling real events, can make non-actors powerful speakers when telling their own story. Oral histories are often recorded as a conversation between two people sometimes in the comfort of an interviewee's home. When played back, it is as if a relationship has been established, though the voice only speaks to or at the listener. After listening to *Memoryscapes* (2005) the creator, Toby Butler, found that personal stories reduced distance between speaker and listener through empathy and understanding.[26] Sharing memories builds a 'collective memory' of place, which draws together community.[27] Jo Reid and Richard Hull describe 'the phenomenon of walking through a sea of voices'; layered sound files in a layered locative media story that plays automatically, as a 'Magic Moment'.[28]

Personal stories with a voice and delivery that reveal non-actor's feelings can be touching and immersive. Without a script, interesting memories need to be captured in quality recordings despite being made, at times, in less than perfect conditions. Recording on site helps capture comments about specific landmarks, or remnants or memories of them, although the age of interviewees can make this unattainable. Longer stories need to be edited. A lack of clarity in the recording (muffled or distorted), too much background noise or long rambling accounts will challenge immersion in the most fascinating story.

Creative approaches to the layering of histories and stories of place have been made by artists (such as Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, Teri Rueb, Graeme Miller, Duncan Speakman, Platform and Blast Theory), writers (such as Walter Benjamin), artist-performers (such as Mike

Pearson), historians (such as Toby Butler) researchers (such as Jo Reid and Richard Hull) and geographers (such as Caitlin DeSilvey, Michael Gallagher, Iain Biggs, Anthony Lyons, Jane Bailey and Owain Jones).[29] Through juxtaposition and layering, alternative stories and perspectives of the past, present and future can be unearthed and exposed to a wide audience turning GPS into, what I describe as, a '**G**eo-**P**oetic **S**ystem'.[30] Locative media experiences 'tinker with our locks, thereby putting our inner worlds in contact with the outer world',[31] leading to a potential opening of both site and participant. The reference tool is there to help guide your exploration and creation of outdoor experiences with digital elements, such as sound. Rich layering of stories can be achieved through site-specific locative media experiences, transforming perceived linear hegemonic narratives of place and the 'passive frontality of art'[32] into an immersive, embodied and more nuanced polyvocal experience of place in all its dimensions.

In return for this open access sharing of knowledge, beyond citation, please contact me with your observations so that the tool can continue to develop. Information on how you have used the reference tool and approached voice scripting, recording and performance is very welcome.

Author

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