Traditional storytelling formats are often understood and analyzed in the context of a “frame;” or the boundary that separates the real from the fictional (Frow, 1982). In cinema, the frame would be the aspect ratio of the film, or the black bars bordering the screen. In theatre and literature, the frame would be the edge of the stage or margins of a page. These markers create a designated space in which a story can be told and accepted by an audience, regardless of how "realistic" it is. For the duration of the narrative, audiences will believe in brutal deaths, talking animals, and all other unrealities in stories because they acknowledge that in this time and space, what they are consuming is fiction. The frame provides structure and order in both the telling and receiving of narratives, and facilitates the audience's immersion by providing a curated doorway into the fictional world being constructed in that designated space; whether it be the screen, page, or another medium. But once they have stepped over that threshold and into that space, the audience is often relegated to the role of a passive observer who is expected to remain immobile for the duration of the story. They are rendered stationary by the frame, and see only what the frame allows. Locative media seeks to challenge the frame and step away from the immobile experience of traditional storytelling by inviting the audience to interact physically and intellectually with a story; blending performance art with interactive mechanisms and digital tools such as laptops or web map services to dynamically immerse the user in a multi-perspective narrative (Raley, 2010).

Locative media narratives are often constructed from and centered around the physical surroundings of the user, which is what separates these projects from their traditional counterparts. Although a film or a book may depict locations that exist in reality, these representations remain locked away behind the screen or page; barred by the frame. We can visit a location featured in fictional media, but it will never be the version that we encounter in the story. Locative media takes the physical, tangible environment around us and turns it into the storyworld; thus redefining the frame as flexible and constantly changing. This essay

seeks to explore the narrative conventions of urban-based locative media by pulling from relevant theory on mobile narratives to discuss the manifestation of multi-perspective storytelling in the following case studies: Blast Theory's *Rider Spoke* (2007), Teri Rueb's *Itinerant* (2005), and *34 North 118 West* by Jeremy Hight, Naomi Spellman, and Jeff Knowlton (2002). These three works demonstrate that by challenging the frame, merging story and surroundings, and situating the user at the center of the narrative, locative media is capable of producing uniquely immersive and highly interactive narrative experiences that transform our perspective of the world around us.

Emerging in the early 2000s, locative media originally branched off from net art. Whereas net art centered around screens, locative media claims the physical world as its canvas (Tuters & Varnelis, 2006), and is a broad enough genre to encompass any artistic use of location data. Locative media relies upon the widespread use of information and communication technologies in our everyday lives (Raley, 2010), from the mobile cell phone to Google Maps. The overwhelming digital presence of such technologies is what makes the creation of location-based narrative experiences possible, with artists designing for and around the accessibility of personal handheld digital devices and the complex networks of location data that are layered upon society. In his research on ambient aesthetics—the process of engineering artistic encounters between humans and digital systems—Jonathan Dovey describes Geographic Information System systems (used in Satnav, Google Maps, and more) as creating an invisible infrastructure that senses and tracks our movement through the world (2015, p. 142). These widely available GIS systems not only feed us information in the form of maps for navigation, but they receive information as well, such as people adding reviews or ratings to specific landmarks or restaurants. Location-aware technologies enable people to "read" and "write" city spaces by accessing information left by others and contributing their

own (de Souza e Silva, 2013), resulting in layers of location data that blanket the physical world.

How can a story be told through geographical locations and the information associated with them? How can meaningful encounters be produced between an individual and the environment they move through? Teri Rueb believes that to successfully deliver a narrative experience, locative media works must employ a combination of narrative conventions from literature, film, and theatre to efficiently incorporate the user as an integral component of the narrative. The final element is the user's movement, which will weave together these borrowed narrative conventions, and result in a meaningful narrative experience. Locative media is characterized by requiring "the interaction of participant, place, time, and social context" (Rueb, 2008a, p. 130). The emphasis on incorporating space, location, and movement as dynamic elements in the user's narrative experience is what removes the limitations of the conventional frame, which separates the audience from the story and relegates them to passive observers.

In locative media, space is viewed as an open area "defined by boundaries and dimensions," whereas location is interpreted as a space that has been imbued with human experience; therefore giving it meaning and turning it into a "place" (Ruston, 2010, p. 107). This transformation of a space from something neutral and empty to a place of meaning and emotion is facilitated through the movement of the user, just as a narrative takes the figurative and literal space between a frame and turns it into a fictional world. Locative media narratives often require users to travel between several different designated locations, interacting with each place as they go. Their perception of space, location, and their own physical embodiment in their surroundings changes constantly throughout the narrative experience as they make connections between the narrative and their physical environment; resulting in the blurring of boundaries between fiction and reality (Whittaker, 2019).

Although the specific mode of user interaction with their surroundings may differ from project to project, these mechanisms are usually implemented with the goal of transforming the user's perception of the world around them with a narrative that evolves alongside the user's movement (Whittaker, 2019). Similarly to performance art, the narrative will never be experienced the exact same way twice, with each user taking a different journey through the story in different conditions, whether that be the weather or their own current state of mind. The unpredictability of reception is a key characteristic of locative media that separates it from other mediums. Locative media invites the user to stand, to move, to *participate* rather than passively consume. This is especially true of mobile narratives, which are locative media works designed specifically to be consumed on handheld devices such as cell phones or tablet laptops (Raley, 2010). This essay will focus on mobile narratives that are structured to rely upon the interaction of the participant; situating them at the center of the narrative as both a consumer and/or creator, and includes content that evolves dynamically with their physical location.

The concept of users simultaneously creating and consuming is explored in Blast Theory's *Rider Spoke* (2007), a mobile narrative experience designed with urban cycling at its heart. Equipped with a headset and smartphone, participants are instructed to cycle through a city whilst a narrator speaks to them through their earphones, asking questions that grow progressively more personal. To answer, participants are instructed to choose a place to stop and make a recording of themselves speaking, which the smartphone app will then save and link to their current location. The app indicates nearby recordings made by other users, which participants may only listen to in the exact place that they were originally made. As an anonymous voice tells them a story through the headset, participants survey their current surroundings and reflect upon themselves and the lives of others (Blast Theory, 2007).

Karen Quigley describes the participant's role in *Rider Spoke* as one of a "spectator-performer." As they cycle through the city, the participant acts as both a spectator to the stories of others and a performer of their own. At each location, participants find themselves inhabiting the same space as previous participants, but the listening that follows occurs in a different time, which lands participants in a unique spatiotemporal position of an endless "loop" of creation and consumption (2016). These spaces, which were once nothing more than another park bench or street corner in a sprawling urban environment, transform into places of meaning and emotion with every participant's contributions of their own personal stories. Participants will speculate over the reason why someone else chose this spot and how it connects to the story they tell; thus altering their perspective of their surroundings and what they mean or represent to both themselves and the disembodied voice in their ear. The act of cycling, speaking, stopping, and listening results in the participant's body and mind becoming closely connected with the city and the narratives scattered throughout.

Rider Spoke takes the vast urban space of a city and annotates it with narratives left behind by countless participants, imbuing each location with a range of human experiences and creating an extensive overlay of stories. Cycling allows for participants to travel further and faster than if they were exploring on foot; creating opportunities for them to come across more places of interest and resulting in a wider variety of narrative experiences. Whether the participant is new to the city or a longtime resident, the personal journey they take during *Rider Spoke* will allow them to experience the city through multiple different perspectives in addition to their own. Participants will notice features of the landscape they may not have paid attention to otherwise, and their understanding of the city around them and how it affects the countless people traveling through it will change. *Rider Spoke* creates close connections between the participant, their body, the locations they choose to stop at and the recordings that are linked there; resulting in a deeply engaging and immersive narrative experience.

A similar work to *Rider Spoke* is Teri Rueb's 2005 interactive sound work *Itinerant*, which takes users on a walk through Boston Common and nearby neighborhoods. But unlike *Rider Spoke*, where users are dynamically contributing and consuming countless original narratives scattered throughout the city, *Itinerant* already consists of two predefined narratives: one is a reimagining of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and the other is an original text centered around a mysterious figure who represents both the doctor and creature in *Frankenstein* (Rueb, 2005). In addition to a map, the user is equipped with headphones connected to a pocket size PC with GPS installed to track their movement and software that plays audio files based on the location of the user. The audio files consist of spoken excerpts from *Frankenstein* and passages from the original text and are programmed into the software so that each file corresponds to a region of the city. When the GPS detects the user's location overlapping with a designated "active region," the software will automatically play the related audio files (Rueb, 2008b).

The two narrative texts do overlap at certain locations, which results in moments of fascinating juxtaposition between Shelley's early 19th century prose, Rueb's narration of the mysterious second protagonist, and the modern urban environment. The blending of classic literature and contemporary fiction provides the participant with a multitude of different perspectives in addition to their own to explore Boston through. Both texts, written in first person perspective, consist of lengthy expository sections that set the scene and internal monologues from their respective protagonists, resulting in two very different fictional worlds being imagined by the participant, and thus layered upon the real physical world around them. As participants walk through the city and trigger audio files along the way, they simultaneously experience three separate streams of consciousness that evolve alongside their surroundings. The trees populating Boston Public Garden morph into the autumn scene described in a passage of *Frankenstein*, the streets lined with buildings become the childhood

hometown featured in Rueb's original text. The occasional echo of footsteps can be heard in the background of the narrated texts, resulting in participants feeling as though for a brief moment, they are walking alongside the shadow of characters from both stories (Rueb, 2008b).

The manipulation of the malleability and fallibility of our beliefs and understanding of our environment is made possible by the absence of a strict frame separating the fictional world from our own (Whittaker, 2019, p. 92). It is also important to note that the participant is directly addressed in some way by both stories: *Frankenstein* consists of letters and a manuscript written by a character (Asquith, 2003), and Rueb's original text is delivered by an anonymous narrator telling their story *to* the participant. The participant is incorporated into both narratives as a pseudo-character of sorts who is more than just a passive audience member. The complex immersion achieved by this dynamic of being neither fully integrated into the story nor relegated to viewing from beyond the fourth wall designated by a strict frame replicates the theme of isolation and displacement felt by the respective characters in the participant, who in reality is walking alone during the experience, despite the audio occasionally creating the illusion of an invisible, momentary companion.

Unlike *Rider Spoke*, participants do not actively annotate the landscape. The mechanisms of interaction in *Itinerant* revolve around the act of discovering the narrative rather than contributing to it. There is a set beginning and ending, but a majority of the experience is built around free exploration of downtown Boston. Rueb designed the project to be a "patchwork narrative" that does not require walking the entirety of the mapped route from start to finish, and is also possible to re-experience with a second run (2008b). Each iteration of the narrative will come with its own individual features, such as the weather or the order the passages are triggered; resulting in an entirely unique experience each time. Rueb provides a starting point for the narrative and a recommended route to begin with, but

the rest of *Itinerant* is meant to be consumed in an infinite number of different configurations. The unpredictability of the delivery and reception of the piece is a notable characteristic in performance art, but mobile narratives like *Itinerant* take this one step further. In theatre, the frame is a stage that usually remains as immobile as its audience for the duration of the story, and often only shows as much as the constraints of the stage and theatre itself will allow. But mobile narratives, which are designed with the free exploration and movement of participants in mind, are structured so that the frame is constantly changing; evolving alongside the participant's experience of the narrative and perception of their physical embodiment in space.

Projects such as *Rider Spoke* and *Itinerant* transform concepts of space and location with the narrative contributions of participants or reimagining literary texts. Locative media works often focus on either fictional or nonfictional material and delivering these narratives in dynamic and engaging ways. However, there are projects that blur the lines between fiction and nonfiction, past and present, historical fact and dramatized speculation. One such example is *34 North 118 West* by Jeff Knowlton, Naomi Spellman, and Jeremy Hight: an exploratory audio walk that seeks to reveal the lost history of downtown Los Angeles. Set in what was once the freight depot hub of the city, participants listen to sounds and voices of the past as they explore an area that has been constantly rebuilt and repurposed throughout time (2002). *34 North 118 West* was one of the very first locative media projects, with development beginning in 2000, when GPS was still a niche tool used predominantly by backpackers and fishermen. Another notable feature is the project was designed to be experienced by participants in groups up to four, unlike *Rider Spoke* and *Itinerant*, which were intended for a single user. Groups were equipped with a laptop capable of connecting to multiple headphones and a handheld GPS device which tracked their coordinates as they

walked. Audio files containing historical narratives performed by voice actors played over the headphones when participants entered certain areas on the GPS grid (Hight, 2010).

The downtown Los Angeles that participants explored in 2002 was likely much different compared to the downtown Los Angeles of the early industrial era, but by listening to the dramatized historical narratives playing over their headphones, participants are able to imagine what those four city blocks once looked and felt like. As they walk through the remnants of the former freight depot hub and its nearby streets, they envision the several iterations of immigrant communities, periods of abandonment, and numerous transformations that the area experienced over several decades (Hight, 2010). The involvement of the participant in building the world of the narrative is a notable mechanism of interaction used in locative media. The act of co-creation in the context of a space with historical and cultural meaning bridges spatial and temporal divides; linking the past and present, the participant and those who once stood in their place. The voice actors performing in the audio files may also be an inhabitant of the present, but by lending a human voice to the characters, the written narratives gain an added layer of humanity and meaning, which further transforms the landscape from a mere "space" to a "place."

The history of downtown Los Angeles could easily be explored in a film or book, but a locative media adaptation cultivates deeper multisensorial immersion and provides a more varied perspective on the area. Rather than only being able to witness history through the limited viewpoint provided in more traditional mediums, *34 North 118 West* delivers a compelling narrative experience. Walking whilst navigating with the tablet PC and listening through the headset is a complex physical and cognitive action. By actively engaging with an environment that blends fiction (the narratives performed by voice actors) and reality (the remnants of the downtown Freight Depot), participants become emotionally "receptive and responsive" to the space in the context (Ross, 2013, p. 214). Participants do not contribute

their own personal narrative annotations to each location, nor do they move in pursuit of uncovering passages that constitute a larger text. But with every step and every story they listen to, participants peel back the layers of time to look and think beyond the abandoned buildings and streets around them; imbuing the space with new historical meaning and understanding.

A key characteristic of locative media is the use of location-aware technologies as creative tools for immersive, engaging storytelling. *Rider Spoke*, *Itinerant*, and *34 North 118 West* all utilized GPS and mobile devices to track the movement of participants and deliver location-specific content; thus turning the act of physical movement, whether that be walking or cycling, into an interactive mechanism that is integral to successfully manifesting the narrative. Each case study utilized geographic coordinates as a condition for the delivery of content, closely linking story and surroundings, and creating opportunities for participants to imbue places with personal meaning and emotion. Today, complex urban environments such as cities are overlaid with layers upon layers of location-specific information. The widespread use of mobile devices and GIS system applications such as Google Maps allows users to indiscriminately annotate the digital representation of physical locations with reviews, photos, and more. Locative media is a medium that approaches the annotation of physical space through a storytelling perspective, and seeks to create meaningful, memorable encounters between users and a space.

The three case studies discussed in this essay are examples of mobile narratives: locative media projects designed specifically for consumption via handheld digital devices which dynamically deliver content to the participant. The dynamic of participant-device interaction in mobile narrative consists of several parts: the participant's movement, the device's ability to track their movement, and the delivery of content that their movement triggers. The physical movement of the participant through the space is often loosely guided

by a map or other form of instruction, such as the narrator's prompts in *Rider Spoke* or the designated starting location in *Itinerant*. The handheld device utilizes GPS to determine the location of the user as they move, and in the case of *Rider Spoke*, alerts the user to nearby places of interest. Site-specific content is delivered to the user when their tracked location coincides with a designated area, such as participants in *34 North 118 West* listening to historical narratives that reveal the history of specific buildings and streets in downtown Los Angeles. Participant-device interaction is a key mechanism in mobile narratives that facilitates participant immersion and engagement with the story.

In film or literature, the audience is a passive, stationary agent whose perception of the narrative is limited by a strict frame. Locative media projects are often structured so that participants are given more freedom in experiencing the story than they would in traditional mediums. It challenges the frame by choosing to set its story in an expanse of space; open to interpretation and full of possibilities. The element of participant movement results in their point of view constantly changing throughout the narrative experience, and as demonstrated by the three case studies in this essay, participants are often free to approach their journey however they want, ensuring that the narrative is never experienced the exact same way twice. *Rider Spoke* situated the participant as a spectator-performer (Quigley, 2016), *Itinerant* incorporated the participant as a character in its audio adaptations of literary works, and *34 North 118 West* took the participant on a journey through time and space to rediscover lost history. Each project approached participant interaction with the narrative differently, but all shared the common goal of the participant reframing their perception of their physical surroundings and creating a connection between the narrative and the space.

Locative media creates opportunities for participants to experience the world around them through multiple perspectives. As demonstrated by the three case studies, locative media narratives occupy a unique spatiotemporal setting that blurs fiction and reality, the past

and present. The scenes that participants listen to in *34 North 118 West* are indeed based on real people and real events of the past, but they are dramatic interpretations of history rather than firsthand accounts. When participants in *Rider Spoke* cycle their way to a location where another participant recorded an audio file, they are technically listening to it in the same geographic location, but there will inevitably be differences in the weather, time of day, and other conditions. *Itinerant* has participants walking to uncover and piece together passages taken from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and short snippets of a second original text; juxtaposing 18th century England with memories of 1970s family holiday gatherings against the backdrop of Boston. As they walk or cycle, participants layer the various narrative events, characters, and themes over each space they pass through, leaving behind the unique meanings and emotions they derive from each story. This process transforms urban spaces from just another street corner or brick wall in a sprawling urban expanse into places that contain layers upon layers of personal experiences and emotions.

In locative media, there are three key components in the successful manifestation of the narrative: space, location, and movement. The way in which they interact with each other differs from project to project, but the role of the participant's physical movement is usually treated as the catalyst for narrative progression. Mobile narrative artists choose specific spaces for the delivery of content and designate these areas on software installed on the digital device. The participant's movement in and around such areas, and their engagement with the narrative that occurs in each location, is what gives meaning to these spaces and completes the narrative. The integration of the participant into the narrative experience as an agent of change with their physical movement, a creator with their narrative contributions and interaction with the wider story and surroundings, and a spectator with their consumption of narrative content results in a uniquely immersive and engaging narrative experience that transforms our perception of the world around us and our place in it.

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