



Research note

Media tourism through atmospheric practice

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Introduction

Literary, film-induced, or media tourism tends to focus on visits to material places associated with fictional worlds and their creators (Beeton, 2015; Reijnders, 2016). Research has shown that visitors are attracted to the links between stories and sites, ranging from the Georgian architecture reminiscent of *Bridgerton* settings to places that are only tenuously rumoured to have inspired fantasy authors (Lovell & Thurgill, 2021). However, future concerns about the sustainability of travel may mean that we require more imaginative ways to link stories to places, extending media tourism beyond the physical proximity to tourism markers. Also, as McLaughlin (2016) observes, some tourists who are unable to travel to designated mediated locations expand the texts into their local area. This example serves to illustrate the compulsion of tourists to mediatise a variety of environments in order to spatially experience stories.

The aim of this brief investigation is therefore to examine how media tourism extends into places that are unconnected to narratives but are infused with their atmosphere. Two theories are synthesised to achieve this aim: first, the notions of texts as spatial (Hones, 2011, 2014; Thurgill & Lovell, 2019) and, second, Bille and Simonsen's (2021) concept of solitary 'atmospheric practice'. In this theoretical context, the study examines examples that illuminate both attuned states of mind and the spontaneous intersubjectivity that characterises the lived experience of media tourism through atmospheric practice.

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Spatial hinges and atmospheric practice

To understand the relationship of stories to places, it is first necessary to turn to the field of literary geography, where Hones (2011, 2014) has conceptualised texts as 'spatial events', or collaborative, infinitely-unfolding, multiplicitous happenings. Spatial event theory has led to the notion of 'spatial hinges' (Thurgill & Lovell, 2019). When spatial hinges open then 'actual-world places shift from shaping the reading of the text to being shaped by the reading of the text' (p. 18). This means that fictional places are linked to those not associated with texts, but 'which feel like they share the same affective environment' (pp. 17–19). The concept of spatial hinges became more relevant during the COVID 19 pandemic, due to the physical restrictions of lockdowns. The spaces to which people were confined became invested with thickened narratives (Amey, 2021). Webcam and virtual, 'non-corporeal' types of tourism also flourished (Jarratt, 2021). At that time, media tourism involved *sites travelling to us*. This paper draws on these theories to develop the idea that media tourism occurs in places that are entirely unconnected with stories but are permeated with their atmosphere.

As research subjects, atmospheres are considered to be phenomenological, unfinished, slippery, ambiguous, vague and ephemeral entities than can overwhelm us (Böhme, 2013). But Sumartojo and Pink (2020) reason that we can know *about* aspects of atmospheres through our research and also know the world *in* and *through* the atmospheres we encounter. Tourism literature, including Edensor and Sumartojo's (2015) study of light festivals has applied Anderson's (2009) notion of 'affective atmospheres' to collective, planned spectacular situations. The affective atmospheres of fantasy fiction settings are also constructed by fans through social gatherings and embodied performances (Everett & Parakootathil, 2018). Yet, as Wetherell (2015) argues, individuals are 'reflexive, discursive, interpreting, meaning-making, communicating' bodies and so collective atmospheres are also comprised of singular lived experiences (p. 160). Taking this point a step further, Bille and Simonsen (2021) remark that atmospheric practice can be 'performed in solitude within a world of material objects, without any direct affective relation to other people' (p. 305).

This research note expands the idea of solitary atmospheric practice beyond the examples of cooking and running suggested by Bille and Simonsen into the non-relational, lived acts of media tourism that hinge stories to unrelated places.

Media tourism in unrelated sites

Atmospherics are significant to fantasy media tourists who, from childhood onwards, tend to be highly invested in the imaginative negotiation of unobtainable places (Lovell & Thurgill, 2021). Special effects and emotive stories contribute to the powerfully affective atmospheric place associations which media tourists try to recreate (Beeton, 2015). To this end, they often purposefully identify specific environments that induce the atmosphere of storyworlds; for example, by ghost hunting in 'spooky places' (Holloway, 2010).

However, impromptu media tourism experiences also occur. This phenomenon is apparent in Lovell's (2019) study of independent tourists visiting English historic cities. Independent tourists do not participate in guided tours. Sumartojo and Pink (2020) have argued that architecture possesses an atmospheric resonance that these tourists interpret for themselves. But the medieval built environment of walls, castles, gateways, and towers in many historic cities is also repeated as the setting motifs in many popular fantasy multi-platform TV and film series. Consequently, some tourists familiar with the genre spontaneously discover a diffuse, cinematic 'magi-heritage' atmosphere when visiting historical sites (Lovell, 2019, p. 2). This example allows us to unpack the elements of the *atmosphere* within atmospheric practice. Atmospheres are intersubjective entities, a presence arising in-between subjects and objects (Bille & Simonsen, 2021; p. 302). But it is important to remember that literary geography also considers texts to be objects, with agency (Daya, 2019). Leading on from this point, Lovell describes how fairytalesque historic cities return the tourist gaze and actively conceal and reveal lanes and houses (p. 6). Atmospheres are thus apprehended by media tourists as the impossible, familiar, dispersed, active presence of stories (in this case fairytales) in the settings of their lived experiences.

The medieval architecture of historic cities is more obviously evocative and symbolic. Yet it is possible that landscapes bearing little resemblance to fictional places may also share their atmosphere. During his solitary walks in Dry Creek Kansas, Mayberry (2013) suddenly encountered the atmospheric genius loci (spirit of place) of *Narnia*, a fantasy series written for children by CS Lewis. Mayberry's experience moves this discussion forward because it implies that a state of relaxed consciousness is essential for the *practice* of atmospheric practice. He walks mindfully, in a manner resembling the 'half conscious' discursive walking described by Wunderlich (2008, p.132). Mayberry describes his sensory hyperawareness of 'all that surrounds you...' (p. 254). As a consequence, he is receptive to the atmospheric shifts and 'oscillations of affect' that occur when texts hinge themselves to spaces (Thurgill & Lovell, 2019, pp. 16–17). Mayberry's attunement to his surroundings also supports Jarratt's (2021) proposition that reverie and daydreaming characterise non-corporeal tourism experiences.

The commonalities that emerge between the two instances discussed in this section include atmospheric practice as walking with a relaxed consciousness that is receptive to the intersubjectivity of stories. Both the historic city tourists and Mayberry were paying loose attention to their environment. What followed was unexpected. Bachelard (1971) reasons that reverie causes dreams to *visit us*. Neither subject purposefully sought the story, but unbidden, the story visited them in atmospheric form.

Implications

This original study responds to Sumartojo and Pink's (2020) request that researchers develop an understanding of 'the configurations that constitute particular atmospheres' (p. 19). It does so by suggesting that media tourism through atmospheric practice

takes place in a state of relaxed attunement to one's surroundings that allow the reverberations of texts to spontaneously, inter-subjectively emerge. The inclusion of spatial hinge theory in this discussion means that texts are considered to be collaborative, active presences that shape events. As a result, the imaginative happenings of media tourism can be untethered from official material anchors and occur in a broader range of more inchoate, unmediated destinations.

An important implication of this work is that atmospheric practice may become increasingly relevant to media tourism, due to a reduction in on-location shoots. Joel Collins (producer of the BBC *His Dark Materials* TV series based on fantasy author Philip Pullman's novels) visited 120 small Mediterranean towns searching for the location for Pullman's fictional town of Cittagázze (the City of Magpies). However, due to concern about the negative impacts of extended film crew occupation, followed by possible Pullman over-tourism, Collins made the decision to build the Cittagázze set in a car park in the Bad Wolf studio in Cardiff for the duration of the shoot (Fullerton, 2020). Yet, through atmospheric practice, Cittagázze may manifest itself in the winding stairs of a Mediterranean town, or a glimpse of magpies in an urban park. For example, the angel statue on the set Cittagázze's Torre del Angeli was also "discovered" by a tourist at Coventry Cathedral (the post actually refers to Jacob Epstein's sculpture of the Archangel Michael) (Higgins, 2021). So fictional places can travel to us, igniting the lived imagination of media tourists.

In conclusion, atmospherics, spatial hinges and media tourism are three fluid, slippery fields and this work only begins to outline their multiplicitous intersections. While experiences of fictional places seem uncontrollable, future studies may consider how the tourism industry can support the reveries of tourists by fostering a softer, less factually interpreted approach. Also, the happenings of media tourism through atmospheric practice share a sense of the sublime unexpectedness of enchanting experiences, which merits further investigation. A final example illustrates the last point by touching on the unbidden, surreal, magical reveries of atmospheric practice. During the writing of this piece, the author sat outside a cluster of ancient Essex barns at midnight after an August wedding party. It had been a busy, hot day and the author was tired and relaxed. A floodlit fountain splashed under a supermoon. Unknown wedding guests called goodbyes and wove away, disappearing into the trees. A niece wearing a flower crown cartwheeled past with another child in a flashing cow hat with moving ears. In an attuned frame of mind, every puddle can become a portal and every starry night can assume the form of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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