



Reading Audiobooks

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6.1 INTRODUCTION

Smartphones, tablets and computers make texts available in a number of different technological formats and have changed the way we read in the digital age. This raises the question of whether we need to understand reading on new terms. It can be done by theoretically embracing and investigating the multimodality of texts as a precondition for media-specific analysis, as suggested by Lars Elleström (2020). It can also, in continuation hereof, be investigated in relation to the multimodal aspects of reading as well as to the technological conditions for reading. To illustrate the current changes in digital reading this chapter discusses a medium that has gained huge global popularity because of the development of digital technologies. It is also a medium that challenges a traditional conception of what it means to read a book because—can you read with the ears?

An audiobook is an electronic book format which is listened to instead of being read in the traditional sense. Long before e-books became available, literature appeared in the form of audiobooks in electronic and digital formats. Historically, the audiobook has been described as a kind of by-product of the printed book and as a service for readers who for various reasons have difficulty reading printed books—either because they do not see well, have not learned to read (yet), or because they are dyslexic.

This has changed with the advent of digital media: first, the audiobook is no longer a by-product which, if the sales figures for the printed book are high enough, is recorded long after the book is printed. Today, the market for audiobooks is so big that they are often published at the same time as both the printed and the e-book, which creates a flexibility of reading choice from the moment of publication. Second, audiobooks are no longer for the few, but for everyone. The digital audiobook appeals to a much broader group of consumers than audiobooks did previously. As early as 2006, an American study showed that people who listened to audiobooks on an average became younger, compared to earlier years, and more well off (Audio Publishers Association 2006: 1). In addition, around half of audiobook customers are men, who otherwise only buy one in four books sold (Arvin 2010). By definition, an audiobook is a recording of a printed, published book (Have and Pedersen 2016), but the explosion in usage of audiobooks has caused a detachment from the printed original, so the audiobook is recognised as a medium in its own right. The mobility of the audiobook and the possibility for readers to engage with literature

at the same time as they are, for example, doing exercises or commuting by bike, train or car, also fits well with a modern lifestyle.

The digital audiobook raises a number of interesting issues regarding its modal aspects—not at least compared to the experience of reading a printed book. We have previously discussed the distinct features of the experience of book reading and audiobook reading, building on Lars Elleström’s ideas of the modalities of media (Elleström 2010; Have and Pedersen 2012, 2016). Here we have been highlighting that according to Elleström’s model for understanding media (2020), the digital audiobook and the printed book differ in a number of aspects, which makes it evident that we need to understand the different literary experiences in a media sensitive way. This means that we underline the importance of technology and the context of the reading situation, while being sensitive to the specifically auditive sensory aspects of the audiobook (e.g., the voice and the temporal aspects of the experience).

The chapter takes a context and user perspective on the experience of audiobooks and asks the fundamental question, to what extent we can say that we ‘read’ an audiobook. Reading is conceptualised as an institutionalised skill which is learned in school and which is connected to the cooperation between sight and cognition. Research on reading in schools is often tied closely to national contexts, and in that sense, you will find both similarities and differences when it comes to national research on reading. It seems, however, that concepts like phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension are among the ingredients of reading definition, in this case, the national reading panel of the United States (Read Naturally 2018).

If reading in everyday usage means, among other things, visually “perceiving the content of written or printed texts”, as Gyldendal’s Den Store Danske dictionary (2019) defines it, we cannot say that we read an audiobook. If, on the other hand, reading is about “recreating mental images on the basis of identification of the text’s words”, as it is defined in the same source (2019), we may argue that we can read by listening to literature in the same way that we also use the concept of reading when speaking of Braille. In a Danish context, the aspect of written word decoding has for many years been at the core of the reading definition put forward by leading reading researches which makes it difficult to include use of audiobooks as a reading practice.

We wish to emphasise the sensorial as well as the technological aspects of the reading activity; in that sense we regard the audiobook reading

activity as multisensory in itself. This also can be said to be the case regarding printed book reading: you read a book in a specific setting, using your sight to visually and cognitively perceive the written text; in that sense, also reading a book takes place in a situation where sounds, smells and other bodily senses are important. The audiobook reading activity, however, not using sight for the reading activity, creates new possibilities for mobile reading experiences, listening while walking, bicycling or driving, and the mobility takes part in the meaning creating, semiotic process of reading a book. The multisensory aspects act beyond language; however, they take part in the meaning creating process. In this sense, we displace the focus of interest in the analytical strategies from a more classical close reading of a text to include also the technological aspects as well as the sensory, situational and context-oriented aspects of the reading situation.

The first two sections of the chapter are about what sort of medium the audiobook is, how we use it, and what sort of reading experience it affords. Thereafter three sections follow which suggest, on the basis of Helle Helle's novel *Ned til hundene (Down to the Dogs)* (2008), how the audiobook experience as a whole may be analysed with regard to 'technological framing', 'reading situations' and 'the voice', respectively. After these three sections, the reading of audiobooks is discussed in relation to the experience of time and depth, before the chapter concludes with a brief résumé.

6.2 THE FORMATS OF THE AUDIOBOOK

Whether it makes sense to call an audiobook a book is an open question, since it as a medium, as experience and in usage is fundamentally different from the printed book (Have and Pedersen 2016). Technologically and materially, the audiobook has nothing in common with the printed book; rather, it shares its technology and formats with music. Thus, the technological histories of the audiobook and of recorded music run parallel. The starting point was Edison's invention of the phonograph in 1877, the original aim of which was to record speech. Later, in around 1900, the vinyl record was invented, and in the 1970s, the cassette tape became the audiobook's primary storage medium, so that it could now be listened to on cassette recorders, Walkmans and the inbuilt tape decks in cars. It was also with the invention of the cassette tape that the term 'audiobook' began to be used about recorded books (Rubery 2011: 8).

In the 1980s, the digital CD slowly began to take over the market for audiobooks. First as digital audio CDs to be played on traditional CD players, later as MP3 CDs. MP3 CDs can be played in the CD player at home or in the car, but the compressed files can also be transferred via a computer to most computer-based playback media such as smartphones (Sterne 2012). Even though audiobooks are today still in circulation as both CDs and cassette tapes, audiobooks have become less tangible and are now primarily disseminated via the Internet as downloads or via streaming. Due to technological developments, audiobooks have thus become easier to use. To take an example from Matthew Rubery's introduction to the book *Audiobooks, Literature, and Sound Studies* (2011), the development of storage media for audiobooks means that Tolstoy's *War and Peace* in an unabridged edition has gone from demanding 119 vinyl records, 45 cassettes or 50 CDs, to having become today, with the MP3, weightless (Rubery 2011: 9).

That it nevertheless makes sense to speak of an audiobook, in spite of the technological, aesthetic and usage-based differences from the printed book, is due to it requiring, according to our definition of an audiobook, a prior or contemporary printed book and an institutionalised literary context in the form of authors, publishing houses, bookshops, libraries and so on. This means that not all recordings of texts read aloud are audiobooks and that a recorded oral tale without a written source is not an audiobook either. This also means that there are differences between audiobooks, talk radio and podcasts—even though they all more or less consist of texts read aloud—because the two last-named typically arise from media institutions and 'on-demand blogging culture'. At the same time as the audiobook is part of the literary ecology, it is also part of the culture surrounding mobile sound media—that which Michael Bull described as "iPod culture" (2007), but which has today become part of a broader smartphone culture. With the smartphone as the primary platform for listening to audiobooks, the discussion of the audiobook as a medium is also inscribed in a broader discussion about media convergence, where it merges with various other everyday private and social digital activities (Schulz 2004). By defining the audiobook as a sound recording of a literary or academic book which is read aloud, usually by professional actors or the author him/herself, we understand the audiobook as a remediation of the book (Bolter and Grusin 2000), which underlines that the auditive mediation of literature adds substantial new aspects to the work. The narrative and its structure are the same, but in the audiobook the way in which it appears,

and thus is experienced, changes radically (Bednar 2010: 80). Seen historically, the audiobook is not just a remediation of the printed book but also refers back to the oral tradition of oral tales and the reading aloud of novels, long before literature became an institutional concept (Ong 2002).

6.3 DO WE READ AN AUDIOBOOK?

Today, we access texts in a number of different ways, among them in books, on paper, smartphones, tablets and computers. When we listen to an audiobook, are we then reading the book, or are we listening to it, and are these two activities fundamentally different? In 1994, Sven Birkerts wrote in the chapter “Close listening” in *The Gutenberg Elegies* (1994) of both a fascination and an aversion to the audiobook experience:

[O]nce we grant the audio book its attractions, we are still confronted with the question of its whatness. This is no mere epiphenomenon; it is a full-fledged trend. As life gets more complex, people are likely to read less and listen more. The medium shapes the message and the message bears directly on who we are; it forms us. Listening is not reading, but what is it? (Birkerts 1994: 145)

Audiobook researchers today do not necessarily agree with Birkerts that we do not read an audiobook when we listen to it. In order to discuss the differences between listening and reading, it is however necessary to speak of the activity of listening as something other than reading understood as a visual decoding of writing. One argument for such a differentiation is that in our everyday usage of media, we also change between platforms when ‘reading’. Don Katz, the founder of Amazon’s audiobook service Audible, who has a promotional rather than research-based perspective on the matter, says:

We’re moving toward a media-agnostic consumer who doesn’t think of the difference between textual and visual and auditory experience [...] It’s the story, and it is there for you in the way you want it. (Don Katz cited in Alter 2013)

The individual semiotic and sensorial expressions—individually or together—function, according to Katz, to a greater degree than previously as channels which mediate stories. Katz is perhaps right in saying that in

everyday usage we think less about the specific sensorial medium (e.g., sound or writing) in which the story appears. It may be argued, on the other hand, that the technological medium, the experience and the physical usage are different depending on whether you are reading Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* from 1925 as black ink on white pages with a hardcover, whether you are listening to Jake Gyllenhaal reading the novel aloud through headphones on a smartphone or whether you are allowing yourself to be absorbed in the darkness of the cinema together with other cinemagoers while watching Baz Luhrmann's film version from 2013. The medium is of importance, and this transposition is not a frictionless transition, but it alters the object itself. An analysis of an audiobook must therefore be medium-specific and medium-sensitive. A story changes when it is moved to another medium, and strategies of analysis must therefore be developed which are sensitive to these material and technological differences (Hayles 2004). The concurrent presence of both audio and visual text at, for example, the smartphone, offers the technological possibility to read with both the eyes and ears on the same platform—for example, through Amazon's feature *Whispersync for Voice*, which makes it possible to change 'seamlessly' (as they describe it) between an e-book and an audiobook version, which supports Katz's argument about the 'agnostic' media consumer.

In everyday speech, it is still widespread to speak of the activity of reading an audiobook as listening, but in our experience, consumers of both audio and paper books do not specifically differentiate between which books they have *read* and which they have *listened* to (cf. also Bednar 2010: 81). When you have listened to Jake Gyllenhaal reading *The Great Gatsby*, or to Helle Helle reading her own *Ned til hundene* (2008), have you then read that book? In one sense, the person reading aloud has read the book for you, but in this chapter, we want to insist that reading should not be reduced to the visual decoding of writing but can also be an auditive decoding of an audiobook, which offers a different form of literary experience.

Using the Danish author Helle Helle's novel *Ned til hundene* as a recurring example, we will in the following describe which parameters are important to include in an analysis of the audiobook as a medium, and of particular audiobook experiences. The specific technology, access and reading situation are important, being bearers of meaning in the analysis of medium sensitivity. In this method, we refer to the American philosopher of technology Don Ihde's so-called postphenomenology, an

analytical strategy which seeks to integrate a material perspective into an experience-oriented phenomenological philosophical position. Ihde writes that “*postphenomenology* is a modified phenomenology hybrid” (2009: 23). The fundamental premise of a postphenomenological position implies that we understand technology as objects which act and together with the situation as a whole constitute a dynamic understanding of our lifeworld. In this way, this chapter also tries “to probe and analyze the role of technologies in social, personal, and cultural life” (Ihde 2009: 23).

If we analyse audiobook reading and book reading in continuation of Elleström’s conception of modalities (2020), it is not possible to accept the idea of a seamless transition. Instead, taking into account the material, the sensorial, the spatiotemporal, as well as the semiotic modality, the audiobook performs the reading experience on distinct and almost totally different terms from the printed book as we have elaborated on earlier (Have and Pedersen 2012). In this sense, the theoretical framework for analysing the audiobook is inspired by Elleström (2010, 2020), however adding some perspectives. We are studying the audiobook reading situations from an everyday, sociologically oriented perspective as well, also including discussions of how the audiobook takes part in circuits of cultural value, renegotiating also the production side of digital publishing (Have and Pedersen 2019). As we see it, reading an audiobook takes place in a triangulation between everyday practice, specific technological formats/conditions and specific aesthetic or modal literary experiences of reading.

6.4 NARRATIVE AND THEMES IN *NED TIL HUNDENE* BY HELLE HELLE

Helle Helle’s novel *Ned til hundene* came out in 2008 and was published by Gyldendal Lyd (Gyldendal Sound) the same year, read by the author herself. Helle Helle usually reads her texts herself, and she has often been singled out as exemplary with regard to successful author recordings. Following a brief presentation of the novel’s narrative and its narrative characteristics, some important analytical focus points will follow, which attempt to encompass some of the audiobook’s particularities as a medium and reading experience.

The novel takes place in the countryside somewhere in Denmark, where we in the opening scene meet a 42-year-old female main character, the author Bente, who at the beginning of the novel finds herself with a suitcase in a not defined place. We understand that the main character has left her home without a clear aim and that she is waiting for a bus in a corner of provincial Denmark. The bus is cancelled because of a storm warning, and the main character is invited by Putte and John into their home, where they live with their dogs. We are, on the one hand, witness to a tense situation, where someone has left something behind for an unclear but potentially problematic reason. This reason is never quite revealed, but the reader follows the main character's life with John and Putte and their friends, while we are presented with glimpses of Bente's past: her husband Bjørnvig, who is a dermatologist, and her woes as an author with writer's block, who has left her disintegrating marriage—and perhaps oeuvre—behind.

The novel follows life with John and Putte, with whom the author has taken up residence, taking part in everyday life by feeding the dogs, filling in lottery tickets, playing a number of board games and visiting John and Putte's family. In general, the story describes this scenario from the Danish provinces where fundamental existential questions probably lurk beneath the surface but are rarely exposed or taken up explicitly in the text. Finally, the narrator receives a phone call from her husband, and Putte puts this potentially existential question to the protagonist: "Do you want to be found?" (or "Do you want to exist?"). In Danish the sentence is "Vil du findes?" and 'findes' both means to be found and to exist).

Whereas the introductory scene suggests a kind of formative journey, the story ends up taking place in and depicting the everyday provincial scenario in a peculiarly laconic and loyal tone of voice. The situation which we as readers are thrown into from the beginning of the novel intones a tension which suggests a dramatic arc, but the expectant position remains stationary, among other things *qua* the story's tone of voice, its static plot and its preference for registering details.

A fair amount of direct speech is used in the novel, broken by descriptive, registering and reflective passages. It is built up around a number of apparent contradictions, which in terms of narrative technique appear in the shifts between interior monologue and a plan of action consisting of descriptions and direct speech. In terms of context, details such as the difficulty of eating a croissant with chicken salad, and dwelling on knee-length socks, are in this way contrasted with a tacit existential crisis and an

apparent escalation of the drama: a coffin is, for example, described as well-suited both for storing board games and for trying out how it must feel to be dead. The concluding remark about whether she wants to be found or not suggests a short-circuiting of meaning or an existential doubt, which lurks in the wings of the novel, but which is seldom articulated.

6.5 TECHNOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Ned til hundene is a relatively short novel of 157 pages, and as an audiobook it only lasts 3 hours and 39 minutes, which is short for an audiobook. If you buy the audiobook as download from one of the major Danish Internet bookshops such as Saxo, you pay half the price of the printed edition. Once the audiobook is bought and the e-commerce confirmed, it is sent to the buyer's email address as a compressed ZIP-file. *Ned til hundene* can now be downloaded and unpacked in order to gain access to the 53 MP3 files which make up the audiobook itself, which takes a few minutes. It is now up to the consumer to name the file folder, which in this case comes with a visual book cover, which is important in giving the purchase a recognisable aesthetic representation and 'materiality'. The audiobook can thereafter be transferred to the consumer's other devices, such as a smartphone, but cannot be legally shared with others, unlike the printed book which can be lent to friends and family.

The audiobook can also be accessed via a streaming service, for example, Mofibo, which is the North European counterpart to Audible where you pay a monthly subscription in order to be able to stream or download audiobooks. When streaming, you can only read audiobooks when you have an Internet connection and therefore do not have the same feeling of owning the audiobook as you do with a download. Recently, the Internet bookshop Saxo also introduced a streaming service. From their webpage, you can now decide whether you want to buy *Ned til hundene* as download or subscribe to 'Saxo Premium' and get access to the book from an app downloaded to your smartphone or tablet.

On eReolen, a service offered by the Danish libraries, it is possible to both download and stream electronic e-books and audiobooks for 30 days at a time. The lending of audiobooks via eReolen has been such a great success that in 2015 some authors and several large publishing houses, among them Gyldendal, chose to recall all publications from eReolen for the sake of their own turnover and the authors' honorariums. *Ned til*

hundene is therefore no longer to be found on eReolen. The unlimited digital copies of books on eReolen have of course caused debate, since the free access of Danish citizens to literature stands in opposition to the ability of the producers to earn money. Attempts have been made to limit the lending by limiting the number of audiobooks a person can lend at any one time to three and by limiting the number of digital copies of new releases that are available for lending.

Once *Ned til hundene* has been transferred to the telephone, it is saved with the other sound files in the phone's music library. In iTunes it manifests itself as 53 'songs' on the 'album' *Ned til hundene*. In contrast to both downloads from eReolen and streaming services, the book is not saved as a long sequence but as 53 separate files, nor does iTunes remember where you got to if you listen to other sound files in between the audiobook. As the technology stands at the time of writing, a form of virtual bookmark is lacking, which works a lot better with regard to streaming. Apart from this, the interface looks like a traditional playback device, with icons for 'play', 'stop', 'rewind' and 'fast forward', as well as an indication of the volume and the ability to mix the order of the files during playback, which is hardly desirable with regard to a linear narrative. Audiobooks are often listened to through headphones, which also allow other audio signals from the telephone to break into the reading. In this way, the story stops or briefly fades out when someone calls or texts. Audiobooks are usually not recorded in stereo, so the same signal comes out of both sides of the headphones. It is obvious that small *carbuds* allow in more ambient sound than large headphones, and they may therefore be better suited to situations in which, for example, you want to be able to orient yourself in the traffic at the same time as listening to the audiobook.

In an analysis of the audiobook (both a particular audiobook and the audiobook as a technical medium), it is initially important to take into account the actual technologies and forms of distribution which frame listening, by interrogating the following aspects:

- Storage technologies (as sound files on a PC or in the cloud)
- Medium of distribution (the Internet)
- Providers (libraries, bookshops, streaming services)
- Playback media (computer, tablet, smartphone, loudspeakers, headphones)

Each of these also includes some visual representations and functional structures which can be further described: book covers linked to MP3 files, interfaces, functions and organisation on the providers' Internet sites or apps and icons for using the playback medium.

The technology behind the actual production of audiobooks lies outside the focus of this chapter and will not be treated in more depth, but in the following, we will give some examples of how various situations of consumption also have an influence on the experience of an audiobook.

6.6 READING SITUATIONS

The act of reading an audiobook can occur in a relatively large number of ways. When reading a paper book, we may find ourselves in all sorts of different locations, but the activity of reading always holds the attention of our sight as long as the activity is taking place. We can read at the beach, on the train, in bed, in a comfortable chair or on the bus. When reading a digital audiobook, we can furthermore read in a car, and when using a mobile technology, we can read on the way to work, in the fitness centre, while knitting, gardening, running, biking or while at work (if doing primarily manual labour).

These differences in possible reading situations at the same time point to great differences in modal spaces of experience. For example, does something happen to our experience of Helle Helle's novel if the reading takes place on a long walk through a town, in comparison to if we read the book in bed in the dark before going to sleep? If we walk through an urban area and then along a beach and the edge of the woods while listening, the everyday spaces we find ourselves in will of course have an influence on the space of reading. The internal images of the woman waiting for the bus, of the chicken salad on her sleeve, of dwelling on the knee-length socks, of the lottery ticket in her hand, will evoke a different response when they are experienced in a bodily and mobile relation to a lifeworld. There is a transfer of impressions from the real to the literary universe, and at the same time, we can imagine that the characters and the locations in the book potentially also influence our experience of the physical surroundings. The character of the landscape in the actually sensed world can evoke a response in the literary space of imagination, or the book can add an atmosphere to what we are in the process of doing. The body in motion can also be experienced as a factor in the whole

experience. It lends rhythm and respiration to the reading, which can speak either with or against Helle Helle's diction, pauses and vocal qualities.

When reading in the dark while falling asleep, other image-forming processes may arise. We can in this case imagine that the detailed nature of the language, and the potentially absurd situations described, will stand out more clearly, possibly in interplay with an increased emphasis on the diction of the voice and changes in tone from description and reflection to direct speech. Potentially, the atmosphere may here be more strongly tied to a stylistic sensibility, both with regard to the character of the language and—perhaps in particular—to an increased feeling for the voice of the performing narrator.

The use of the terms listening, reading and experience are related to ideas about concentration in the reader. There may be differences in the degree of identification with and immersion in an audiobook when driving a 12-hour route in a lorry, compared to walking around the house doing housework, activities that require differing degrees of concentration. The audiobook has suffered under the idea that listening is a more distracted form of reading than reading a paper book, among other things, because we can do other things at the same time (Kozloff 1995; Have and Pedersen 2016). We would like to argue, however, that the attentiveness to the world and bodily participation has a potential for leading to more 'deep', 'immersed' readings. In the article "Reading on the Move", Lutz Koepnick suggests that:

To read between an audiobook's lines—to read an audiobook deeply—means to open your minds and senses to the productive interplay of ears, eyes, and bodily motions during the act of attending to the movements of a text. (Koepnick 2013: 236)

Things which may be perceived as disturbing or distracting elements in the listening experience—the landscape which passes by, an overtaking bike—may actually contribute to reinforcing rather than impairing the feeling of identification and immersion in a story. At the same time, we wish to reject the idea that listening to an audiobook is a more passive form of reading than reading a paper book—it can be just as captivating and gripping, but it is different and therefore requires different methodological approaches than the analysis of a traditional reading experience. Analysing sensorial aspects of the reading situation are here taken beyond

the relationship with the text as implied positions to also include the real reader as well as the specific context for use.

6.7 THE VOICE

The voice is the technical medium of display (Elleström 2020: 33–40), which most clearly points to the difference between the paper book and the audiobook, and an analysis of the audiobook ought therefore to include the role of the voice. The voice delivers an interpretation of the text and in so doing becomes a new medium for literature. In implementing such an analysis, it is relevant to include the five points listed below, which can flow into one another and be combined as needed (Have and Pedersen 2016: 87).

- Technological processing of the voice
- The materiality of the voice, rhythm and diction
- The voice as a rhetorical situation, addressing the reader
- The enunciation of the voice, for example, author/narrator relation
- The voice in context: the age, gender and ethnicity of the person reading aloud

The recording of *Ned til hundene* is experienced as a very soundproof production. Only a few cuts are heard in the recording, which we notice when the intonation of the voice changes. A few sounds of the performing narrator's mouth opening and closing can be perceived, as well as a few words which are spoken with a quiet whistling or lisp.

Helle Helle's voice has a pleasant sound, which resonates in the mid-tones. Her voice is neither particularly compressed nor especially airy, but functions well sonorously, is calm and pleasant to listen to, in the sense that it is a voice which does not draw attention to itself in a disturbing way. The reading is delivered with a fine and balanced diction, slightly dramatised through direct speech, during which the voice is raised to a slightly higher tone. When descriptive passages are read, the voice becomes more monotone. Generally speaking, Helle Helle has chosen to emphasise the ends of words, creating a pleasant sense of rhythm. Her feeling for dramatic pauses works in support of the narrative without demanding too much attention. Generally, a relatively transparent reading has been aimed at, in which the attempt has been made to stay loyal to the written word by not drawing too much attention to the mediation of the reading.

Rhetorically, the reading style seems relatively monotone with controlled fluctuations, which supports the minimalist, soft-voiced style of the book's narrative. Stylistically, it seems almost deliberate that the contradictions in the text are not marked by pauses and/or changes in the intensity of the reading voice: the sentences "Osteoporosis—hell on earth", "It's Bente", "Do you want liver?—There's a fine smell of onions here", for example, are delivered in a flow without any particular expressivity or dynamic fluctuation. The existential difficulties are not elaborated on or interpreted in the text but revealed in the cracks of, for example, everyday observations, whether they be about lottery tickets or foodstuffs. This quality is supported here by the use of the voice, the intentional pauses of which typically seek to indicate changes in the register of the text.

The enunciation of the text is primarily about who is speaking. In a text there may be several narrators, who may be reliable or unreliable. These narrators are as we know not identical with the author, but when the author herself records her audiobooks, something happens with the voice's relation to the text (see, e.g., Have and Pedersen 2016: 116). The text's narrator and the author are physically tied closely together, and the text's positions are thus negotiated in new ways, which in Helle Helle's case has several interesting implications. Partly there is the metafictional layer of the novel, the narrator of which is an author with writer's block and who writes about 'ordinary people who drink coffee and chat and that sort of thing'. This metafictional quality is reinforced in the audiobook version. Partly there is the relationship between the author who reads aloud and the figures the author describes. Is the performing narrator and author Helle Helle operating with an ironic stance towards the figures depicted, or is the voice in the novel loyal to John and Putte's relatively humble everyday universe? This is in a way undecided, but the ambivalence—that we both laugh at and with John and Putte—seems perhaps less ambivalent in the audiobook version, since the reading actually comes across as relatively loyal to the novel's cast of characters.

When looking at the voice in context, it could in this case be a question of gender and social class. The aforementioned discussion of ambivalence could be continued, since Helle Helle's novels to a certain degree speak to a world of high culture, while the environment she describes lies far from the literary world's ideas about itself. Even though the audiobook's recording thus demonstrates a loyalty to or love for the figures it describes, exposes and lives with, it still encompasses an explicit collision between

what is described and the literary world of which Helle Helle's novels are part.

Above, we highlighted three important parameters in the analysis of a specific audiobook experience. The combination of the specific technology, the reading situation and the reading voice contributes to defining the reading experience in the meeting with the individual listener's personal disposition and experience, which we, in parenthesis, have not considered methodologically in this analysis.

By including technology, situation and the voice in the analysis, a reading experience is sketched out which is significantly different from reading the book as a printed book or e-book. According to how the three parameters combine in the individual reading experience, it can be further analysed in relation to two general aspects of experience, which focus on how the use of audiobooks negotiates the relationship of the experience to time and on the experience's degree of immersion—or with metaphorical designations: a horizontal and a vertical aspect of the appropriation.

6.8 THE ASPECTS OF EXPERIENCE IN READING AN AUDIOBOOK: TIME AND DEPTH

Empirical studies have shown that the reading of audiobooks has an effect on our experience of time (Dalsgård et al. 2015; Have and Pedersen 2016). Although this is also the case with visual reading, the popularity of the audiobook in the last few years perhaps has something to do with the modern person's relationship to time. Reading audiobooks gives waiting and wasted time a positive aspect by adding an extra mental layer of experience to the bike ride, walk or waiting time on the platform, so that we feel we are making the best possible use of time.

An American questionnaire from 2012 showed that 62% of those asked mentioned that they chose audiobooks rather than printed books because they could be read while they drove their car, 46% highlighted the mobility of the audiobook and 31% ticked the box "it helps me multitask". Only 11% answered that they chose audiobooks because they had difficulty reading printed books (Have and Pedersen 2016: 101). This was confirmed by a qualitative study we ourselves undertook, in which reading audiobooks qualified the time our informants otherwise felt was wasted on, for example, transport or cleaning and was seen as a choice that added value to everyday activities (Have and Pedersen 2016: Chapter 6). Our

informants also confirmed a point from an earlier American survey (Audio Publishers Association 2006: 1) that audiobook readers typically also read many printed books and therefore do not replace the printed books with audiobooks but rather create new routines for reading in situations in which they cannot read with their eyes (Have and Pedersen 2016). As the report *Når Danmark læser* (*When Denmark Reads*) also confirms, the audiobook offers new possibilities for reading in a time when many people do not feel that they have time to read printed literature (Dalsgård et al. 2015). People with routine jobs or commuters also have additional time or attention with which to listen to literature (Dalsgård et al. 2015: 33).

There has been a tendency to view listening to audiobooks as a distracted and superficial form of reading and getting to know literature, but when audiobook readers say that they make wasted time pass faster by reading audiobooks, it is also a question of compressing time through immersion. We can therefore differentiate between two forms of listening to audiobooks, each with their qualities. It is an analytical differentiation, since the two forms in practice enrich one another: *atmosphere-oriented audiobook listening*, which is reminiscent of listening to music and which emphasises the aesthetic aspects of the voice and a ‘thickening’ of the linguistic in a sonorous-stylistic sense, and *content-oriented audiobook listening*. Immersion may occur in both cases, depending on whether we immerse ourselves in the audiobook’s narrative or in the atmosphere created by the sonorous qualities of the language and by the narrator’s voice, which in, for example, Helle Helle’s case can create presence and mental calm. It is, then, a question of two different ways of reading ‘deeply’, and the audiobook can be said to increase sensibility to the *connection* between the sonorous atmosphere-oriented and the narrative-oriented levels. Sound is experienced in real time, but audiobook reading can either make time pass more quickly or give time an atmospheric and content-based wealth. The temporal dimension is therefore closely connected to the vertical dimension, which is about immersion and concentration. Depending on which reading situation we find ourselves in, reading an audiobook ‘deeply’ may mean that we are absorbed in a story driven by a hermeneutic desire but can also mean that the audiobook’s tone creates a, in part, sensorially based atmosphere for the experience, which affects the reader’s relation to his or her surroundings.

Like the printed book, the audiobook can be read with varying degrees of attention, and like traditional reading, it demands practice to read an

audiobook concentratedly, to understand and immerse oneself in the stream of words that meets the ear at a high tempo. One of the points we wish to draw out in this chapter is that it is possible to speak of different ways of reading an audiobook and that habituation and discipline may be required to approach audiobooks in different ways, in the same way that the reading of writing presupposes practice and discipline. In this sense, the audiobook reading practice negotiates the relation between spatiotemporal aspects of reading on new terms, not at least questioning the hierarchies of cultural values when it comes to conceptions of close- and deep reading.

6.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have tried to give the digital audiobook a voice in the analysis of the reading of literature. We define the audiobook as an audio recording of a printed book (the technical medium of display), which is read aloud, but do not see it as a by-product of the book; it is not only a remediation but also an independent medium, which offers other and expanded forms of reading literature. The large circulation of the digital audiobook calls for new methods, and by presenting some different parameters of analysis which can supplement the traditional literary analysis, we have sketched an analytical method which is sensitive to the medium and points out the importance of the technology, reading situation and voice for the reading experience. Together with the narrative content of a fiction-based audiobook, the various combinations of these parameters make possible a broad range of audiobook analyses, which can be further qualified by discussing them in relation to two types of reading, the atmosphere-oriented and the content-oriented reading, respectively, which in different ways build upon the audiobook's particular potentials within time and depth as aspects of experience. By insisting on the fact that we *read* audiobooks, we also hope that we can contribute to challenging the preconceptions that may still exist about the reading of audiobooks as superficial and compensatory.

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