The Secret Language of Desire

The Secret Language of Desire is an electronic literature app exploring the ways in which interactivity and multimodality are impacting the form and experience of literature within digital environments.

Research background

The research sits in FOR 1902, Film, Television and Digital Media.

Alice Bell argues that digital literature is distinguished through its structural and formal engagement with the digital medium. Anastasia Salter suggests that the iPad represents a site of tension between "the codex and the breaking of the page, between genres of fiction and genres of play".

While Kate Pullinger's works demonstrate the interactive, multimodal potentials of digital literature; writers and publishers are experimenting with hybrid novels where multimodal elements augment text-based narrative.

The work explores the question: in what ways can the interactive, multimodal and haptic potentials of digital tablets impact the form and experience of literature within a digital environment?

Research contribution

The work demonstrates that interactive and multimodal features can be integrated with predominantly textual narrative to extend the narrative experience without necessarily sacrificing narrative flow and engagement. It does this through textual foregrounding and relevant interactive augmentation such as the selective use of touch-driven animation and sound, the use of relevant haptic interactions such as scratch-off effects, and specific consideration of user interface and sound design within the digital tablet experience.

Research significance

The work was funded by the Literature Board of the Australia Council for the Arts and internationally exhibited at the peer-reviewed Electronic Literature Organisation's conference and exhibition in Bergen, Norway, 2015.

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The Secret Language of Desire is available from the AppStore here http://tinyurl.com/gthxfdp

A 6 minute screen recording off iPad can be viewed via https://vimeo.com/176591353

Megan Heyward introduces *The Secret Language of Desire* at ELO 2015, Bergen, Norway, August 2015. Image Deanne Achong.
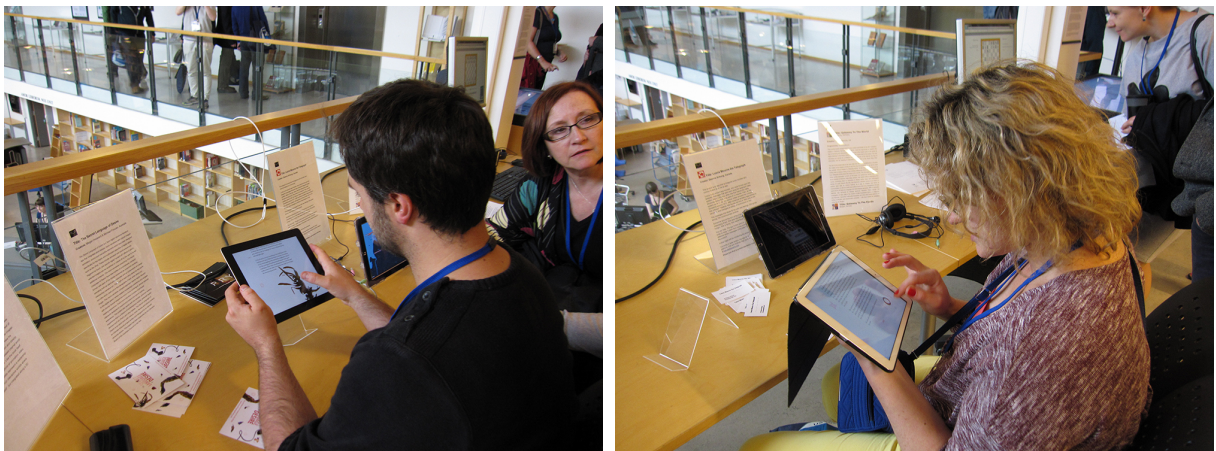
Conference attendees experience *The Secret Language of Desire* at ELO 2015 exhibition, Bergen University Library, Bergen, Norway, August 2015. Images Megan Heyward.

An attendee experiencing *The Secret Language of Desire,* and conference attendees at the ELO 2015 exhibition, Bergen University Library*,* Bergen, Norway, August 2015. Images Megan Heyward

Catalogue Entry
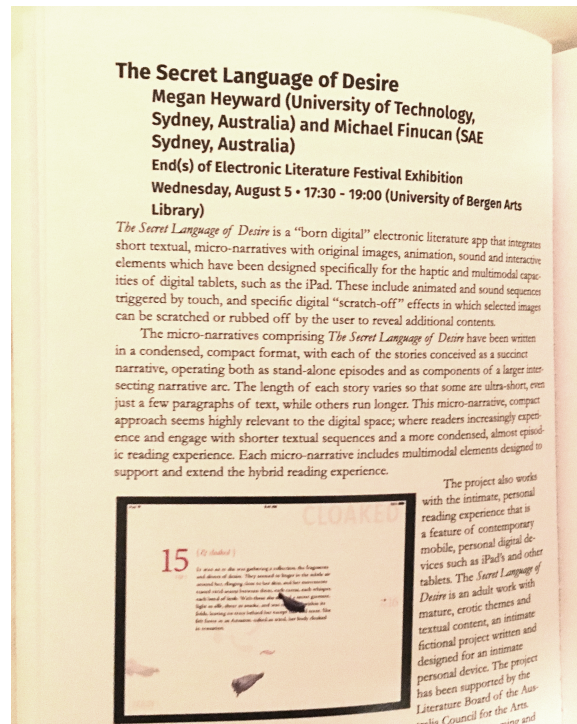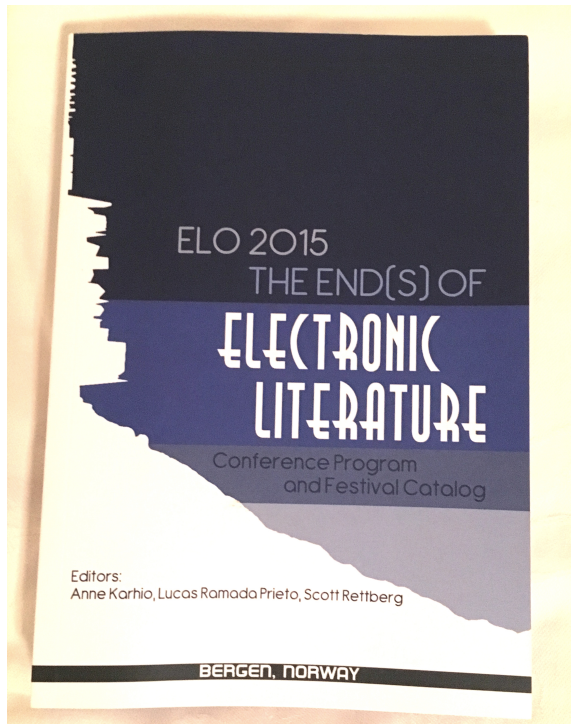
ELO 2015: The End[s] of Electronic Literature Conference Program and Festival Catalogue, ISBN 978-82-999089-6-2

IMAGES OF WORK

Figure 1: iPad screengrab from Introduction sequence, *The Secret Language of Desire* app.

Figure 2: iPad screengrab from Main menu, *The Secret Language of Desire* app.

Figure 3: iPad screengrab from Chapter 1, *The Secret Language of Desire* app.

Figure 4: iPad screengrab from Chapter 15, *The Secret Language of Desire* app.

8 { ✳ *sea* }

SHE HAD A FAR off look to her eyes. Almond shaped, heavy lidded, thick, dark lashes. Bedroom eyes they used to call them. But it was their colour that you noticed, when you really looked. Her eyes were the colour of the sea. Sometimes blue, sometimes green, they would change, in the light and over time. They seemed greener,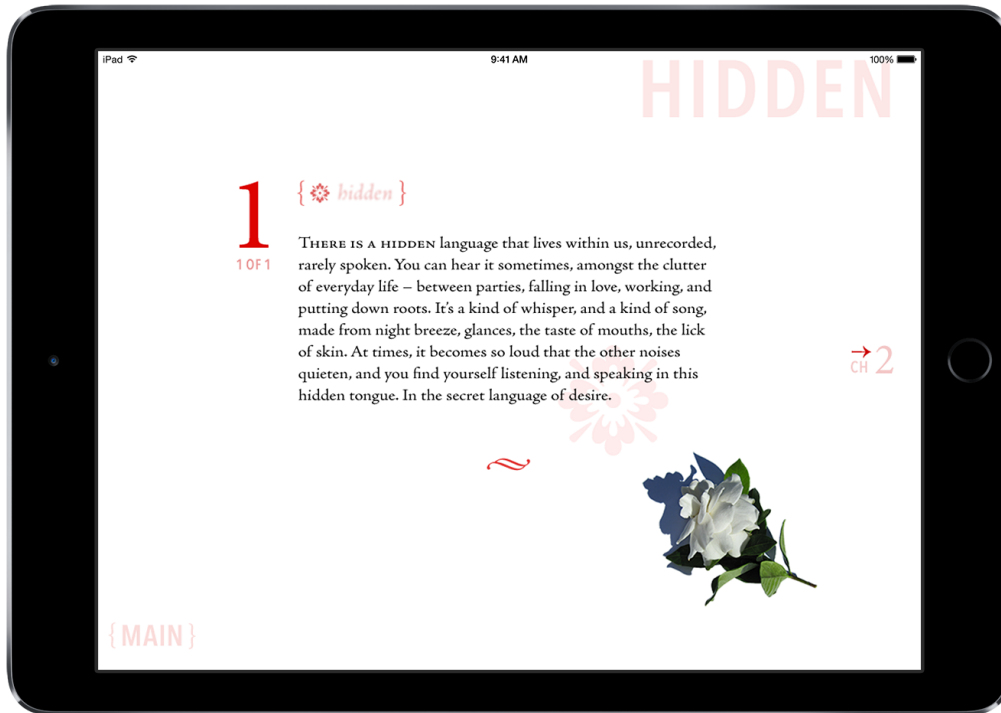 now she was single again, or was it her imagination? Men had fallen into those pools, occasionally, far in the past. She had met her husband the last time her eyes were turquoise green. But it had been a long time since anyone had really looked into her eyes.

As she explored more, kissed and touched more, the ocean seemed to claim other parts of her body. Her hair grew a little longer, wavier, more unkempt. She began to notice the scent of her crotch, a sweet fishy salt smell. Not at all unpleasant, but definitely there, like a day spent on a boat in summer. Stronger than before. She worried that other people might be able to smell it; colleagues, friends. Men in a certain state of anticipation. Just the other day, walking to her car after work, a man passed her on the street, then ran back and stopped her,

Figure 5: iPad screengrab from Chapter 8, *The Secret Language of Desire* app.

asking her out for coffee. She gently rebuffed him with a flimsy excuse. She was sure that he had smelt her as she walked past, smelt her sex, her longings, her moans and grinding hips and midnight sighs.

A friend said it was as if something in her, holding her back, had been torn away. Didn't she know it was the sea working on her, waves lapping at her relentlessly, tangling the ropes of her hair, yawing and bending and splitting old wood apart, washing her clean? Now everything below her waist belonged to the ocean, if she didn't know better she might have thought she was turning mermaid.

Figure 6: iPad screengrab from Chapter 8, *The Secret Language of Desire* app.

4 { ✤ *talk* }

THEY HAD COFFEE ON Saturday. She rang on Monday. They made a little conversation, weekends, work, but by then, she'd already decided to accelerate.

She told him she'd been thinking about him, a lot. He paused for a moment. In what way? She laughed. Well, it didn't involve walking hand in hand along a beach. Again, a slight pause. They were both crossing a tiny line. Their voices changed slightly.

She said he had made quite an impression on her. Really? What did she mean? She laughed again, nervously, and he could hear her breathe as she paused. She told him that she'd had to touch herself that night, right after meeting him. His voice lowered a little. Tell me more. She breathed deeply again and when she spoke it was in a languor; driving home late at night, the car, fingers touching, slipping. As she spoke her body seemed to echo her words, swelling and loosening. Then it was his turn to talk, and he too, had been thinking of her.

He talked about what he wanted to do to her, kiss her lips,

Figure 7: iPad screengrab from Chapter 4, *The Secret Language of Desire* app.

her full mouth, her breasts. They both moved somewhere more quiet. She lay on the lounge as he described in detail what they'd both imagined, but not yet done. In real life, they hadn't even kissed, but she was lying down with the phone to her ear as he talked about kissing and touching her, pushing inside her.

They spoke like that for two hours, she and the guy she'd met once over coffee. It was her first ever phone sex. They burnt up the phone lines for a few days, till they could meet again in person.

Figure 8: iPad screengrab from Chapter 4, *The Secret Language of Desire* app.

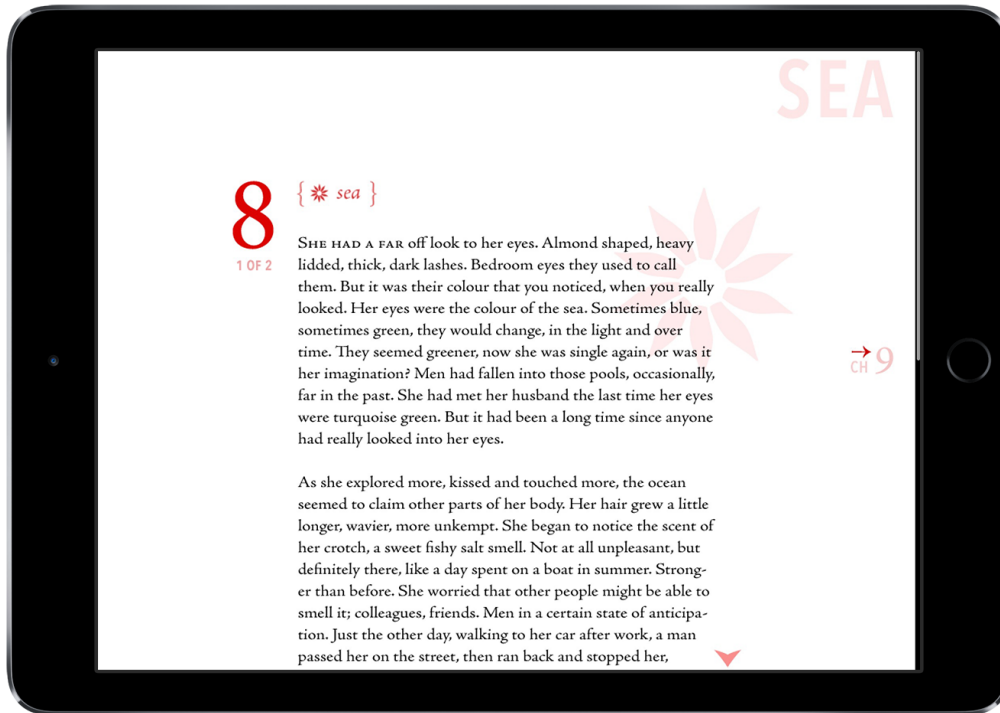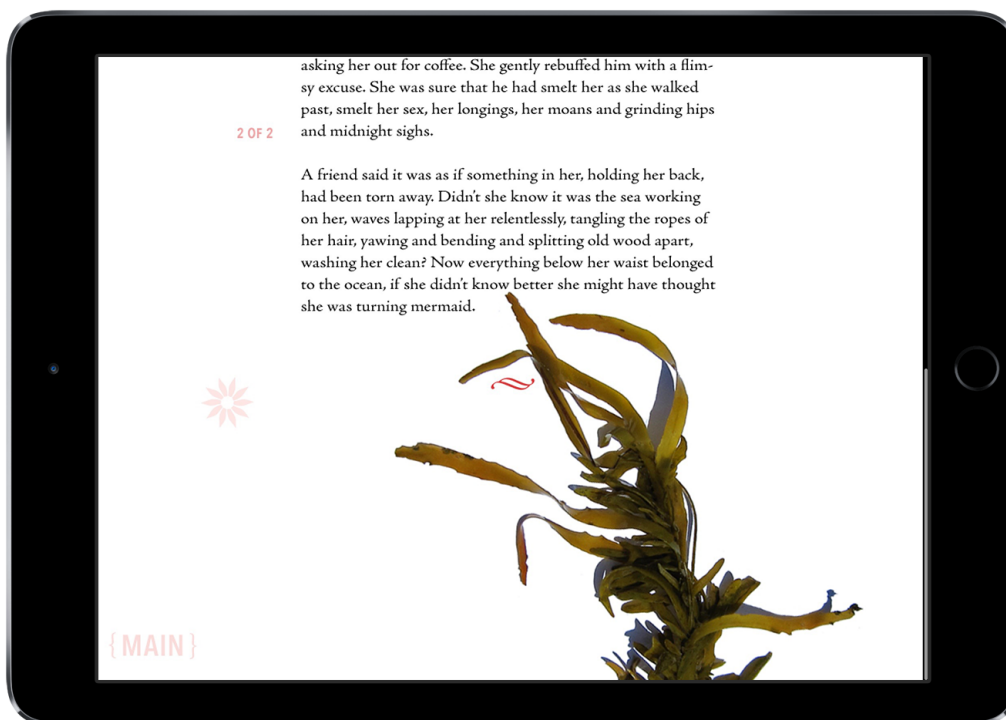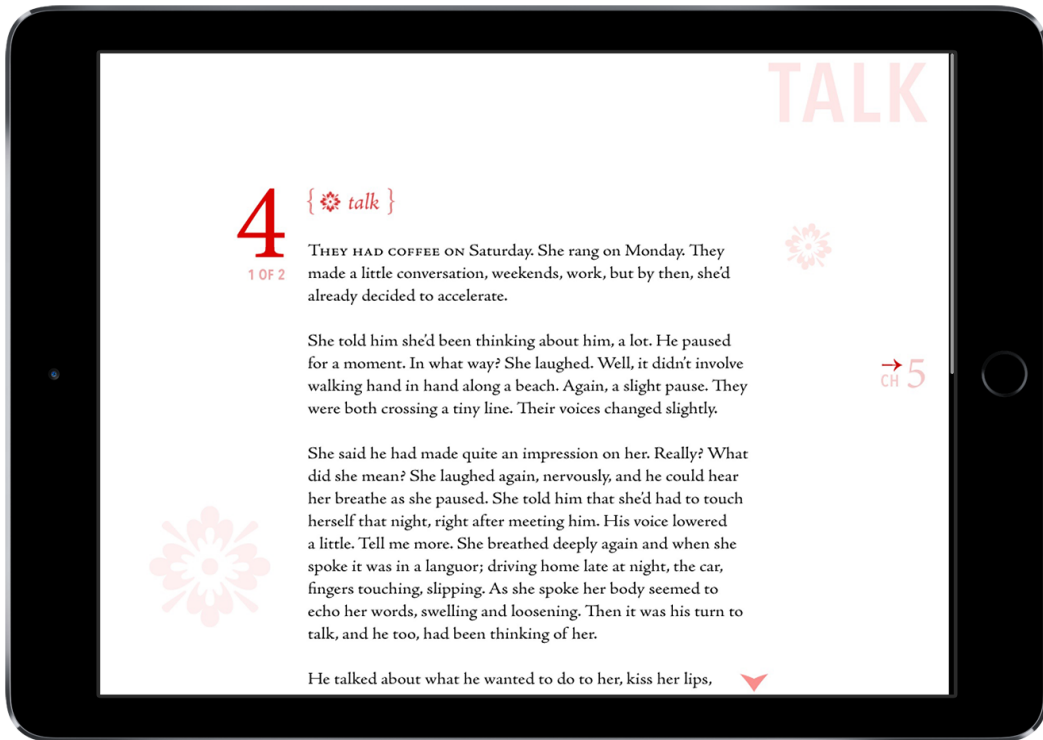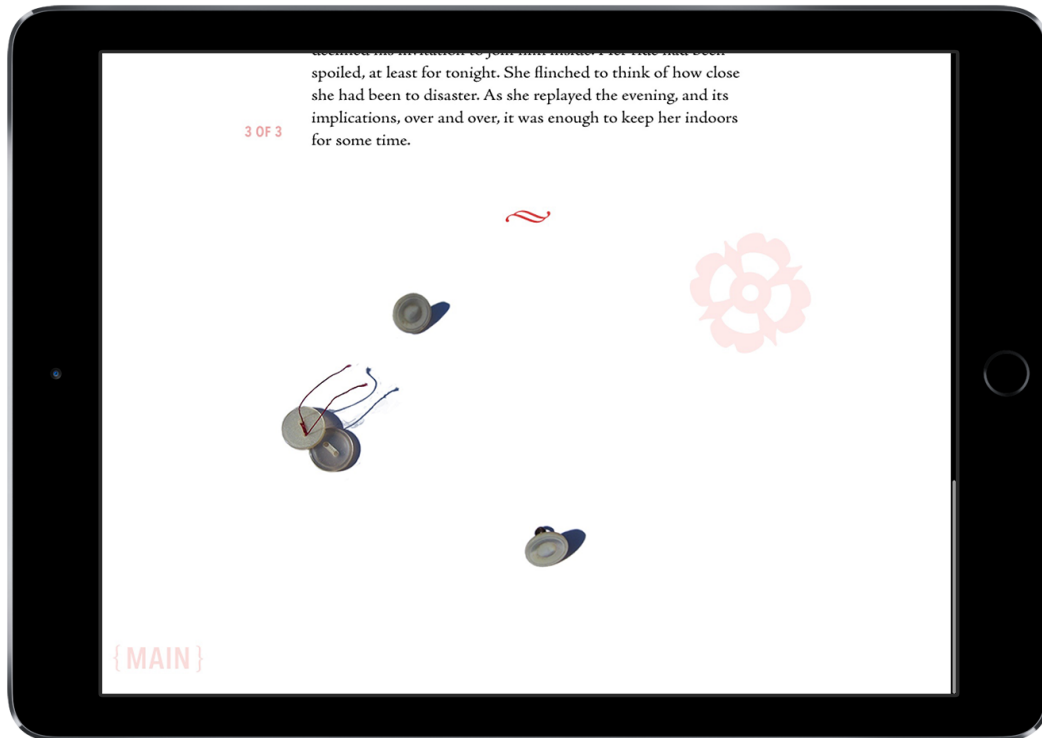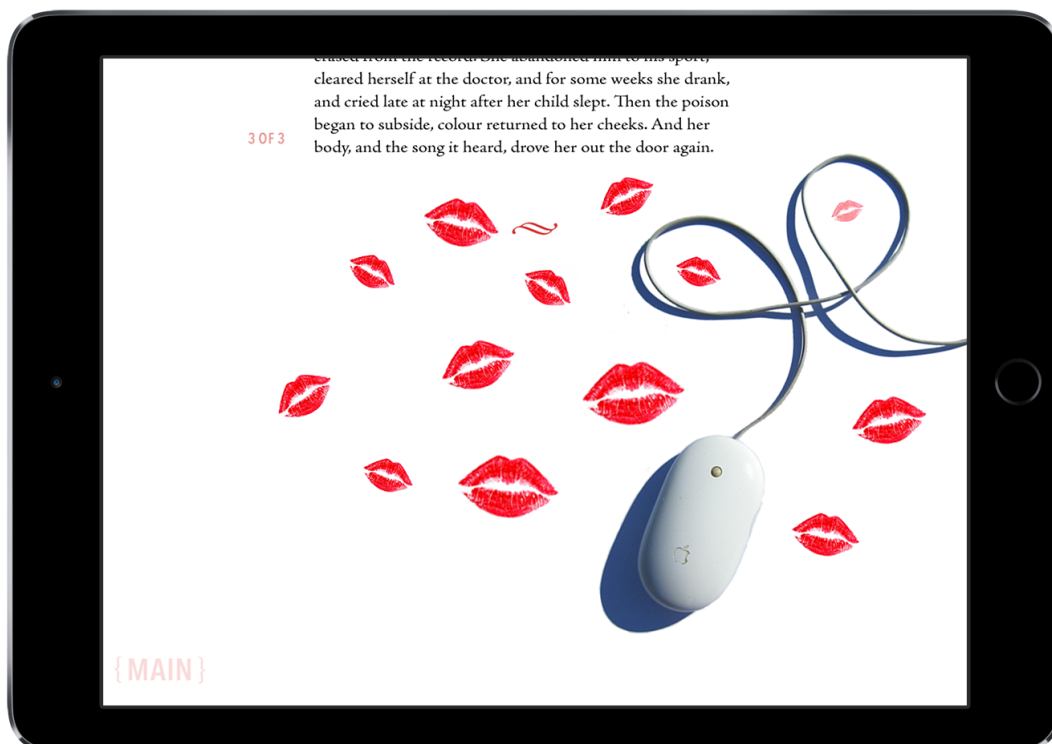Figure 9: iPad screengrab from Chapter 16, *The Secret Language of Desire* app.

Figure 10: iPad screengrab from Chapter 9, *The Secret Language of Desire* app.

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