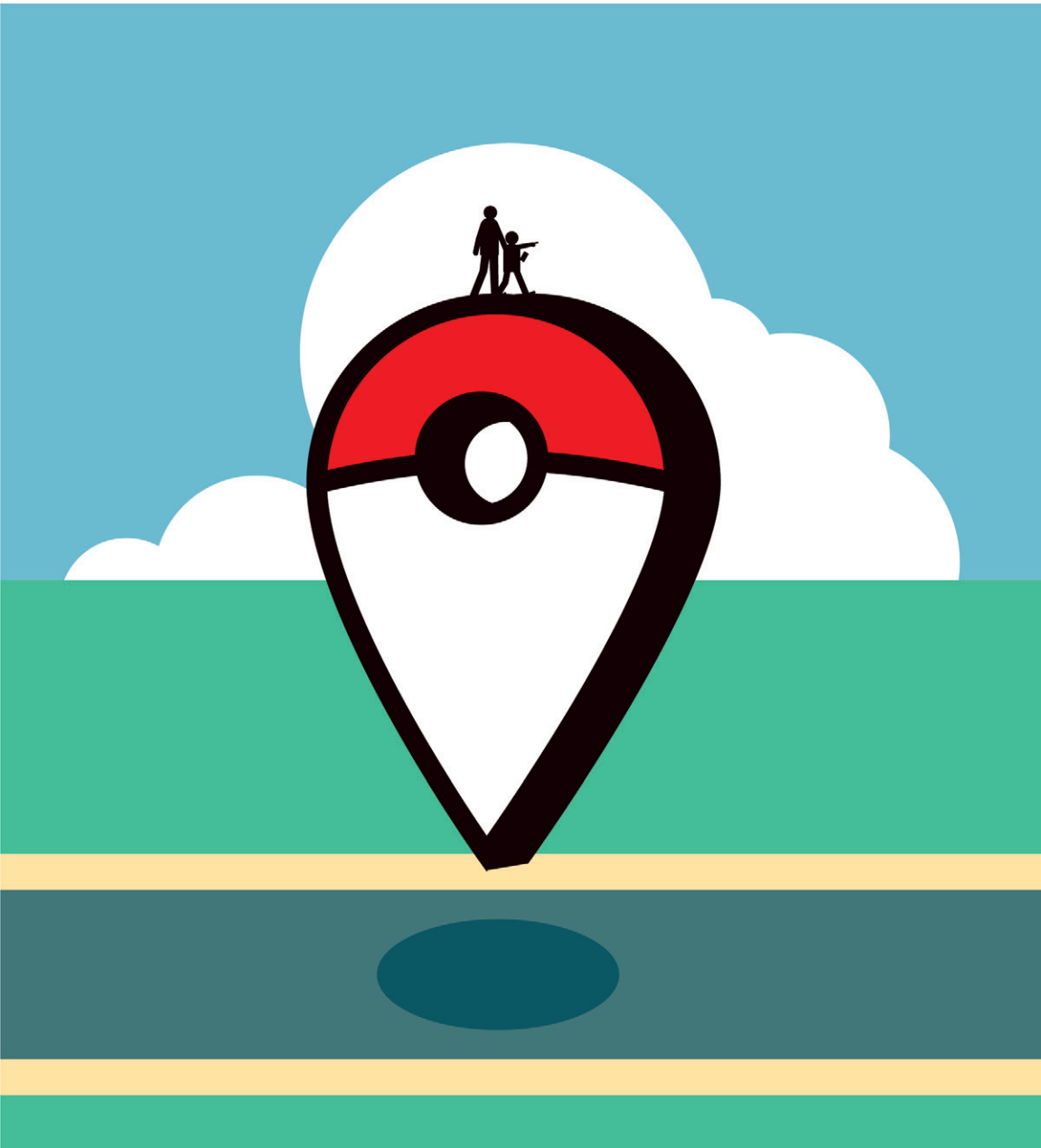
INTERGENERATIONAL LOCATIVE PLAY

AUGMENTING FAMILY

MICHAEL SAKER
LEIGHTON EVANS



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Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2021

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83909-140-7 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-83909-139-1 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-83909-141-4 (Epub)

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ISO 14001

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

For Mark and Edgar

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Abstract

Intergenerational Locative Play: Augmenting Family examines the social, spatial and physical impact of the hybrid reality games (HRGs) Pokémon Go on the relationship between parents and their children. The ubiquity of digital media correlates with a mounting body of work that considers the part digital technologies, such as video games, play in the lives of children. Consequently, commentators have deliberated the effects of rising levels of screen time and the association of this trend with antisocial behaviour, mental health–related problems and the interference of family life. Yet, recent studies have demonstrated that the intergenerational play of video games can, in fact, strengthen familial connections by facilitating communication between adults and children and allowing adolescents to experiment with a range of roles. Research on intergeneration play, however, has tended to focus on video games played within the domestic sphere. In contrast, locative games such as Pokémon Go involve players physically interacting and moving through their surroundings. Through an original study of Pokémon Go, then, this book extends developing research on intergenerational play to the field of locative games. In doing so, the book explores families who play locative games together through the following themes, spatial practices and mobilities, family life, social relationships and communities, and the digital economy and surveillance capitalism.

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Acknowledgements

Mike. A colossal thanks go to Eryn Parker. You went above and beyond in all aspects of your role in this project. Your enthusiasm, knowledge and rigour have been pivotal to this publication. A mammoth thanks go to my friend and long-term collaborator, Leighton Evans. While the past few months have not been easy – to say the very least – I would not have known this looking at your productivity. As always, you are a force to be reckoned with. A sincere thanks go to all the participants and respondents who took the time to provide a window on their worlds. This access has been invaluable.

I would like to offer a big thanks to all of my colleagues at City, University of London. Were it not for the Pump Priming funding Leighton and I received, the research underpinning this book would not have been possible. Special thanks go to Dan Mercea, Johnny Ilan and Chris Rojek. Your comments, observations and suggestions are always appreciated. Other thanks go to Jen McCall and everyone at Emerald. I hope we get to work together again in the future. A gargantuan thanks go to my family and friends for their encouragement and support along the way. In particular, an unreserved thanks to my mum who has listened to me discuss various aspects of this book. You are endlessly appreciated.

Finally, a wholehearted thanks go to my amazing wife, Megan, and beautiful children, Una and Elliott, for providing a constant source of love, light and levity. A large chunk of this book was written during lockdown when our world suddenly became much smaller. As long as you three are in it that is all I need.

Leighton. Two people in particular deserve a huge and heartfelt acknowledgement from me for this book. Firstly, Eryn Parker for her incredible research work and diligence during the data collection and preparation for this book. It was a pleasure to work alongside Eryn and I know she will become a name to watch in this field. Secondly, the indomitable Mike Saker for taking the lead, keeping me focused and motivated and showing immense patience during the writing of this book. In a very difficult time for me personally, cheers mate barely begins to cover it.

Other thanks go to my colleagues William Merrin and Rhys Jones for their always excellent comments and suggestions, Sian Rees for all her support, Richard Thomas and Sarah Crowther for keeping an eye on me and all my colleagues at the department of Media and Communication at Swansea University. Also thanks to my parents and friends for helping me through a tough time when writing this book.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Locative Games and Intergenerational Play

This book explores how an assortment of families incorporate, integrate and utilise digital technologies on a daily basis, both within and outside of their homes. More precisely, it is a book that focuses on families who play locative games together: those games that are played in public spaces with the aid of smartphones and related applications. It considers the effect this practice might have on their mobilities, experiences of space and place and social relationships, alongside nested concerns about surveillance and the digital economy. It is, therefore, a book that examines the varied familial advantages, opportunities and threats that playing locative games might elicit for those families who do so. Importantly, it adopts the perspective of parents and the reflexive meanings they attribute to these locative interactions. To be clear, this book does not demonise digital technologies or condemn emergent forms of mobile media as eroding the sanctity of the public space. Similarly, the book does not make sweeping generalisations about the growing number of families that occupy the same physical space, while engaging in a range of digital activities explicitly disconnected from the physical setting. Instead, this book appreciates the effect of any given technology as being indicative of the assemblage within which it is configured (Latour, 2005). In other words, there is nothing intrinsic about any given media, however new or shiny it might appear, that guarantees a particular effect or outcome. Digital technologies, in this context, can lead to families spending quality time together, just as they can lead to families spending time apart.

Moving forward, then, the purpose of this introduction is to begin unpacking some of the central themes that this book engages with. First, the chapter will outline significant historical developments within the field of locative media, with questions concerning space and place dominating the agenda, and foreshadowing much of the literature surrounding locative games. Second, the chapter will examine the changing landscape of locative media from 2009 onwards and how these advancements eventually provided the necessary foundations for the next generation of locative games to emerge. Third, the chapter will provide an overview of the hybrid reality game (HRG), Pokémon Go, which exemplifies this next generation of pervasive play. At the same time, the chapter will consider the suitability of this game to intergenerational play, while underlining the need for

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doi:10.1108/978-1-83909-139-120211004

research in this filed to move beyond traditional video games. Fourth, the chapter will introduce and describe the original research project that undergirds the various points, comments and observations made throughout this book. Finally, the chapter will outline an exegesis of the remainder of the book through a summary of the ensuing chapters.

1.1 Locative Media and the Centrality of Space and Place

During the early 2000s, discussions about mobile media were regularly marked by questions concerning location (Tuters & Varnelis, 2006), and for good reason. An array of digital artists and groups were frequently experimenting with the social and spatial possibilities of emergent locative media (Kabisch, 2010; Tanaka & Gemeinboeck, 2008; Wilken & Goggin, 2014), alongside their ability to 'reframe the relationship between people and spaces' (de Souza e Silva & Sheller, 2014, p. 3). Blast Theory is a key example of this trend, creating one of the first location-based games in their early work, *Can You See Me Now* (2001). In doing so, these experiments began to slowly normalise nascent locative assemblages.

At the same time, the mobile social network, Dodgeball, developed by Dennis Crowley in 2000, established that the affordances of mobile phones could create new forms of sociality in urban environments (Humphreys, 2007, 2010). Here, '[users] would post their location on Dodgeball's accompanying website and it would send out a series of SMS text messages to a defined list of friends' (Evans & Saker, 2017, pp. 4–5); producing ad hoc social interactions based on physical proximity. While Dodgeball was eventually taken over by Google in 2005, before being shut down in 2009, it nonetheless served as an important primer for the locative possibilities of more technologically advanced handsets that were on the cusp of being released.

The advancement of mobile phones around 2007, following the release of the iPhone 3GS, from devices that permitted phone calls and SMS text messages to smartphones that incorporated myriad technologies, such as global positioning system (GPS), meant these handsets could be located in concrete space (Frith, 2018). This bringing together of the physical and digital aspects of the city (Licoppe, 2016) through the mobile web (Saker & Evans, 2016) effectively allowed information technology to move beyond the desktop and into everyday urban life (McCullough, 2006), leading to what de Souza e Silva (2006) seminally describes as 'hybrid space'. As Frith (2018) explains, '[the] digital information people access in hybrid spaces is not exterior to the place; it becomes a part of that place for the user, just as a street sign or other physical informational becomes a part of a place' (p. 24).

By 2010, then, locative media had notably shifted from something artistic, obscure and specialised to something commercial, commonplace and ubiquitous (Wilken, 2012). For Wilken and Goggin (2014), '[as] mobile phones developed into fully fledged media devices, various affordances led to new kinds of sociotechnical marshalling of location' (Wilken & Goggin, 2014, p. 4). And this development can readily be observed with the advent and subsequent success of the location-based social network (LBSN), Foursquare.

Released in 2009, Foursquare permitted users to share their physical position with a defined group of 'friends' by manually 'checking in' at their current location. The affordances of this LBSN functioned in four broad ways. First, check-ins enabled users to coordinate social gatherings, as well as initiate unplanned social interactions *à la* Dodgeball – albeit in a more technologically advanced manner. Second, users were awarded points for their check-ins. Friends would, therefore, compete for the highest score at the end of the week. Likewise, users who had checked in to a site more than anyone else during a period of 60 days would become the 'mayor' of that venue. Mayorships often involved benefits that extended into the physical world, such as a free refill of coffee in participating coffee shops. Users could also receive a variety of badges if they checked in to a specified combination of locations. Third, users were able to leave reviews and 'tips' about the places that they frequented, which could be additionally furnished with images. Lastly, users' physical movements were archived by Foursquare, allowing this LBSN to function as an *aide-mémoire* (Saker & Evans, 2016).

From the time Foursquare was released, a substantial body of work has coalesced around the wider field of locative media (de Souza e Silva & Glover-Rijkse, 2020; Evans & Saker, 2017; Frith, 2018; Halegoua, 2020; Wilken, 2019). While explicit examples of locative media have changed, as we discuss later in the chapter, extant literature on earlier locative applications remains vital in signalling the kind of scholarly interests that foundationally support this field, and which continue to influence and direct related research on the next generation of locative games today (Evans & Saker, 2019; Saker & Evans, 2020). And while we do not intend on granularly unpacking the entirety of this work, as such an endeavour would surpass the scope of this chapter, it is still important to provide a more detailed overview of these interconnected areas of attention, as we will return to many of these themes in later chapters.

In the main, studies of locative media have typically considered the impact of this phenomenon on phenomenological understandings of space, place (Evans & Saker, 2017; Farman, 2016; Hamilton, 2009) and culture (Galloway & Ward, 2005; Speed, 2010) – and often from the perspective of everyday life (Hjorth, Pink, & Horst, 2018; Özkul, 2014; Saker & Evans, 2016). Research has shown that the embodied space of mobile media (Farman, 2013) can augment the urban environment (Townsend, 2008), craft new environmental experiences (Southern, 2012) and turn ordinary life 'into a game' (Frith, 2013). Likewise, location-based applications can reshape mobilities (de Lange, 2009; Lemos, 2010; McGarrigle, 2010), with pervasive play modifying the routes and pathways users take to traverse their surroundings (Saker & Evans, 2016), thus producing novel urban narratives (de Souza e Silva, 2013; Papangelis et al., 2017) and more personalised experiences of the municipal setting (Saker & Evans, 2020), which echo the Situationist's idea of the *dérive* (de Souza e Silva & Hjorth, 2009).

The digital sharing of one's location through locative media also implicates the social realm, as various studies readily corroborate (Frith, 2014; Sukto & de Souza e Silva, 2011). From this position, LBSNs can produce resourceful cultures predicated on mediated proximity (Licoppe & Inada, 2010), which facilitate serendipitous encounters (Saker & Evans, 2016), different approaches to coordinating communal

interactions (Campbell & Kwak, 2011; Sutko & de Souza e Silva, 2011; Humphreys & Liao, 2013; Licoppe, 2013; Saker & Frith, 2018; Wilken, 2008) and distinctive ways of connecting with the local social situation (Frith & Saker, 2017), grounded on persistent forms co-presence (Licoppe, 2004; Ling & Horst, 2011; Rainie & Wellman, 2012) that can restructure the experience of concrete space (Campbell & Ling, 2009; Gordon, Baldwin-Philippi, & Balestra, 2013; Martin, 2014).

For other commentators, a critical aspect of locative media and its recursive archival functionality revolves around the political economy, which underpins LBSNs (Perng, Kitchin, & Evans, 2016), as well as recent HRGs like Pokémon Go. For these scholars, locative media raises pressing questions about the developing value of locative data (Evans, 2013) together with apprehensions over surveillance (Humphreys, 2011; Lemos, 2011; Santaella, 2011), and the extent to which related services have the potential to either create new forms of social control (Hemment, 2004), based on the digital reimagining of the panopticon (Zeffiro, 2006), or enact geoplaced tactics of resistance (Berry, 2008) that can disrupt top-down systems of command through collective action (Townsend, 2006).

In a similar vein, these assemblages have allowed new visual practices to emerge (Hjorth & Pink, 2014; Pink & Hjorth, 2012), as well as novel methods for getting users to reflect on the images they associate with their LBSN check-ins (Wilken & Humphreys, 2019). To this end, Hjorth & Pink's (2014) notion of the 'digital wayfarer' provides a helpful toolbox to comprehend the mobile media user who not only ambulates her environment following different pathways, but who does so while creating congruent visualities through the camera functionality of smartphones, signalling a shift from 'networked visuality to emplaced visuality and sociality' (Pink & Hjorth, 2012) that both shape, and are shaped by, 'intimate cartographies of place' (Hjorth, 2013).

To a lesser extent, locative media has been inspected from the viewpoint of identity construction (Schwartz & Halegoua, 2014) with the marking of one's whereabouts through LBSNs like Foursquare effectively empowering users to present their identity via the inscription of space (Saker, 2016). Consequently, territoriality has become a central concept in understanding LBSN usage (Papangelis et al., 2020), with locative applications allowing distinctive revealings of place to materialise (Evans, 2015; Saker, 2017). Equally, the documenting of mobilities through LBSN as an aide-mémoire (Saker & Evans, 2016) can disrupt the relationship between time and place (Speed, 2011, 2012) and permit users to algorithmically exchange archived mobilities for future locative suggestions (Evans & Saker, 2017).

In short, while locative media has evidently implicated a range of interests, issues and concerns, the most impactful and enduing area of circumspection remains notions of space and place, followed by sociality, and matters pertaining to the digital economy and the use of personal data in the context of surveillance. And these are the central themes that underpin much of this book. Yet, this brief literature review still does not account for the emergence of recent locative games like Pokémon Go. In the following section, then, we explore how the waning popularity of LBSNs and explicit locative applications towards the end of 2013 ultimately provided the necessary foundation for the next generation of locative games to surface.

1.2 The Evolution of Locative Media

By 2014, Foursquare was in the midst of a deep identity crisis. The company had decided to separate its social side – the side where users would share their location with friends by 'checking in' – from its locative side – the side where users would provide reviews about particular locations, such as restaurants or bars. The latter kept the original Foursquare name, while the former was rebranded, Swarm. As Frith and Wilken (2019) explain, this decision was 'in part because those [social] elements were difficult to monetise and because of shifting end-user interest in and engagement with features' (p. 144). To a certain extent, this rebranding was in vain. Swarm was riddled with technical issues and simply could not recreate the same social appeal that had made Foursquare the most popular commercial LBSN to date. In fact, the only thing swarming during this period was the growing number of analysts proclaiming the death of locative media and detailing the various companies whose legacy would soon revolve around a very short-lived period in the annals of digital culture (Walsh, 2020).

In reality, of course, the evolution and development of locative media is more complex, convoluted and enduring than this reductive narrative suggests (Evans & Saker, 2017). While applications such as 'Gowalla (bought by Facebook and then closed), SCVNGR, Loopt, Sonar and Rummble' (Evans & Saker, 2017, p. 2) seemingly vanished as quickly as they appeared, for the most part, we attribute this trajectory to the limited affordances of earlier locative services. Though the 'check-in' functionality, synonymous with the likes of Foursquare, and more broadly, LBSNs, was an important development in the context of smartphones and hybrid space (de Souza e Silva, 2006), its value soon dwindled as the novelty of this feature failed to find its 'killer app'. It would be wrong, however, to label locative media as being a 'failure' or resigning earlier applications to the realm of 'dead media'. '"Dead" would obviously imply no longer active but the evidence is that both the form and the data of LBSN continue to play important roles in the social and digital media environments' (Evans & Saker, 2017, p. 69).

Today, the digital marking of location is no longer something that stands out as particularly innovative or revolutionary but rather a well-established, and often backstage, feature of social media behemoths like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, as well as a central element of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2015). Indeed, '[every] day, tens of millions of mobile users navigate and way-find using mobile maps that pinpoint their location' (Wilken & Goggin, 2014, p. 1). As the following vignettes demonstrate:

> In Helsinki, a family plays *Angry Birds* together, as the app gathers information on their location via the smartphone and its location technologies and sensors … In rural United States, a child calls 911 emergency services for help, and the ambulance is dispatched using the location information available via their absent parents' phone. (Wilken & Goggin, 2014, p. 1)

Claims about the death of locative application, then, are not so much symptomatic of the disappearance of locative media *per se*, but counterintuitively the

ubiquity of location as a recursive function of mobile media. In other words, the locative affordances of earlier locative media have been reabsorbed into the broader digital economy. As Evans & Saker (2017) put it, locative media has become an example of 'zombie' media. 'We now see that the form and function of LBSN, and the data residues of LBSN, are informing the development of other, new services and platforms' (Evans & Saker, 2017, p. 95). Consequently, these '[locative] features of digital media … have changed from visible location-driven aspects of user interfaces, such as check-in features and location badges, toward more inconspicuous ways of relating to location through automated backend processes' (Erdal, Øie, Westlund, & Oppegaard, 2019, p. 166). Yet, it would be wrong to suggest *all* locative services have followed this fate. As Frith and Wilken's (2019) analysis of Yelp and Foursquare demonstrates, some companies have successfully adapted to this changing landscape.

Around the same time that Foursquare released the ill-fated Swarm, the organisation made a number of sagacious decisions that would eventually see the company amass over $100 million in revenue (Walsh, 2020). First, it moved its social aspect to Swarm and continued to function as a 'search and recommendations service' (Frith & Wilken, 2019, p. 134). Second, it began selling its vast data to countless groups and organisations, including 'brands, marketers, advertisers and data-hungry investors' (Walsh, 2020), while 'charging developers for the use of its location technology in their own apps (it has worked with more than 150,000 to date)' (Walsh, 2020). As Frith and Wilken (2019) explain, Foursquare's Pilgrim software and Places API are integral parts of 'tens of thousands of apps, sites and interfaces' (p. 141), including the likes of Twitter, Tinder and Uber. And let us not forget that Foursquare still gathers locative data on its users. Whereas this was once performed through manual 'check-ins', today this information is passively gathered, backstage, in accordance with users' privacy setting. Equally, foursquare continues to experiment with the possibilities of locative data. This can be readily be seen with its 'hypertrending' feature showcased to attendees during SXSW 2019 that provided users with a real-time heat map of Austin, Texas, when it transformed their handsets into anonymised blips on a live map (Walsh, 2020).

In short, Foursquare very much continues to impact experiences of space and place, much like it always did. Only now the impact of this reshaping is multiplied by the, '[many] apps [that] … rely on Foursquare's location data' (Frith & Wilken, 2019, p. 144). As Frith and Wilken (2019) put it, 'spatial data are more valuable than ever before' (p. 134). While these two complementary understandings of the evolution of locative media as either 'zombie media' – with the mainstreaming of locative features into the broader media environment – or 'adaptive media' – with services like Yelp and Foursquare, successfully navigating 'the fluctuating demands of end-users within a complicated, competitive and continuously evolving geomedia ecosystem' (Frith & Wilken, 2019, p. 133) – are helpful in understanding how applications of locative media have changed, a more critical engagement with the advancement of pervasive play, and locative games is required at this juncture.

1.3 Locative Games and Intergenerational Play

The conceptual picture painted above would seem to imply that ludic interactions with locative media have dissipated as the social and playful function of this media has been surpassed by its monetary value in other areas. In reality, of course, the story of locative play does not end there. Just as Foursquare survived the mass extinction of earlier locative application, the logic of pervasive play similarly persists. Here, our understanding of 'zombie media' extends beyond the normalising effect of locative affordances within the 'geo media ecosystem' (Frith & Wilken, 2019), or the adaptability of certain services; more specifically, the legacy of seminal LBSNs created the necessary conditions for a new generation of locative games to eventually emerge that have – partially at least – overcome some of the problems associated of earlier applications. This new generation of locative games have – outwardly at least – created richer gamic experiences that forge more compelling bridges between the physical and digital aspects of contemporary life (Evans & Saker, 20198). We are, of course, talking about Pokémon Go.

Launched in July 2016, Pokémon Go has been downloaded more than one billion times (Fingas, 2019), and is still played by five million people across the world on a daily basis. In other words, it is a global phenomenon. 'In contrast to earlier HRGs like Mogi (2004), as well as LBSNs like, Pokémon Go is an augmented reality (AR) application' (Evans & Saker, 2019, p. 1). Nonetheless, following a similar logic to earlier locative games, Pokémon Go involves players traversing a game space that is both physical and digital. Through the GPS and the gyroscope built into contemporary smartphones, the physical and digital aspects of this gamic experience are visually merged. 'Players are presented with a digital representation of their immediate surroundings that has been augmented with the superimposition of Pokémon' (Evans & Saker, 2019), even if it is 'a bit crude in phenomenological terms' (Licoppe, 2017, p. 2).

Though later chapters will reveal the complexity of this game, on the surface at least, and for the purposes of this brief introduction, the aim of Pokémon Go is simple enough (Evans & Saker, 2019). Players must discover and then capture Pokémon by venturing out into the streets.

> These Pokémon can be found in locations throughout the world, and areas of interest in the game are mapped on to real locations of interest such as landmarks, historic buildings and public art displays. (Tran, 2018, p. 114)

Once a Pokémon has been discovered, the process of capturing it involves throwing a 'Poke ball' in its general direction through the AR functionality of the application. If the player is successful, the Pokémon will then be under their control. Beyond the central aim of this HRG, and its apparent simplicity, lies a number of important features that testify to the richer gamic experience on offer.

These features include (1) PokéStops, (2) Poké balls, (3) Gyms, (4) Community Days, (5) Field Research tasks and (6) Raids. PokéStops are the sites players can gather items, such as eggs, which can hatch valuable Pokémon, and Poke balls,

which can be used to capture Pokémon. PokéStops are normally situated around noteworthy physical places, for example historical sites, monuments and art installations. In contrast, Gyms are the sites where players can improve the battling potential of their Pokémon as well as battle another players' Pokémon. Equally, players can trade collected Pokémon. Community Days take place every month on a designated day, when a particular Pokémon will appear more often than usual for an allotted three-hour period. Likewise, once a month

> …there are a number of Field Research tasks available, which are basically quests you obtain by spinning PokéStops. By completing enough of these tasks, [players] achieve a Research Breakthrough to encounter a legendary Pokémon. (Wilson, 2020)

Lastly, Raids are difficult battles with large Pokémon that occur at gyms, and commonly require a team of players in order to defeat the 'boss' Pokémon, with these Pokémon changing once a month.

Game features to one side, Pokémon Go has been the subject of many media stories since its release. Resonating with the dialectical commentary that customarily surrounds new technology (Humphreys, 2017; Marvin, 1988), alongside the spatial focus of locative media studies, the popular press has tended to either celebrate or critique the spatial impact of this HRG. Almost immediately after its release

> …[stories] circulated about players going to inappropriate places such as the Holocaust Museum or an old church that has been turned into a private home to capture Pokémon and play against others. (Humphreys, 2017, pp. 15–16)

Similarly, stories surfaced involving players unwittingly putting themselves in physical danger by focussing on the digitality of their smartphones at the expense of the materiality of their surrounding (Frank, 2016; Rosenberg, 2016). This trend eventually culminated in the first reported Pokémon Go death linked to player negligence (Soble, 2016). The implicit suggestion, then, has been that '[the] game had made [players] a menace both to themselves and to those around them' (Humphreys, 2017, p. 16). Nevertheless, these adverse stories have been somewhat tempered by reports of Pokémon Go producing genuine human-to-human interaction' (Wawro, 2016) as well as reinvigorating previously underused public spaces (Perry, 2016). As Mäyrä (2017) optimistically suggests, Pokémon Go

> …encourages people to play … out in the open, visiting public spaces in order to make use of their PokeStops, or to openly engage in Pokémon gym battles, in the city streets and squares. (p. 1)

Moving forward, two themes can be identified in the surrounding literature. First, the cultural significance of Pokémon Go seemingly revolves around the effect this HRG can have on daily life (de Souza e Silva, 2017). Second, Pokémon