**Breathe\_6**

Transcript of semi-structured interview with participant following their experience of Breathe by Kate Pullinger. Part of the Ambient Literature Project, Breathe (breathe-story.com) is a short story length piece of interactive writing meant to be read in a smartphone’s web browser, and features a text which changes based on the time and location of its reading. Participants were recruited through an open call that was circulated and recruited through other convenient means. Instructed to read the piece at home, participants were interviewed in person, over the telephone, or via Skype following their experience of the work in March, April, and May 2018.

After their initial agreement to participate, participants were sent instructions on how to access Breathe, how to schedule a time to be interviewed, and a few short questions to be completed immediately following their experience of the piece to serve as a memory aid for the interview. They were asked to read Breathe in a quiet place, preferably their own bedroom and that it works take about 15-20 minutes to complete. Before the interview, in addition to being provided information regarding the project and consent in writing, participants were briefed on the independence of the interviewer from the makers of the piece and assured of the anonymity of their responses.

Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and then edited to ensure participant anonymity. Deleted sections of the interview are marked by either X’s or bracketed summaries.

START AUDIO

Interviewer: How would you describe this work to a friend?

Respondent: I’d describe it as an exciting project in the development of reading story.

Interviewer: If your friend was to say, “Well, why should I read it? What is it?”

Respondent: I suppose I would say because of its interaction, which adds to the dimension of the creepiness that is suggested by the story. So, it’s making best use, I think, of additional content that you can only get using e-technology, as opposed to a traditional story.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you have any other impressions about the work, just, kind of, to start?

Respondent: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Interviewer: Oh, yes, definitely. So, when you started it, kind of, with all that in mind, what did you expect from it?

Respondent: Well, first of all I was expecting to have an older voice in the protagonist. Sorry, not an older voice. I was expecting her to be younger because of the way the story is written, the short sentences. She came across to me as being much younger than, actually, was revealed in the story. I was surprised to find that she was going out to work.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXX Then, when I read more of the story, I realised that she was probably emotionally stuck at a younger age, which was probably related to the death of her mother. So, it did make sense, but it kind of came after the fact, if you know what I mean.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Yes. Anyway, I don’t know why I started with that, because what I wanted to talk about was something that was more obvious immediately to me, and carried the greatest impact, if I can go onto that?

Interviewer: Oh, definitely.

Respondent: That was because there was no trigger warning. Trigger warnings are very much spoken about currently XXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXX- so, it’s a controversial topic. So, I know the theory of it all, but I never personally have experienced any issues to do with trigger warnings myself, but I did this time. So, because there was no solid book, or book blurb, or nothing to tell me anything about the topic of this… My mum has recently died, and I had a real impact of, “Ugh,” when I found out the topic because I hadn’t prepared myself to be reading about the death of a mother.

So, that’s some feedback for you on that, that a trigger warning, somehow, would have been helpful to me because the content was to do with the death of a parent.

Interviewer: Yes. So, to me that’s really interesting because there’s a question of, as you move into new media forms, in terms of getting that, kind of, gloss around them that you would take for granted in other ways.

Respondent: Yes, it’s interesting, isn’t it? Two things really struck me about [Breathe 0:07:01]. That was the first. It was like a punch to the stomach, to be honest. The other thing, that I thought was really great, that I loved, in contrast, was the creepiness of the ghostly presence taking over the story, and infiltrating, which I though was incredibly well achieved. So, that was impactful, too.

Interviewer: I just want to ask you a little bit about the usability of the work. Were the mechanics of interacting with it straightforward? Was it easy to engage to with?

Respondent: Yes, it was, but the technology was slow in places. I’m a fast reader, but particularly when it was moving from the protagonist’s story to the ghostly presence, there seemed to be a long time to wait for it, before the ‘page’, in inverted commas, would move. That was frustrating because it held up my reading.

Interviewer: Did you run into any other problems with it?

Respondent: Only that very small issue of there not being a space between the heading and the top line. Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Would you want to read something like this again?

Respondent: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: If this kind of thing were commercially available, what would you pay?

Respondent: Oh, that’s a tough one. Are you talking about a full length book?

Interviewer: I think, for this particular size, this particular kind of work.

Respondent: So, like a short story type?

Interviewer: Yes. So, if you’re going to have to put a price on Breathe?

Respondent: A few pounds, as something to read on the tube, I suppose, something like that. Something that you would dip into. If it were a longer novel then I’d be happy to pay more, but the story experience, you’re saying, can I… Is that going to carry? Obviously, it’s more expensive to produce, I’m imagining, so you’re saying, would I pay extra to experience the story in that way? Is that what you’re asking?

Interviewer: Yes. Because, obviously, this is a new-ish form, and so we’re just… The aim of asking about how much you would pay is to think about how do you value it? How do you respond to what is given, or what is provided by the work, in this case, Breathe, as a kind of short story in this kind of interactive form? So, I think that what, you know, you’re saying, that a couple of pounds for a short version of it. You’d pay more if it were longer. To me that’s very intelligible response.

Respondent: Yes, okay. If there had been sound involved, and so it was an even more immersive experience, I suppose, I think you could go higher in the pricing, perhaps.

Interviewer: Okay. Now, you said that if there was sound, if it was a more immersive work. Did you think it was immersive at all?

Respondent: Yes, it was immersive when there was… There were a couple of times in particular when the creepiness was very, very well done, and that was quite spooky. I enjoyed that, and that’s what I’m referring to. So, yes it was immersive. I wouldn’t have looked up from it had someone interrupted me at those moments, which is a good thing to say, isn’t it?

Interviewer: Do you recall what any of those moments were?

Respondent: They were moments where the ‘stain’, or whatever you want to call it, is spreading across the screen, those moments, like [bruising 0:12:25]. Yes. I thought that was really imaginative and well done, well crafted, if you can call it craft. Can you call it ‘tech craft’? Yes.

Interviewer: Yes, definitely, if you go back to the Greek origins of ‘techne’ and things like that.

Respondent: Yes. Something else I wanted to say was about the… There was something not quite- XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.

Interviewer: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXX XXXXX XXX XXXXX XXXX

Respondent: I think some more work perhaps needs to be done on the second story stream, there. So, on her boyfriend’s back story- seemed a bit, kind of, pushed in and fast. I don’t know quite what that added to it. So, there was quite a lot for the brain to be getting used to, particularly mine, because of the lack of trigger warning. So, you might have to bear that in mind, and I might have read it differently.

So, first of all there was that, and then I got over that. Then, there was this interesting interaction and the use of the technology, which was new and exciting. Then, you were just getting to know the protagonist and then the second story about her boyfriend came in, and it seemed to be… It was a bit, sort of, rushed, I found, trying to fit all that in, in the… What was it? 100 pages, was it?

Interviewer: Yes. Quote/unquote ‘pages’. Did the experience make you think about your phone differently, at all?

Respondent: Yes. I don’t normally use the phone to read on, but I know that loads of young people do, which is great. So, I use an e-reader, but I dislike e-reading in general. I mean, it’s okay, you know, it serves its purpose when you’re travelling, but it’s mimicking the written page, isn’t it? It’s really hanging on to tradition.

So, I’m really excited about what you can do with technology now. I’ve been waiting for people, and waiting for publishers to get in on it, and to develop story in many new and exciting ways, and they haven’t, really, because traditional publishers don’t seem to be working along those lines. They’re, sort of, frightened by it all, I think, and the money involved. So, it’s great and I welcome it. So, in answer to your question, it made me see the possibility of using my phone to read on, and it was okay. It made me identify with a younger readership, I suppose, because I know that they do that a lot.

Interviewer: Okay, yes. Did reading the work make you think about your surroundings at all?

Respondent: Well, yes. The keyboard that I was sitting in front of when I was reading the story.

Interviewer: What did you use? So, you read it on your phone sitting in front of…?

Respondent: Yes. So, I was at my desk, here, where I am now, with my PC in front of me, with my keyboard in front of me. So, that was what I was thinking about and seeing. So, it was successful, very successful, in that it transported me very clearly to the world of the protagonist.

Interviewer: Where do you think the protagonist was?

Respondent: Where I was.

Interviewer: Where you were. Okay.

Respondent: That’s what I was supposed to think, wasn’t it?

Interviewer: I don’t know.

Respondent: Alright, okay. Yes. That’s what I thought as I read it.

Interviewer: Did you feel the book was tailored for you?

Respondent: Yes, in that way, but not in terms of age range, no.

Interviewer: Yes. Did you notice any of the, kind of, conditional text of the story that changed based on something like where you were reading it?

Respondent: I didn’t walk around reading it. I didn’t move from where I was, but I got it. I got the point of that.

Interviewer: Okay. So, did you notice that it, kind of- inserting nearby places into it, street names and things like that?

Respondent: No. How can you do that, then? How was the reader made aware of that facility?

Interviewer: So, there are parts of the text that, depending on the location that’s detected by the phone, it will insert different street names, different…

Respondent: Oh, that’s great.

Interviewer: … different café names, train station names, schools.

Respondent: Oh. So, I’ve got all that switched off in my- presumably that’s to with the settings on your phone.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: I’ve got all that switched off, and I guess the majority of people in the target age range would not have that turned off. Oh, great, that’s even better.

Interviewer: Yes. So, it puts in different place names, different seasons, different weather conditions.

Respondent: Oh, does it? Oh, wow. That all went over my head. I didn’t know about that.

Interviewer: Yes, that’s interesting. Is there a reason you have those things switched off on your phone?

Respondent: Yes, but I don’t want to go into it, [sorry 0:19:48].

Interviewer: Okay, that’s fine. About how long did it take you to read it?

Respondent: Oh, I meant to make a note of that. About half an hour, I think.

Interviewer: Okay. You said you read it, kind of, sitting at your desk?

Respondent: Yes, but I was… How long did it say that it would take? 20 minutes, didn’t it?

Interviewer: Yes. Usually people are reading it in about 15, 20 minutes, depending.

Respondent: Yes, it took me that, then. Yes, it was about 20 minutes, but it wasn’t because I couldn’t read it in 20… I could have read it much faster, but the technology slowed me, and that was frustrating. With an e-reader, it picks up your eye speed, and so it works for you because you can turn over when you want to, and it will turn over, and then it will tell you how long it estimates, on your reading speed, it’s going to take you to read the rest of the chapter or the rest of the story. This didn’t do that.

So, there are parts in it where the pace picks up and you want to know what’s going to happen next, and then the mechanics of it work against you, with Breathe, because you want to turn over faster but you can’t.

Interviewer: Do you think that that, kind of, setting of the pace for the reader by the technology was ever effective in the work?

Respondent: No. It held up the narrative, for me.

Interviewer: Okay. Were you able to figure out how to tilt the phone to get the, kind of, overlay text to appear?

Respondent: No. I wasn’t clear quite what I was supposed to be doing, so sometimes I was tapping and swiping and then nothing was happening. So, I wasn’t quite clear what I was meant to be doing, sometimes.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you have any other, kind of, general feedback about it, anything you want make sure that we know about?

Respondent: I think I’ve told you everything that I wanted. I’ve got notes here that I made, and I’ve been through everything. Mainly my feedback is, yes, it’s really exciting, and I think we want more of it.

Interviewer: Terrific. I have some, kind of, straightforward demographic questions that I’d like to ask you. If there’s anything here that you don’t want to answer, you don’t feel comfortable answering, please just let me know and don’t answer. What is your age and gender?

Respondent: I’m female XXXXXXXXXX

Interviewer: What’s your highest level of education?

Respondent: MA, XXXXXXXXXXXX

Interviewer: How would you describe where you’re from?

Respondent: XXXXXX XXXXXXXX

Interviewer: Do you regularly read for pleasure?

Respondent: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: Do you listen to audiobooks?

Respondent: No, but I probably will soon because people keep telling me how great they are, and I’m thinking, “Oh, yes, okay, I ought to explore this.” Yes.

Interviewer: Do you read on a phone, tablet or e-reader?

Respondent: E-reader.

Interviewer: Do you take part in street games, pervasive games, re-enactments or LARPs?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: When you visit a museum or heritage site do you play the games or use the applications provided?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Have you used other kinds of locational narrative smartphone apps?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Okay. Yes, so those are all the questions I have for you. Unless there’s anything else you want to make sure we know about, that’s all I have.

Respondent: Yes, that’s all I have, too.

Interviewer: Oh, perfect. Thank you so much for taking the time, and thank you so much for reading it.

[END AUDIO](http://www.uktranscription.com/)