



Architecture of Resistance

These Pages Fall Like Ash

When: *8th May 2013*
Where: *www.pagesfall.com*
Who: *www.productofcircumstance.com*

Last week I returned to the city where I was born to spend a few days immersed in a brilliantly executed, unique piece of new storytelling.

Before arriving in Bristol, I had bought from the Watershed Art's Centre, for just £12, an artefact. A book. Made in ply, and laser cut, this was the tangible part of a story that would stretch across the coming days and across the centre of Bristol itself.

Two books in one:

The first was an introduction to a mystery, spanning a prolonged period in time, but not necessarily a great distance. The second was an enigmatic guide to where the rest of the story might be found.

Two cities in one:

The second city is Portus Abonae, a water logged settlement of an unknown period in the future where environmental change has resulted in a new city of exceptional architecture reacting to unusual flooding. The other city is your own, the Bristol you currently inhabit.

A removable page listed clues, such as: "with your back to the Castle Park, down by the water's edge, walk to the King's Orchard."

Even with an outsider's knowledge of Bristol I was able to track down my first few locations. I had no trouble logging into the wireless hot-spots once I'd found a space



The artefact.



Unfurled; the two books.

with a full signal and I first got to access two of the drives around 8pm on a Sunday as a heavy drizzle came in from the sea. Huddled low in my coat I started to learn more about a boy called Oska and the current whereabouts of his missing father.

Unfortunately I had to leave Bristol that evening, but I re-read my fragments on the train and was hooked; I had to return and find out more. Finding the remaining locations was easy, especially once I had access to the internet's maps. A brief search back in the warmth of my living room revealed a distinct sequence in the site locations, a meander stretching from the Castle Park, halfway up Brandon Hill, across the docks and into Bedminster.

I printed out my map, and with tracing paper sketched out my own journey, marking the landmarks I remembered from my own childhood. Days later and I was back. I had left Bristol as 10 year old and places I didn't even know I knew became familiar as I walked again through that boy's life. This spatial memory of my own story was stitched into the one I was reading as I walked from node to node. This was a novel experience, a type of digital geo-caching, but I was doing something more valuable than just logging a location, I was exchanging stories.

I found just three others participating, a couple, entranced but a little lost by the narrative. Sitting on the kerb in the sun, they were bemused but enthralled by the hunt none-the-less. Each node had an apparent range of around 5-7 meters so a participant could lean nonchalantly on lamp-post outside the host pub or café to absorb the next instalment. I spotted one other adopting a similar attitude. We looked at each other, smart-phones in hand and didn't share a word. Evidently the desire to do this journey alone, as was suggested, overrode the potential to share. It was enough that we both knew, the mutual understanding of pilgrims. Despite the choice between reading inside or out, I did enter most of the host locations, taking a drink and a break as I read.

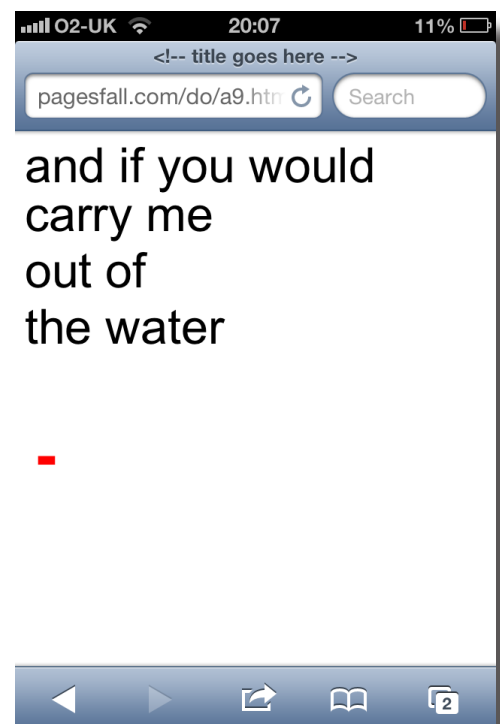
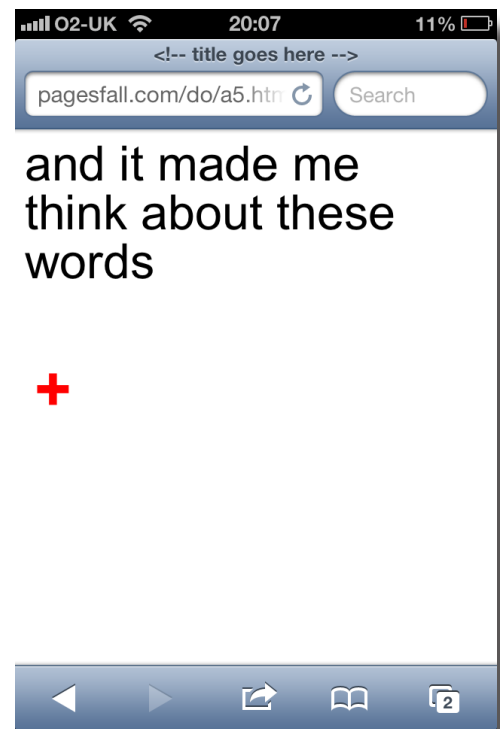
The story and the type of exploration required suggested a full phenomenological immersion. *These Pages Fall* asked its readers to spend some moments joining with their own existence in their home city by sharing an escape *into* other fictional lives based in the same spaces. To quote from a file found at Assemble iii *'A touch of home,'* Oska's mother, who resides in the other of the two overlapping cities, writes:

"I put my hand in the wall next to me and leant firmly against it.

I let the texture of the wall press into my skin.

I think I just wanted to be able to feel the city, to actually feel a palpable sense of home."

Selected screenshots.



Some of the drives hidden in each location asked you interact further. One suggested you send an email. Others had the option to upload photos and see what others had uploaded. The books held space for notes and lists for sensations and emotions, or in fact things you have not yet seen; and many uploaded these lists of theirs. A frame cut into the paper of the book was described by Oska's mother as a means to re-capture her city and the man she lost into ours. A similar frame was provided in your own book, an invitation to focus on the spatial memories that held the most meaning to you.

Metaphorically the tale of Oska and his parents became a tale of re-finding meaning, a rendition of the Sisyphean search for meaning that we all must make. *Pages Fall* therefore became an exploration of the otherness all stories provide, but was not purely an introverted escape as fiction often is, but was instead based on an anchoring of experience.

It makes the proposition that; we are all making stories, but that in order to become more aware of ourselves, we should go as far as writing them down, as the characters in *Pages Fall* do. By allowing stories to provide meaning in this way *Pages* makes you escape back *into* your own existence.

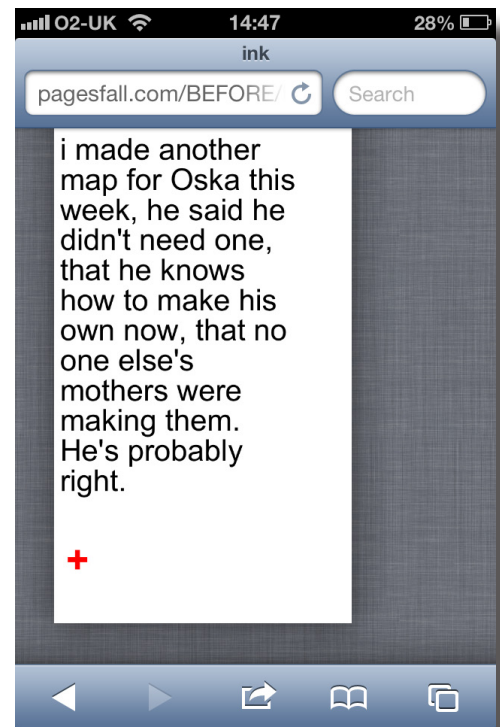
The immersive strength of this type of geographic storytelling was keenly felt by myself as a reader and participant. This experiment has therefore very successfully achieved its aim of reappraising both the book as a medium and the means by which we not only tell stories, but also how we relate those stories to our lives.

The narrative, though by its nature is slightly hazy, still drew in the reader, and the characters shone through as individuals you really would expect to bump into around a corner in St Nicholas's Market. The heartbreak suffered by the character's alienation from each other was tangible. Not least because one of them was here in the city with you, but because he was so heavily disaffected by the apparent nihilism around him.

I would have enjoyed the invitation to perhaps upload our own text files, additional fiction woven into the wireless drives, or of the pages to have described actions more specific to the location where you accessed them. A memory of Oska's father walking down the very road we had just walked, in the rain, even perhaps as it crumbled into the next city, would have brought home the spatial overlay this experiment was aiming for.

Author Neil Gaiman's own work on this sense of the 'other' that resides alongside the now, if only we allowed ourselves to see it, is echoed in other recent works, also in non

Personal maps used as devices for locking subjective memory into space.



traditional media.

In the art/video/game *Dear Esther* (2012) by developer The Chinese Room, a story of guilt and bereavement is explored via a virtual Hebridean island. This universe encapsulated in a single download becomes a vessel for some of our strongest emotions.

Similarly artist Matthew Ritchie's 'The Iron City' (2007) and *Ghost Operator* (2008) use the exploration of a finite, flooded, post-apocalyptic space and its submerged artefacts to illuminate our own fragile existence in the now.

By taking the virtual outside, this process takes the emotive experience our imaginations provide when reading, into a meaningful interaction with architectural space. Our own memories and unrealised designs create an emotive palimpsest, adding meaning to the present and therefore becoming means of giving the future a purpose; a space for more stories. There is a temptation now to draw and map those parts of Portus Abonae that I glimpsed in Bristol last week and past the images on the walls where the two cities intersected.

This idea of the personal truth, of meaningfulness based in our creative imagination, our fantasies, is embodied within private stories. So whilst story-telling has a fantastical side, it is this fantasy which brings meaning into an otherwise potentially meaningless city. Within architectural space this type of imagination, this concealed story-telling is encapsulated within the concept of 'dwelling'. This can be seen as a narrative representation of homeliness, and it is unique to all of us.

Conversely, and this is where *Pages Fall* is most successful, as a means of collecting individual meaning via stories linked to spaces, it could also be used as a method to design new places of shared meaning. An architecture written by its inhabitants on a page before it is imprinted in timber, stone or metal.

Finally *Pages Fall* could also act a warning. A warning that we all might be at risk of living only for today, and that without a yesterday that we can remember, record and build, we might lose a tomorrow.

Feedback to s.n.davey@gmail.com

A structard is shown below, a memory poem with a Fibonacci based word count.

