Ambient Literature (Abba, Butterworth, Dovey, Reddington. c. 2014) has come to describe a cluster of literary and (generalized) technological practices which actively engage the contextual and extra-textual apparatuses inherent in the meaningful function of literary works.¹

Taken together, such practices establish ambient literary works as nexus points for temporal,² historical, geographical, networked, psychological, and interpersonal trajectories producing, in more or less ergodic fashions, a hermeneutic oscillation between the foreground and background³ of post-phenomenological experience,⁴ highlighting the necessary dependence that meaningful actions have on the situations⁵ and stipulations⁶ of their enaction (writing, recording) and reception (reading, viewing, listening).⁷ Formulated as a trans-medial engagement⁸ with the situated/stipulated context of the reader (writ large), works of ambient literature reinscribe the occurrence of literary experience according to a spectral logic⁹ of an unbounded textuality across an errant¹⁰ lattice of both existent and non-existent materiality.¹¹ With this, audiences’ sensory apparatuses are remediated¹² toward an ambiguity¹³ that reconstitutes the present moment¹⁴ of a re-factored world or, perhaps, more accurately, the present moment of a re-factored worlding, or even worldliness.¹⁵ This is to say that the open¹⁶ and variable work of Ambient Literature comes to bear responsibility for both itself and the reader, welcoming the world into itself and extending itself out into the world.¹⁷ In Ambient Literature, the limits of both reading¹⁸ and writing¹⁹ are engaged with a wider (and wilder), paratextual²⁰ world. It proposes a text which remains specific to the materials of its making²¹ even as they extend beyond the immediacy of the written or spoken word. As such, Ambient Literature must be understood as a matter of circumscription, a meta-lexia within a wider field of potential intelligibility.²² It resists strict definition even as it is defined and remains open-ended, available to bring, either fully or in part, already-existent and new works into productive relation with its un-centre-ability. It is an idea open to continual renewal, defined by its responsiveness to emergent processes in literary and technological life.

Dr. Michael Marcinkowski & Dr. Matthew Hayler on behalf of the Ambient Literature team.

Notes

 ámbient, a. Surrounding (the a. air). [AMBI-; L eo go].
 ETYMOLOGY. 1590s, ‘surrounding, encircling,’ from Latin ambientem (nominative ambiens) ‘a going around,’ present participle of ambire ‘to go around, go about,’ from amb- ‘around’ (seeambi-) & ire ‘go’ (see ion). The notion of ‘going all around’ led to the sense of ‘encircling, lying all around.’

litérature, n., books and written composition esp. of the kind valued for form and style, the production of these or their authors as a class, the realm of letters, the writings of a country or period. the books &c. treating of a subject. [LETTER].
 ETYMOLOGY. Early 15c., ‘book-learning,’ from Latin litteratura / litteratura ‘learning, a writing, grammar,’ originally ‘writing formed with letters,’ from litera / littera ‘alphabetic letter’ also ‘an epistle, writing, document; literature, great books; science, learning’ (see Letter n.1). In English originally ‘book learning’ (in which sense it replaced Old English boccraft); the meaning ‘activity of a writer, the profession of a literary writer’ is first attested 1779 in Johnson’s Lives of the English Poets; that of ‘literary productions as a whole, body of writings from a period or people’ is first recorded 1812.