

Introduction: Modes of Reading

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Abstract The digitization of the publishing business has provided publishers with new media and new means of distribution, which in turn have created new modes of reading. The impact of the digital revolution on the production and distribution of literature has already been widely discussed, but much less has been written about how current media developments have affected reading and readers. A central thesis of this special issue is that the phenomenon of reading should be studied from various disciplinary perspectives. Reading as a phenomenon evolves in the intersections among media developments, literary trends, and social practices. By bringing together scholars from literary theory, media studies, aesthetics, anthropology, psychology, and linguistics, the special issue explores different perspectives on how the technological, sensorial, cognitive, participatory, and aesthetic aspects of reading have evolved in recent decades. Reading practices are changing rapidly in close conjunction with the evolving formats in which literature is distributed to its readers. The purpose of the special issue is to provide a forum in which to rethink existing categories and challenge prevalent notions of reading.

Keywords reading, digitization, media, readers

As we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century, the literary field is in transition, and patterns of literary production, distribution, and consumption are transforming rapidly. After a long history of being a privileged form of expression, printed literature is now increasingly in competition with other media, and many consider it an endangered species (Birkerts 1994; Franzen 1996). These challenges to literature's previous hegemony seem inevitable. Opportunities for entertainment, including popular streaming services, podcasts, social media, and the information tsunami of the internet, have multiplied, yet no more hours have been added to each day. In this evolving media ecology, literature must constantly renegotiate its position as hierarchies change. Granted, literature has always been affected by and migrated among various media, just as it moved from orality to writing (Ong 1982). Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that literature's ventures into different media and modalities have intensified as a result of the rapid media changes of the last few decades. After centuries of the printed book as its default medium, literature is now fundamentally between media (Andersen 2015; Hungerford 2016). While this new situation is often seen as cause for alarm, we see no indications that literature and reading are nearing extinction. Literature may converge with other art forms, and our modes of cultural consumption may change accordingly, but history shows us that older media and art forms are rarely entirely displaced by newer forms in an evolutionary battle.¹ Rather, they settle elsewhere in the media system, while larger predators conquer the prime spots at the waterhole for a while. However, there is usually water enough for everyone, and literature and reading will likely continue to exist and even thrive in the foreseeable future.

That being said, literature, and thus also reading, has certainly been transformed significantly by the digital revolution. These transformations are the topic of this special issue. The digitization of the publishing busi-

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1. For a discussion of the coexistence of previous media matrices, see Finnemann 2006. For a pertinent critique of the idea of literature being superseded by new media, see Duguid 1996.

ness has provided publishers with new media and new means of distribution, which in turn have created new modes of reading. Digital audiobooks allow users to perform other tasks while reading/listening, and these tasks invariably tinge the reading experience in various ways. Convenient links to Wikipedia and embedded dictionaries in e-books provide readers with the opportunity to read closely, even while the digital devices themselves offer potential distractions from the text. New literary forms such as social media fiction are distributed to audiences in micro-installments and call for elaborate interaction with other readers or the story itself, and app novels like *Pry* combine written text with various visual features that enrich or complicate the reading experience.

At the same time, the printed book has proven very resilient. In the 1990s, techno-prophets were quick to proclaim that the advent of e-books would spell the imminent demise of printed books, but even after the arrival of popular e-reading platforms such as Kindle and iPad, rumors of the death of the printed book have turned out to be greatly exaggerated. As Angus Phillips (2007: 557) succinctly put it: “As a simple storage device, the book remains highly functional.” Recent statistics show that the sale of e-books has reached a plateau,² so the profusion of new reading modes created by e-books, audiobooks, and interactive media coexists with earlier forms of reading. But even while the printed book has continued to flourish alongside new digital forms, it has also been transformed and reconceived. As N. Katherine Hayles (2002: 33) has argued, the rise of digital media has allowed us “to see print with new eyes,” and various authors accordingly attempt to denaturalize our habitual use of the codex by experimenting with the physical object of the book (Anne Carson’s *Nox*) or integrating it with other media (*The Fantastic Flying Books of Morris Lessmore*).³ In the wake of digitization we thus see both a resurgence of what Jessica Pressman (2009) has labeled “bookishness”—an embrace of traditional material book culture—and the appearance of new intermedial formats that utilize and thematize the affordances of the habitual object of the printed book. Moreover, this ongoing combination of retraditionalization and denaturalization gives birth to new modes of reading.

2. See, e.g., Milliot 2016. While sales of e-books have leveled out, the popularity of digital audiobooks continues to rise.

3. For an analysis of these and other recent experiments with the physical book, see Linkis 2019.

The Dark Matter of the Literary Universe

The impact of the digital revolution on the production and distribution of literature has already been widely discussed,⁴ but much less has been written about how current media developments have affected reading and readers.⁵ While other positions in the literary communications circuit (originally presented by Robert Darnton in 1982) merge or disappear (e.g., as argued in a timely revision of Darnton's model for a digital age by Murray and Squires 2013), the final position in the circuit, the reader, is as important as ever. At the same time, readers remain the least studied element of the literary circuit. As many book historians have pointed out, reading has traditionally been the most difficult part of the literary circuit to study, since it often takes place in private and leaves few traces. Darnton (1990: 122) has stated that reading "remains the most difficult stage to study in the circuit that books follow," and Roger Chartier ([1992] 2006: 87) points out that "reading rarely leaves traces" and "is scattered into an infinity of singular acts" that are hard to study. In that sense, readers are the dark matter of the literary universe. They constitute the majority of that universe and make it all hang together, yet they have largely remained invisible, and we do not know much about them.

Even while reading in its basic constituents remains very much a solitary act, or at least a private act (where parents read aloud to their children or newlyweds to each other), online forums such as Amazon and its subsidiary Goodreads, Facebook, and Twitter provide a number of new opportunities for readers to comment on what they read and to interact with like-minded readers. In addition to these new digital possibilities to comment on and interact about one's reading, physical reading groups have seen a resurgence; libraries, in particular, have evolved from being primarily depositories of books to being facilitators of various literary events. These growing reading communities, whether they take place in cyberspace or face to face, provide new opportunities to study what readers read and how they read it. A number of such empirical studies have already been undertaken and have provided valuable insights into, for instance, women's burgeoning social interactions in book clubs (Long 2003) and the sharing of reading experiences on social media (Thomas 2020), even while they have demonstrated that the newness of these social interactions around

4. See, e.g., Birkerts 1994, Thompson 2012, Striplhas 2009, Hayles 2002, Murray 2018, and Thomas 2020. See also special journal issues Hjarvard and Helles 2015 and Ashton et al. 2017.

5. Recent books by Matthew Rubery and Leah Price (2020) and Simone Murray (2018) have begun to address this lack.

reading should not be overstated. Darnton (1990: 168–69) reminds us that reading in early modern Europe was also very much a social activity, both for those who, due to limited finances, had to share the valuable books and read aloud to each other and for those who did have the means to purchase their own books but still joined reading circles. In her article in this issue, Dorothee Birke contributes to this historical perspective by analyzing Jane Austen's portrayal of reading communities (see also Birke 2016). It has similarly been pointed out elsewhere that readers' comments on social media have a parallel in Victorian readers, who commented freely on the serials they read in letters to the editor (Andersen 2017: 41).

Social interactions around the activity of reading thus have a long history, but the fact that a growing body of these practices leave digital traces has increased our knowledge about the dark matter of the literary universe. At the same time, such studies of reading in a large (often digital) social sphere can hardly stand alone in the attempt to describe the multifaceted nature of reading in the current mediascape. While studies of online reading communities shed new light on some of the communicative practices surrounding the consumption of literature, they have less to say about the cognitive processes connected with reading or about how new media technologies and their related affordances create new forms of reception and enable new aesthetic experiences.

A central premise of our editorial project in this special issue is that the phenomenon of reading should be studied from various disciplinary perspectives. If we wish to apply a holistic perspective on the phenomenon of reading, traditional reader-response theories as proposed by such scholars as Louise Rosenblatt, Wolfgang Iser, and Stanley Fish no longer suffice, nor do anthropological studies of reading practices or purely cognitive approaches considered independently of one another. Reading is a concrete and situated phenomenon that evolves in the intersection of media developments, literary trends, and social practices. By bringing together scholars from literary theory, aesthetics, media studies, anthropology, psychology, and linguistics, this issue combines different disciplinary perspectives to explore how the technological, sensorial, cognitive, participatory, and aesthetic aspects of reading have coevolved in recent decades.

What We Mean (and Do Not Mean) by *Reading*

Before providing a detailed presentation of the contents and scope of this special issue, we find it equally necessary to stress what the issue is *not* about. Here we have in mind another influential discussion about reading centered on the concept of postcritique that has taken place in the

last decade, especially in the journals *New Literary History*, *PMLA*, *Representations*, and *American Literary History*. An important starting point in this conversation was the publication of Rita Felski's (2008) seminal *Uses of Literature*. In the introduction to her book, Felski argues that the prevalent critical mode of reading—a “hermeneutics of suspicion” (1)—has been the dominant approach in literary studies for so long that it has outlived its usefulness. With this exhaustion in mind, Felski calls for a negation of the prevailing impulse toward negation and makes a case for a postcritical mode of reading that seeks to reinstate the affective responses to literature that attracted us to reading in the first place.⁶ Similar arguments inform Felski's (2015) *Limits of Critique* as well as Toril Moi's *Revolution of the Ordinary* (2017). Like Felski, Moi calls for an abandonment of the hermeneutics of suspicion and argues that academic reading could profitably learn from lay reading as it attempts to move beyond the habitual critical approach.

While we recognize the importance of this discussion, we do not aim to engage in it with our special issue. First and foremost, we find that Felski's and Moi's arguments occasionally conflate different practices that we aim to keep separate. Felski (2008) does invoke John Guillory's distinction between scholarly and lay reading, pointing out that the former is “a form of *work*, compensated for by salary and other forms of recognition,” while the latter remains a “leisure activity” and a “solitary practice” (12), but she becomes less precise when she attempts to argue how the two modes of reading should be combined. Moi (2017) similarly conflates lay and professional reading when, on the one hand, she argues that the ideal reader is someone who pays close attention and, on the other hand, she states that description and paraphrase are valid modes of reading. It becomes clear that, to Felski, Moi, and other proponents of postcritique, the activity of reading also involves the practice of writing. From their perspective, to read a text is not just to absorb it and analyze it but also to turn one's reading into writing that others can engage with. Elaine Auyoung (2020) explicitly addresses some of the assumptions in this conflation between reading and writing, as she tries to lay bare some of the unspoken conventions that literary critics constantly engage in as they move from the consumptive process of reading to the academic discipline of performing or producing a reading (imagine a world where academics could earn a living by just reading!). Going back to Darnton's and Chartier's claims that reading rarely

6. Felski 2008 is part of a larger counterreaction to poststructuralism and postmodernism, and Felski's critique of the “terminal case of irony” in humanities scholars (2) and her plea for a negation of negation sound remarkably like the major arguments in David Foster Wallace's (1993) landmark essay “E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction.”

leaves traces, we emphasize that reading in a postcritical understanding does very much leave traces, namely, the vast archive of literary criticism. There can be no doubt that postcritical studies have led to important problematizations of the increasingly conventionalized practices of literary criticism. However, reading in our understanding is much closer to what Darnton (1990: 177) calls “the experience of ordinary readers”—an activity that usually is not converted to scholarly articles in highly specialized journals.⁷

Important early attempts to describe this ordinary experience can be found in traditional reader-response theories as practiced by Iser ([1980] 2006), Fish (2008), and even earlier Rosenblatt ([1933] 1983, 1978), among other critics, but the articles in the present issue are also not particularly aligned with their approaches. These earlier critics’ shift of focus from the text itself to the interactions between texts and readers has made an invaluable contribution to recognizing the active role of readers in the construction of literary meaning, but in their version readers often tend to be theoretical, idealized entities rather than actual readers, abstract positions in a diagram rather than human beings with a pulse and a digestive system (not to mention hands and sensory organs). A similarly generalized reader position appears in Roland Barthes’s classic essay “The Death of the Author” (1967), which seeks to banish the idea of the author as the origin of the text’s meaning. Rather, Barthes argues, meaning arises as the text encounters the reader. But the reader in Barthes’s account seems hardly more alive than the author:

The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted. (Barthes [1967] 2006: 280)

Barthes thus ends his essay with a double abstraction: a text is not a tangible, material entity but a dynamical process of free play, which comes together in the abstract, disembodied field of the reader.

We aim for a more concrete approach, more in alignment with recent practices within the sociology of literature. In his introduction to a special issue of *New Literary History* on the broad return of the sociology of liter-

7. For a similar plea for the importance of distinguishing more clearly between ordinary readers and professional readers who publish their readings in academic journals, see Miall 2006.

ature, James F. English (2010: x) argued that the discipline of book history “has helped to dislodge the traditional literary critical conception of ‘the’ reader as a generalized text processor (a conception reinforced rather than challenged by the work of Wolfgang Iser and the Konstanz school of reader-response theory).” English argued that this abstract idea of a reader is gradually being replaced with a new sociology of readers, which considers reading as a complex and embodied phenomenon that takes place in a changeable social space. We welcome such a concrete approach, and many of the articles in this issue express similar ideas, but we complicate the conception of readerly community even further by attending to how various media affect reading as a social practice, as well as how the literary texts themselves (in addition to the media that bear them) structure the process of reading. Certain book-historical and sociological studies of reading are so bent on studying actual readers that the very object that turns them into readers, embodied and mediated literary texts, tends to disappear from the equation. As a consequence of this abstracting of the literary text, such studies often offer as reductive an approach to the phenomenon of reading as does traditional reader-response theory. There is no reading without readers, but there is also no reading without texts, and no texts without the media that bear them.

The reflections above do not amount to a wholesale rejection of the discussions of readers found in postcritique, reader-response theory, and the sociology of literature; the different articles in this special issue contain reminiscences of and dialogues with these alternative conceptions of reading. In sum, though, the authors in our issue are concerned with reading as the meeting of actual readers with embodied texts in different media and different historical contexts.

General Insights

Before we move on to a presentation of the individual articles, we wish to single out a number of general insights and reflections from these articles.

(i) Entrenched notions of what reading in different media entails are often challenged by actual studies of reading in the current media ecology. In his essay “Perchance to Dream: In the Age of Images, a Reason to Write Novels,” novelist Jonathan Franzen (1996) describes readers of literature as a last, beleaguered bastion against the idiotic and superficial mass media. Similar ideas (albeit less shrill) are found in academic criticism. The melancholic title of Sven Birkerts’s (1994) *Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* speaks clearly of his idea that we live, as the official book description states, “in a state of intellectual emergency—an

emergency caused by our willingness to embrace new technologies at the expense of the printed word.” Somewhat less alarmist is Hayles’s (2007: 187) argument that the current networked and digitized mediascape has caused a broad shift in cognitive styles from the “deep attention” associated with traditional print culture to the distracted “hyper attention” of an age of multiple information streams. While some empirical studies (Baron 2015; Mangen and Kuiken 2014) seem to confirm these notions, other studies (Henkel 2017) found that the nontrivial physical interaction demanded by some digital formats produces even better retention in readers than do printed pages. Other studies (Have and Stougaard Pedersen 2016) suggest that audiobook listening can be just as immersive as reading a printed book and that print reading does not automatically result in immersed deep attention (as anyone who has tried to read *Ulysses* surrounded by kids playing with Legos will attest). As we noted at the beginning of this introduction, literature is increasingly located between media, and an understanding of reading that is strictly derived from book reading is no longer sufficient.

(2) Although reading is often connected with vision and the written word, this coupling is challenged by a wide range of new formats and reading practices. Audiobook listeners generally tend to say that they *read* the books they listen to (Rubery 2011; Have and Stougaard Pedersen 2016), and readers of app fiction with embedded videos and interactive sequences likewise describe their experience as *reading* (Henkel 2017, 2018), even though it consists just as much of what we would generally describe as watching, touching, and moving. Most of our senses have always been involved to some extent when we read a printed book (such as the smell of paper and ink or the sound and texture of turning crisp pages), but born-digital fiction often deliberately calls for a multisensory approach that expands our notion of what reading means. Reading practices are changing rapidly in close conjunction with the evolving formats in which literature is distributed to its readers. The purpose of the special issue is to provide a forum in which to rethink existing categories and challenge prevalent notions of reading.

(3) As we have already suggested, reading can be many different things to many different readers. The phenomenon is very much a situated and concrete one, but at the same time (and therefore) it manifests in various ways depending on the context. Therefore, while we aim to address the experiences of real readers, we do not have an ambition to monopolize the idea of what a real reader is. As Paul Dawson (2012: 103) has argued, “The category of the ‘real’ reader can . . . be seen as a *virtual* construct of literary theory, which seeks to corroborate and universalize the

professional theorist's critical response to a text under the guise of testing how readers *actually* read." We wish to avoid universalizations of the kind sketched by Dawson. We find that attempts to define reading too categorically are quickly challenged by instances of the opposite and that Chartier's earlier-quoted description of reading as "scattered into an infinity of singular acts" is more relevant than ever. This realization should not be construed as a resigned admission of failure or as an expression of absent theoretical or methodical rigor but as an unavoidable condition for the study of reading. The dynamic nature of reading is in many ways reminiscent of the dynamic nature of texts, and as we try to describe the constantly shifting and context-dependent phenomenon of reading, we can find help in Jerome McGann's (1991) description of "textual events" and in John Bryant's (2002) argument that all texts are "fluid." For McGann (1991), a text is not a stable, clearly delimited object but a concrete event that takes place in a larger network of various actors. This event-like nature of texts implies an inescapable fluidity, as Bryant (2002: 1–2) has argued:

Simply put, a fluid text is any literary work that exists in more than one version. It is "fluid" because the versions flow from one to another. . . . Literary works invariably exist in more than one version, either in early manuscript forms, subsequent print editions, or even adaptations in other media with or without the author's consent. The processes of authorial, editorial, and cultural revision that create these versions are inescapable elements of the literary phenomenon, and if we are to understand how writing and the transmission of literary works operate in the processes of meaning making, we need first to recognize this fact of fluidity and also devise critical approaches, and a critical vocabulary, that will allow us to talk about the meaning of textual fluidity in writing and in culture.

When McGann and Bryant speak of a *literary work*, they are therefore speaking not of a stable, self-contained object but of a dynamic accumulation of its different incarnations. We subscribe to this view and add that these different incarnations give rise to yet more ways of reading, such that reading even a single literary work truly constitutes an "infinity of singular acts." Once again, such an admission is not the same as laying down arms. Rather, it is an acknowledgment of the need to temper any attempts at generalization with case-by-case analyses, and it is a realization that reading cannot be as categorically described as certain reader-response theories strive to do.

(4) Many studies of modern, digitized media culture have a strong focus on user participation, such as those of Henry Jenkins (2006) and Jason Mittell (2015). But while reading and participation are no doubt related,

it is important to emphasize that they are not fully congruent practices. When Jenkins and Mittell discuss modern participatory culture, they usually focus on users' active co-construction of meaning and, just as importantly, on the social aspects of this active participation. However, this strong emphasis on active, empowered users in a 2.0-culture has recently been problematized in ways that might be relevant for the attempt to understand reading in twenty-first-century media culture. As S. Elizabeth Bird (2011), Nico Carpentier (2011), Tore Rye Andersen and Sara Tanderup Linkis (2019), and others have pointed out, digital media's rich opportunities for interaction do not necessarily generate an active and social cocreation of meaning. Reading in a modern mediascape can still be primarily a private and receptive affair, and if readers do communicate about their reading on social media, their comments can just as easily be instances of phatic communication ("Look, I'm reading!") as of active interpretation. Furthermore, participation and conversations around literature in modern participatory culture can be totally decoupled from actual reading (as Birke shows in her article on BookTubers who unbox their latest book haul). In short, reading can be a form of participation, but not all participation in literary culture equals reading.

This disjunction leads to the pertinent question of whether reading is primarily active or passive. In some analyses of modern media culture, users who do not join online discussions about the cultural artifacts they consume are described as passive consumers who refrain from using the means of participation at their disposal. For us, reading is always active, even when it merely consists of a meeting between a single reader and a single text; the labor involved in this private situation can often be more intense than the labor involved in certain forms of digital participation.

(5) Studies of new reading practices in a digital media landscape often result in a renewed understanding of older reading practices and allow us to reevaluate historical continuities and differences. Much energy is often invested in underlining the newness of new media, and entire journals (e.g., *New Media and Society* and *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*) are dedicated to consolidating this distinction. However, as several of the articles in this special issue show, the similarities between old and new modes of reading often outweigh the differences. Birke demonstrates that reading was very much a social phenomenon long before the advent of social media; Karin Kukkonen argues that reading before the appearance of digital media also combined elements of immersion and distraction; Lutz Koepnick shows that the dream of speed-reading is as old as reading itself; and Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen and colleagues argue that literature has always been in more or less friendly competition

with other media and has always been multimodal. We thus hope that this issue gives rise to a nuanced reevaluation of both similarities and differences between the good old days and the current fragmented reality.

We hope that readers will be able to identify even more important insights as they work through the individual articles. Furthermore, they will discover that our authors do not always agree with one another. In the eight articles of this issue, we find both a pronounced skepticism toward the effects of digital media on the act of reading and a warm embrace of the new possibilities those media provide, and we find an emphasis both on historical ruptures and on continuities. It is our hope that, by bringing different approaches, disciplines, and viewpoints into contact with one another, the concrete analyses will create interesting interference patterns that can lay the groundwork for further studies.

Interdisciplinary Approaches to Reading in a Digital Age

In the first article in this special issue, Dorothee Birke examines how digital social media have led to a significant increase in reading communities that celebrate bookishness online. She grounds her discussion of this recent phenomenon in analyses of two BookTube channels. At the same time, she complicates the claim for the newness of this social and digital reading culture by pointing out remarkable parallels with much older reading cultures. Through a comparison with the various reading communities portrayed in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, Birke argues that the values evinced by BookTubers and other examples of bookish online communities are not so different from those expressed in a novel released more than two hundred years ago.

The next two articles focus on the temporality of reading in and before the digital age. The question of temporality has always been crucial for studies of reading, since reading takes place on a temporal spectrum ranging from rapid skimming to deep reading. Reading to absorb information as quickly and efficiently as possible (as when cramming for an exam) differs from reading in anticipation of reaching the solution of a murder plot, which again differs from reading for savoring exquisite word choices or dwelling on original metaphors. The two articles in this group trace how different texts, different historical periods, and different media create different temporalities of reading.

Karin Kukkonen examines how the objects of reading, in this case literary texts, themselves have the ability to structure our reading experiences by either slowing or accelerating our reading speed. Drawing on insights from narratology and empirical cognitive studies of how readers process

texts, she closely analyzes selected passages from Alexander Pushkin's classic novella "The Queen of Spades" and demonstrates how their stylistic and syntactic features call for different reading speeds. After this meticulous analysis, Kukkonen relates the concept of multispeed literary reading to two recent novels that thematize the question of temporality in a digital age, and she shows that notions of slowness and fastness still coexist in our contemporary computerized culture.

Lutz Koepnick also addresses the temporality of reading in his discussion of different experiences of reading in an age of compression. His article shows how neoliberal values have recently entered parts of the cultural sphere. Reading—previously regarded as a privileged space for reflection—is now increasingly perceived as a quantifiable activity, where the slow reflectiveness identified by Kukkonen in a number of literary works is no longer desirable, since such reading works against efficiency and productivity. Drawing on Jonathan Sterne's seminal study of the MP3 format and Lisa Gitelman's important work on the PDF format, Koepnick analyzes three examples of compression—consonant writing, speedreading apps, and the PDF format—and astutely lays bare "hidden assumptions . . . that accompany the rhetoric of text compression." At the same time, he argues that none of these forms of compression can fully control the temporality of reading, which will always be subject to a number of unforeseeable, uncontrollable factors, not least including readers and their obstinate bodies.

The next group of three articles present a number of empirical studies of actual readers and their reading habits. Like the preceding articles, Anne Line Dalsgård's article is interested in the temporality of reading, but she approaches the question anthropologically. Drawing on Michael Flaherty's concept of time work, her article explores the uses of literature in contemporary Denmark and describes how reading allows readers to manipulate their own experience of time. The article is based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork and discusses the various ways that readers find time for reading in their busy lives, as well as the subjective experiences of time that are caused by reading in different media and genres. One part of the article focuses on cultural norms and expectations in relation to reading time, and another discusses the structuring temporal effects of literary texts and the media through which they are consumed.

In the next article, Mette Steenberg, Charlotte Christiansen, Anne Line Dalsgård, Anne Maria Stagis, Liv Moeslund Ahlgren, Tine Lykkegaard Nielsen, and Nicolai Ladegaard also focus on actual readers. Using concrete experiences with the Danish Reading Society and its practice of shared reading as a starting point, their article discusses the possibilities of new types of reading practices introduced by this formalized mode of read-

ing together. Analyzing a number of actual dialogues from guided shared reading sessions, the authors discuss how this mode of reading facilitates reading engagement and allows readers to relate their reading experiences to their own life experiences in front of others. The article draws on phenomenologically oriented reader-response studies, but in their discussion the authors seek to bridge this theoretical approach with the more practical ideas of reading engagement expressed in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

Naomi S. Baron and Anne Mangen's study is also largely empirical and addresses the overarching question of how reading in a digital age compares with earlier modes of reading.⁸ Their article focuses on higher education in the United States and Norway, where the authors have observed a clear decline in so-called long-form reading. Baron and Mangen use the information gleaned from their interviews with a number of teachers in higher education to discuss possible reasons for this decline. Their analysis of these interviews leads them to conclude that digital technologies constitute a significant factor in the shift toward shorter assigned texts. Even while they discuss other possible reasons for the shift, such as changes in student demography and higher demands with regard to extracurricular activities, their findings thus align with Hayles's (2007) ideas on a general shift in the digital age from deep reading to hyperattention.

The two articles in the last group represent a more optimistic account of digital media than Baron and Mangen, and investigate the emerging opportunities their affordances create for new modes of reading. Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen, Maria Engberg, Iben Have, Ayoe Quist Henkel, Sarah Mygind, and Helle Bundgaard Svendsen—all part of the research project *Reading between Media*—analyze and discuss what the multisensory affordances of new digital formats do to our understanding of reading as a phenomenon. Through analyses of the app novel *Pry* and the digital audiobook version of *Gilead*, and not least through analyses of the concrete reading situations to which they give rise, the authors argue that current discussions of digital reading can benefit from rich descriptions not only of the multimodal texts and the media that bear them but also of the specific sensorial situations in which they are read. Through analyses and discussions of such embodied reading events, the authors challenge entrenched hierarchies that, for instance, value paper reading higher than audio reading,

8. The article is a natural continuation of Baron's and Mangen's earlier and widely cited studies in digital reading, but it is their first cowritten publication, and we are proud to have facilitated and to present the first joint venture of these two influential reading scholars.

and they argue that newer digital formats can be just as suited as printed books for deep reading and immersion.

The final article is Amy Spencer's discussion of ambient reading. Spencer has been a part of the research project Ambient Literature (hosted at Bath Spa University under the direction of Kate Pullinger). The project was practice based and involved the creation of a number of literary works that—as the name implies—use the multimodal affordances of digital media to activate a number of senses. One of these works, *The Cartographer's Dream*, takes the form of an audio walk through London. To progress through the story and release the next chapter, readers have to walk to certain geotagged locations, and the reading of this work thus involves movement, sight, sound, and smell (the stink from the Thames and the delicious smells from a food market). Such reading experiences show that reading is also sometimes done with the feet or the nose, in elaborate interaction with one's physical surroundings. Spencer's article analyzes how these interactions are often uncontrollable and unpredictable, even while they have the potential to create deeply immersive reading experiences. This argument is a fitting characterization of the forms and situations of reading today, and it can also be argued that it is an apt description of reading throughout the ages.

The articles in this special issue do not have a final word to say about reading in a digital age, but we hope they will open a fruitful interdisciplinary discussion that will take important steps toward better understanding what reading today means. We hope our readers enjoy this special issue, whether they access it on a screen or in the printed version, read it deeply in quiet surroundings or skim it in a noisy airport or a rowdy classroom. Such media and situations will undoubtedly result in different modes of reading, but all will still undeniably be reading and, as such, deserve our ongoing attention.

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