**IMHBDBT\_4**

Transcript of a semi-structured interview conducted with participant following their experience of Duncan Speakman’s *It Must Have Been Dark By Then* at the British Library, 4, 5, 6 June 2017. The audience for the work could either book a place in advance or just walk up.

*It Must Have Been Dark By Then* is comprised of a smartphone app, physical book, and a set of headphones. It takes about an hour to complete and involves participants being guided through mostly outdoor spaces by the smartphone app while listening to an audio track and reading selections from the book. Typically, after a brief explanation, participants were sent off from a table set up in a public space, with the experience returning them back there at the end. Participants were approached for interviews following their completion of the work.

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 to a friend?

Respondent: Definitely a deeply personal experience. I think it’s certainly unique to each participant, there are no two journeys the same. I think, being from London – like myself – it was even more eye-opening for me – because I thought I knew the area pretty well, but I walked in completely different places I’d never been. I thought it was really interesting. I do a lot of walking around anyway – but not in that way. I felt a lot more observant of everything. It’s kind of nice to not listen – looking at your phone in terms of the usual things I look at on my phone or the usual things in my ear. It meant you were quite receptive to a lot of things around you.

Interviewer: If you were going to have to say to somebody, “Hey, come do this thing with me.” They’re like, “Why should I do it, what are we going to go do?”

Respondent: I would say it’s quite a unique form of escapism. I would say it’s… It encourages you to walk without direction. Even though it’s telling you places to go, it’s still on a hunch. It’s a deviation from your usual path in life. I’d say if you’re used to walking from A to B, then this is a nice way of circumnavigating your usual routes.

Interviewer: When you were arriving at the library today, did you have any kind of expectation about what the experience was going to be like?

Respondent: I had no expectation whatsoever, I didn’t know this was here. When I saw it, I was just intrigued. Intrigued by- I had no idea what it was, it isn’t clear what it is when you look at it – which makes it more intriguing.

Interviewer: Did you just walk up?

Respondent: I’m doing some work in the library. I was just looking for any form of procrastination possible.

Interviewer: So thinking back to when you first set off, how did the actual experience differ from what you were expecting?

Respondent: It differed in the sense that I thought it was going to more pre-meditated as to where you went. It was totally up to you. It’s quite nice and loose in terms of there not being many restrictions on it. So it was definitely more designed by me than it was designed by these guys in terms of the experience – which I liked.

Interviewer: What did the piece make you think about?

Respondent: A lot of things – a hell of a lot of things. One of the thoughts that I had was that I had to retrace my steps, seeing what was still there was interesting – and what wasn’t. It was kind of sad – in a way – as well, I ended up by some quite derelict housing estates. I ended up in St Pancras Hospital grounds, I ended up by a recovery centre. The people that I saw – again – were the people that had nowhere to go. A lot of the people that were kind of drifting around were the ones I saw again.

I think it made me feel a little bit more empathetic around what is on the streets – the buildings and stuff. Some of the buildings were quite grand. I approached them not knowing what they were, then suddenly you realise you’re at the back of a hospital ward - or something. It’s not a place you often choose to wander through – you’re normally there for a reason. I kind of felt like a bit of a voyeur in a way, but in a positive way.

I found it interesting that you had to stop and read very often, because I often… I, actually, yesterday walked about 15 minutes – 20 minutes – from my house to find somewhere to sit and read a book. The places I stopped to read today were definitely not traditional places you would stop and read a book. You know, standing on the side of the road or – again – a bench outside a recovery centre. Really, all you need is a bench or a place to sit – it doesn’t really matter what the background is. I’m not saying I would choose to go back there again for leisure, but it – kind of – opened the spaces. It opened up avenues – I guess – within London.

Interviewer: You were talking about how it made you think about the places, it took you to places you wouldn’t normally go. Is there any way that it changed your perception of your surroundings?

Respondent: Yes, definitely. There is a lovely park I discovered, that is right near St Pancras Hospital, that is quite a calm place to be. Again, it’s not somewhere I’d normally go. It’s quite interesting as well, the place I landed as my oasis were some really fancy houses that were a 40-second walk from where I started off – which was a council block. You forget how close they are to each other in London.

Interviewer: Yes, yes, yes, yes. What did you think about the sound?

Respondent: It was nice, it was quite harrowing. It’s the kind of sound you’d expect to accompany a documentary that’s about – I don’t know – rising water levels or problems with the environment – or stuff like that. It was quite sombre, it definitely made you a bit more reflective. It’s the composition you’d expect to accompany quite serious things.

Interviewer: How did the printed text and the app and the sound work all together for you?

Respondent: Yes, it worked really well. I kind of forgot where I was a lot of the time, which was – I guess – the idea of it. If the pages were all the same – like a regular book – it would probably be less interesting. The fact that there was certain interesting materials used - and certain bits where you had to fold one page over the other to read the full text - just made it a bit more engaging. I think it worked well.

The app itself was pretty simple. It was quite nice- It’s quite weird looking at that – the map like that – because when you see a map like that normally it feels like it’s not loaded. That’s normally a point of frustration, because your signal is not working and you probably need to know quite quickly at that point. If you’re using your maps, you’re in a rush or you’re looking to know where to go. It was quite nice to do that.

It was also a little bit difficult at one of the points where it was telling you to go north. I use Citymapper because it’s one of the only maps that has an arrow pointing the way you need to go. Even the maps on an iPhone, you have to start walking a little bit before you realise if you’re going the right way. So this was a nice… It was quite nice, yes it was nice. It was reliant on you figuring out – yourself – what the story was.

Interviewer: Beyond some of the things you’ve already mentioned, was there anything you particularly liked about the experience?

Respondent: I quite liked people thinking, “What the fuck is that guy doing?” It was quite interesting because… I just liked stopping in places I wouldn’t normally stop. I think that was the main thing – it’s just actually stopping and pausing in places.

I also quite liked that – and I don’t know if this defeats the purpose of the literature or not. It wasn’t really what was written in the book that I cared about, it was my own thoughts at the time. When you’re reading the book and its saying, “This is your oasis, this is the point you’re stopping where there is water.” It was more my own reflections on the things I could see, so I felt more absorbed in London than… I didn’t feel like I was transported out to Tunisia and Louisiana – all the places that are there. I felt more present here than ever.

Interviewer: Yes, yes. Did you have any issues or any kind of confusions trying to figure out what you were supposed to be doing, in terms of using the application?

Respondent: No, not really, not really. A couple of times – when I had made it to the circle that it’s told me to go to, but it didn’t give me the option of saying, “I’m here.” The only thing to press on the app was to say you can’t make it, but I could make it. Then it started saying, “Oh but the sands shift,” and the location changes. I don’t know if that was part of it, or that was just a way of them trying to comfort someone that couldn’t make it somewhere - when I thought I had made it there. It was fine otherwise, yes.

Interviewer: Do you feel comfortable walking around with headphones on?

Respondent: Yes, it’s funny actually – I never, ever, ever wear over-the-ear headphones. It’s quite comfortable, but that’s… I always feel like a bit of an idiot when I wear the big giant headphones. That wasn’t a problem, because it’s not a big deal – I’m not too conscious of how I appear.

Interviewer: How was it walking around not being able to hear your surroundings as well?

Respondent: Yes, that was a challenge. It was nice, but it was just sort of like… I had to remember sometimes - crossing the road and stuff. It was nicer when you were in public walking areas – in a sense – because you could just roam and get lost in your own mind a bit.

Interviewer: Public walking areas [such as 00:10:33]?

Respondent: There is a Church not far from here, there is a massive park within the Church – with fountains. Actually, I thought it was a fountain – it wasn’t. That’s why I went there, because I thought there would be water there – but there wasn’t. There are no cars or anything, you could walk left, right, diagonally – whatever you wanted to do.

Interviewer: Would you want to experience this kind of thing again?

Respondent: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: Is there any particular reason why?

Respondent: Probably one of my favourite things to do in the world is just walk around aimlessly. I normally say that I have that mentality when I’m in a foreign city. I don’t have that in London, I don’t have that wide-eyed enthusiasm and carefree walking structure because I usually know where I’m going in London so I don’t have that serendipity about when I walk somewhere. This opened it up a little bit more. It would encourage me to do more senseless walking. Even though – again – it was telling you stuff like find water and find housing – and all that – but they’re not normally the things you’re looking for when you’re walking – you don’t need to find water or housing.

Interviewer: Yes, yes, yes. How much would you pay for this kind of thing?

Respondent: I wouldn’t pay for it. That’s the beauty of it, you just need curious minds.

Interviewer: Yes?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you have any other further thoughts, ranging from the time you approached the table all the way through to the time when you returned? Were there any really notable things that happened?

Respondent: I’m trying to think. Down to the council flat down there, then I walked across. Again, it was just more like… Almost everywhere I walked had… Again – obviously – the place at the hospital – of course – had lots to offer if you needed a hospital. A lot of them were places that are not really offering anything. They’re not somewhere you’d go for a stroll. I originally thought I was going- I headed left out of there because I was thinking – in my head – originally, “I’m going to head to the canal.” Somehow I got distracted along the way and ended up… So I guess it was more… The notable thing for me was finding something where you think there is nothing.

Interviewer: Yes, yes, yes. I just have a couple… Did you have anything else you want to say about it?

Respondent: I don’t think so, no. I think that’s it. I probably will in about an hour, when it comes to me again.

Interviewer: I just have some quick demographic-style questions to ask you. Again, you don’t have to answer anything you’re not comfortable answering. What’s your age and gender?

Respondent: Thirty, and male.

Interviewer: What’s your highest level of education?

Respondent: Master’s.

Interviewer: Where would you describe you are from?

Respondent: London.

Interviewer: Do you regularly read for pleasure?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you listen to audiobooks?

Respondent: No.

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

Respondent: No.

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

Respondent: No. What are street games? I don’t think I do.

Interviewer: I’m not sure if I know what street games necessarily are. Some kind of locational – usually locational based game.

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Do you – either – play games, or use tours that are part of museums, heritage, or visitor attractions?

Respondent: No, I tend to prefer to look around myself.

Interviewer: Do you use any kind of locational narrative smartphone applications?

Respondent: Locational narrative smartphone applications? Citymapper, but that wouldn’t be narrative, so no.

Interviewer: Did you come here by yourself, or as part of a group?

Respondent: By myself.

Interviewer: By yourself.

END AUDIO