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Iben Have and Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen: *Digital Audiobooks: New Media, Users, and Experiences.* New York: Routledge. 2016

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When considering recent developments and transformations of the production and consumption of literature, the audiobook is an interesting phenomenon to study. Furthermore, more general insights may also be gained, both regarding the ever-changing ways in which we consume media and the interplay between different media technologies and these modes of consumption. Since radio, cinema and television began to challenge printed media from the beginning of the 20th century, speculations about the “death of the book” arose, suggesting that it would be slowly replaced and erased by these new technologies. Such speculations indicate certain understandings of technology. One is the notion of “supersession” (Duguid, 1996), where new technologies reject the old. This notion can have both positive and negative manifestations: one is the optimistic idea that the development of text and reading technology is innovative and evolutionary; a darker vision is often related to an idealization of the past where print culture is tied up with perceived values of the past, such as linear thinking, sustained attention, and a clear sense of quality and usefulness (Finkelstein and McCleery, 2005). An alternative understanding of technology is the idea of “liberation” (Duguid, 1996), in which digital media technologies are perceived as empowering and potentially subversive.

These three perspectives are all represented in both academic and public discourse about the future of the book, but they often risk overshadowing an understanding of the actual practices of reading. *Digital Audiobooks: New Media, Users, and Experiences* is therefore a very welcome contribution to the discussion. Here, Iben Have and Birgitte Stougaard

Pedersen present a thorough and reflective analysis of the digital audiobook. Truly interdisciplinary in its approach, this co-authored book is a densely packed volume which opens up a range of interesting perspectives for different areas within the broader field of media and information studies. Have and Pedersen point out that the audiobook is often overlooked in the scholarly treatment and popular discussions of digitization of literature. Traditionally, it has been associated with a 'lesser' mode of reading, intended for pre-literate children and the visually impaired. The underlying prejudices are clearly articulated by Sarah Kozloff, as quoted in the book: "To many, listening to audio books is a debased and lazy way to read, with connotations of illiteracy (...); passivity (...); abandonment of control (...); and lack of commitment". Have and Pedersen clearly want to challenge these notions by systematically showing how the audiobook is a medium of its own which interacts with and affects the reading experience in specific ways. They base their analysis on mediatization theory and post-phenomenology in particular, but draw on an interdisciplinary approach including elements from media and sound studies, sociology, aesthetics, and literary theory.

An introductory chapter presents the empirical and theoretical approach of the book, which is divided into three main sections. The first, "Aesthetics, Sound, Senses", discusses the concept of 'reading with the ears' and audiobook listening as an experience determined by a reading situation which is an interplay of form, content, and medium. Here, the authors agree with N. Katherine Hayles' assertion that a media-specific analysis is important, but they criticize her notion of reading, which they argue is too idealized and print-centered. A careful post-phenomenological analysis also considers how the situated experience of audio reading affects reception and understanding; and it demonstrates that reading may be seen as a multimodal practice. In section two, "Affordance and Voice", the relationship between the medium and the user experience is further explored. Here, the concept of affordance is applied in particular to reflect on how the digital audiobook affects forms of use and experience. In the case of the reader's interpretation of a text, for example, narratological elements such as voice and narrator are complicated, as the content is mediated by a performing narrator in a voice performance. This voice, never transparent, is fundamentally parasocial, and this constitutes a significant reconfiguration of the experience in comparison with reading on print.

The third section, "Usage and Mediatization", offers more concrete, empirical insight into audiobook use and discusses this in a media historical context. The authors explain the development of audiobook consumption by combining surveys in North America and Scandinavia and qualitative interviews with Danish audiobook users. The authors acknowledge that the ever-changing consumption patterns present a challenge to providing an accurate account of the field of audiobook use. Not surprisingly, both qualitative and quantitative data show that audiobooks are most often used by readers on the move – in cars or during other transportation situations, or while walking, exercising or doing practical work. Have and Pedersen refer to this as "turning wasted time into quality time" (p. 138).

Finally, in reaching the conclusion, the authors address the question of whether an audiobook is actually a book. In a technical and material sense, the audiobook has nothing in common with the printed book. However, they take a pragmatic approach and argue that audiobook listening is a mode of reading, and therefore the audiobook is to be included in our understanding of a book. Their comprehensive analysis of digital audiobooks therefore becomes a productive contribution to the study of the development of a reading culture in the digital age. Instead of trying to assess whether audiobooks make us worse or better readers, Have and Pedersen contribute to a much needed rethinking of our concept of reading. As such, their book should be of great value to researchers and teachers within different fields who are interested in understanding mobile media use, literary reception, the multimodality of reading, and the relationship between media technology and user experience.

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