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Reading spaces

Original audiobooks and mobile listening

Abstract

Following 'the audiobook boom' of recent years, born-audio narratives have emerged: texts produced specifically for the audiobook format and intended for mobile audio consumption. Focusing on this category of works, this article examines how the audiobook draws attention to places and situations in which we read, and how these places, in turn, influence the content and experience of literary works. Drawing on theories on mobile reading and listening by, for example, Michael Bull (2007), Lutz Koepnick (2013, 2019), and Iben Have and Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen (2015, 2020), I investigate the case of Storytel Originals, texts produced specifically for sound by the Swedish subscription service Storytel. Focusing first on the Danish Originals series Askehave *(2019-2020) by Jakob Melander, I examine how Storytel promotes a situated reading experience for a mobile listener. Next, I move on to investigate what happens to the audiobook experience when the listener is not mobile: Cecilia Garme's Original series* Dagbok Från Coronabubblan *(2020) describes everyday life during the corona crisis in spring 2020. Analysing the diary's reflections on the isolation at home and the listeners' response to this text, I examine how the audiobook produces a social and intimate listening space.*

Based on these two examples, I point to two different tendencies in the content and usage of original audiobooks, one reflecting how mobile listening promotes situated reading experiences in public and another focusing on the construction of social reading spaces at home.

Reading spaces: Original audiobooks and mobile listening

> Listening frees up the eyes to observe and to imagine, thus differing from the traditional reading of a book in which the reader is visually engaged in the text [...]. The text becomes a continuous flow of sound on to which he adds a level of physicality in the act of imagination. The sound print of the book is imposed on the silence of the world around him. (Bull, 2007, p. 199)

In the quote presented above, Michael Bull describes the experience of listening to audiobooks, compared to reading printed books. He emphasises how the listener is free to observe the surrounding world while listening. Mobile devices make it possible to move around while listening, and the listening experience is thus framed by shifting contexts, places, and situations. In this way, an emphasis on audiobooks paves the way for new attention toward the places and spaces where we read, or listen to, literary texts, and it becomes possible to consider how these shifting contexts influence our reading—an aspect which has often been overlooked in modern reading theory.

According to Bull, the freedom of the eye makes it possible to impose the 'sound print of the book' on the 'silence' of the surrounding world. This description resonates with Bull's often quoted theories on modern listening culture. According

to Bull, listening via mobile devices such as the iPod promotes an individualised consumption as people move around in private 'sound bubbles' (Bull, 2007). They impose their personal soundscapes, and, in the case of audiobooks, the fictional universe of the book on the surrounding world which they see, but do not interact with. However, one might ask, is the world around the audiobook user really silent? May the physical and social context not affect the experience of the text? Certainly, it is possible to question Bull's description of mobile listening culture as leading to aural solipsism. Focusing on audiobook consumption, Iben Have and Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen (2015) and Lutz Koepnick (2013, 2019) have argued that, rather than isolating the listener, mobile listening may intensify the listener's experience of the surroundings. Drawing on their works among others, this article examines how the mobile audio format promotes interaction between listeners, text, and surroundings. How are the content and reception of audiobooks affected by mobile media and shifting reading places?

While the phenomenological approaches by Koepnick and Have and Pedersen focus on the audiobook *experience*, I am interested in the way in which the *texts* are adjusted to shifting reading places and situations. Because of the audiobook's growing popularity and the format's rapid development, audiobooks are claimed to constitute an 'accidental avantgarde' (Colbjørnsen, 2015) and to trigger a 'silent revolution' (Have & Pedersen, 2020) within the publishing field. Accordingly, audiobooks are not only associated with new modes of reading, but also with new modes of literary production, and new forms of content. I focus on a recent development where texts written specifically for the audio format have emerged. One example of this tendency is the Storytel Originals series, produced by the Swedish subscription service Storytel. Focusing on the representation of places in *Askehave* (2019-2020), an Original series by Jakob Melander, I examine how Storytel produces textual content directed toward a mobile listener. They arguably promote a situated reading experience, where listeners project the fictional world onto the real, physical surroundings.

Listeners are, however, not always on the move. Cecilia Garme's Storytel Original series *Dagbok Från Coronabubblan* (2020) describes everyday life during the corona crisis in 2020 and is produced in Garme's own home. Analysing Garme's reflections on the isolation at home as well as the listeners' responses to this text, I examine how the audiobook produces an intimate *and* social listening space in a situation in which most people had to stay at home. I conclude by discussing how Melander's and Garme's Originals series exemplify two different ways in which born-audio texts may promote interaction between the listener, the text, and the surrounding listening spaces.

Audiobooks and situated reading

Traditionally, physical reading places have not received much attention in reading studies. Anezka Kuzmicova emphasises how reading theories have been dominated by the metaphor of transportation, wherein 'readers are not only assumed to engage in mental travel into distant imaginary worlds, but also become temporarily decoupled from their own world as part of the same process of transportation' (Kuzmicova, 2016, p. 4). According to this concept of reading, the physical places where we read should not matter. If they are noticed at all, they are usually associated with a negative or disturbing influence (Kuzmicova, 2016).

Listening to audiobooks, however, draws attention to reading as a situated activity that always happens someplace.[1] Because the audiobook 'frees the eye' and allows for mobile consumption, it becomes possible to combine listening to audiobooks with other activities, such as commuting or exercising (Have & Pedersen, 2016). In this way, mobile audiobook consumption relates to a broader cultural tendency of 'private-listening-in-public', as discussed by du Gay et al. (1997, p. 16) in relation to the Walkman. Du Gay et al. associate the Walkman with 'the very "modern" practice of being in two places at once, or doing two different things at once, being in a typically crowded, noisy, urban space while also being tuned in, through your headphones, to the very different, imaginary space of soundscape in your head' (Du Gay et al., 1997, p. 17). As discussed by Deborah Philips (2007), audiobooks represent a confrontation between the new mobile technologies and the literary tradition which values concentration and absorption. Accordingly, audiobooks are often associated with a distracted or superficial mode of reading. Sven Birkerts notes that 'to be ambulatory, even with headphones on, is still to be in a live environment—too distracting' (Birkerts, 2006, p. 87), and concludes that 'deep listening is rarely an option' (Birkerts 2006, p. 89).

Audiobooks have thus been criticised from two different perspectives: according to Birkerts, they direct the listener's attention away from the text and, according to Bull (Linkis, 2021a), from the physical and social surroundings. It is, however, possible to question both these claims. Several critics have recently theorised about the audiobook experience, emphasising the exchange and interaction between the listener, the text, and the surroundings. Lutz Koepnick points out how listening to audiobooks 'on the move' reminds us that reading is always a situated and embodied practice. Thus, he notes, '[a]s they commingle the private and public attributes of reading and ask us to shuttle between different diegetic worlds, audiobooks remind us of the extent to which bodies are the primary media of perception and experience, of being in and reading the world' (Koepnick, 2013, p 235). Koepnick develops this perspective through the concept of 'resonant reading' (2019). Literary resonance refers to the way texts are shaped by their shifting context and interpretations.[2]

This is also true of printed books, however, by focusing on audiobooks, Koepnick returns to the aural dimension of the concept. An audiobook performance is an expression of literary resonance because the work is transformed when read aloud. At the same time, the audiobook becomes the object of resonant reading because its mobile dimension promotes exchange between the text, the listener, and the surrounding world. Koepnick describes resonant reading as follows:

> Resonant reading may not operate under the banner of highly attentive, controlled, focused and goal-oriented subjectivity that guides most concepts and pedagogies of reading. [...] Instead, [it] takes place at the edges of attention and thereby collapses how we have come to juxtapose, rigidly and normatively, reader and read, focus and distraction, activity and passivity. It hovers at or above the fissure where different worlds, temporalities, states of consciousness, and perceptions mesh with or attach to each other. (Koepnick, 2019, p. 13)

Rather than opposing the idea that audiobooks promote distracted reading, Koepnick turns the argument around and argues that exactly *because* the listener may be distracted—balancing between the fictional and the real world—we may read the text through the surroundings, and vice versa.

Koepnick's emphasis on the embodied reading experience echoes other phenomenological approaches to audiobooks. Have and Pedersen describe the audiobook experience as intersensorial since 'the reader's experience of the concrete semantic and semiotic content of a novel is linked to his or her bodily acts as well as to the visual and haptic sensorial inputs of the situation' (2015, p. 44). According to Have and Pedersen, the surroundings do not only affect the experience of the text, the listening also transforms our sense of place. They note: 'the listening process and the reader's movements can create a sense of place [...] or locality through mobile practice, producing a more dynamic experience of an atmosphere [...] or environment' (2015, p. 51). D.E. Wittkower also emphasises this idea, noting that 'The audiobook *forms* a context for physical and social experience rather than being experienced *within* a physical and social experience' (2011, p. 229). This approach notably signals a movement away from the text-centred approaches to reading which are associated with the printed book. It is certainly possible to consider how also the reading of printed books may be influenced by the physical surroundings, as explored by Kuzmicova (2018), however, audiobooks specifically draw attention to the intersensorial reading experience because of its ability to 'free the eyes.'

Wittkower further describes how mobile audiobook consumption may promote interaction between the listener, the text, and the surroundings at different levels:

> And so here we see three kinds of community within the seemingly solitary and solitude-seeking act of listening to an audiobook in public: a real, but non-local community which is formed around the aesthetic work; a local, but imaginary community within the listener's privately contextualized experience of others; and a real

and local, but unexperienced community of audially unavailable, mere presence-alongside-others. (2011, p. 230)

The different communities are partly defined by their spatial relation to the listener: the 'real' community' is 'non-local' and the 'imaginary' community is 'local' because the listener projects a fictional community onto his or her surroundings as she is moving around.[3] Below, I examine how selected text may produce the kind of listening spaces that define these two types of communities.

Mobility and Storytel Originals

The phenomenological approaches discussed above apply to the experience of listening to any text. However, certain texts promote resonant reading because they are written for mobile reading, or even for specific sites. The latter is true of mobile narratives and 'ambient literature', discussed by Jason Farman (2013) and Amy Spencer (2018), respectively. These narratives use locative technologies in order to link the story to the surroundings. Yet, they belong to a niche genre. A more widespread type of text that is produced for mobile listening is born-audio productions. Following the rising popularity of audiobooks, producers have begun to develop content written for the audiobook format. Contrary to the stories discussed by Farman and Spencer, these narratives do not trace the locations of the listeners and, still, the narrative style and content of these texts reflect the producers' ambition to promote a 'resonant' mobile reading experience.

One example of this strategy is the Storytel Originals series. These stories exemplify how literary production is currently influenced by new actors and media logics. Rather than beginning with an author who writes a text and then approaches a publisher, these texts are initiated by Storytel, the distributor. Storytel engages the authors and asks them to write texts according to specific criteria, as discussed below, in order to produce content that is especially fit for the audio format. Notably, the subscription service owns the copyright to the texts, signifying a deflection from the centrality of the author in traditional print culture, and reflecting how the publishing system moves toward the logics of collective and commercially driven production as we see it, for instance, in television production.[4] Accordingly, below, I refer to 'Storytel' as the producer of these texts, rather than to the specific authors.[5]

According to Storytel's presentation of the concept, 'a Storytel Original is a story that is written directly for sound. This means that you can easily keep track of what's happening in the story, even during the hectic events of everyday life' (Storytel n.p.). Thus, the Originals series are written with everyday mobile consumption in mind. The presentation continues:

> The reason behind this is that we have noticed that not all written stories reach their full potential as audiobooks. For example, the writing style might be heavy with metaphors, have too many vague characters or a disrupted timeline that stands in the way of the listening experience. In an Original, we adapt the story instead and give it a more straightforward timeline, where you follow distinct characters with a clear goal in mind, without compromising the quality of the content. (Storytel 2020, n.p.)

Storytel relies on the idea of the easily distracted audiobook listener. Adjusting their content accordingly, they produce uncomplicated stories without too many digressions or metaphors. Most Originals belong to popular genres, such as romance and crime stories. They are presented in a serial format, organised in episodes and seasons, reflecting inspiration from television production. The serial format exemplifies how the stories are made to fit mobile listening, as short episodes are easily consumed on the move.[6] The resulting texts illustrate how Storytel's orientation toward a mobile listener influences the textual content, to the extent that it may be questioned whether these texts are literature, or whether they may be closer to other formats, such as podcasts and television series.

The Originals accommodate a mobile listening experience, not only through their narrative style, but also because they often focus on the description of specific places or environments. Many Originals present the story within a presumably recognisable setting. Most of the Swedish series, for instance, takes place in Stockholm, and many Danish series take place in Copenhagen and mention well-known places, street names, cafés, and so forth. In this way, the series may introduce these places for the potential tourist, promoting the use of the book as a guide to the cities in question, while producing the experience of recognisability for local readers. Both locals and tourists may thus be moving around in Stockholm or Copenhagen while listening.

One example of an Originals story that invites such usage is the series *Askehave* by Jakob Melander. At the end of the series' season two, *Askehave II,* the following note is presented:

> This book is fiction. The Copenhagen you just read about has a lot of similarities with Copenhagen in real life, where I have lived most of my life. But the city and the world that is presented here are not identical to real life. Thus, there is no guaranty that you can use the book as a guide or a key to any other Copenhagen than the one that is located in my head and in my books.[7] (Melander 2020, p. 653)

Thus, Melander does not guarantee that his book can be used as a guide to the real Copenhagen. However, the fact that he even needs to state this suggests that the novel invites such use. *Askehave* is a fictional story about the singer Malin, heir to the shipping company Askehave Shipping, and focuses on Malin's attempt to uncover the dark secrets in her family history. Malin lives in Copenhagen, and the story is

filled with place markers, referring to specific places in Copenhagen. The following quote illustrates this tendency.

> Mogens dropped her off at **Bernstoffsgade**, just by the main entrance of **Tivoli**. After making sure that he continued over the crossing by **Vesterbrogade**, Malin also crossed the street and walked into the **Central Station**. **Orientkaj** could wait. She needed to sit down, to disappear into the anonymous crowds **at the station**. She kept her sunglasses on as she went into the **bakery Lagkagehuset to the right of the entrance** and ordered a latte macchiato. (Melander, 2020, pp. 274-275)

Here, the words that refer to specific, recognisable places in Copenhagen have been marked. References to real places may, of course, be observed in many literary works—just as stories without metaphors or digressions can also be observed in print format. However, the fact that *Askehave* is a result of Storytel's stated ambition to produce texts that fit the mobile audio format makes it interesting to investigate the density of place markers in this text.

The emphasis on locations becomes even clearer when Malin leaves Copenhagen to go, for instance, to Nice, Stockholm, or St. Petersburg. While places in Copenhagen, such as Tivoli and the Central Station, are mentioned without any explanation, since Malin and the Danish listener know them already, other cities are described with more reflexivity. For instance, describing the city centre of Stockholm, Malin compares it to an old French city which she visited previously.

> Contrary to the French city, it was obvious that Gamla Stan was a product of the Scandinavian welfare state. Here, there were no dangling shudders, no piles of garbage along the houses. The buildings were newly painted and nicely kept, and even though it did smell of French Fries and deep frying, there was no trace of the fermented smell of garbage and cat urine that haunted Vielle Ville. Everything smelled fresh and clean, as if it had just rained. (Melander, 2020, p. 371)

Stockholm is described through a tourist's gaze, noting every detail and reflecting on the way in which these physical characteristics reflect the Swedish welfare state. The description contrasts with the story's dramatic plot and with Malin's situation when she is visiting Stockholm, not as a tourist, but in a desperate situation, as her child and partner have both been kidnapped and taken to Sweden. It seems unlikely that she would be reflecting on how the Scandinavian welfare state smells at this moment. Rather than reflecting her mental processes in the situation, the description reflects how the text is adjusted to the intersensorial reading situation, as described by Have and Stougaard Pedersen, and to a listener who is moving around and observing his or her surroundings while listening to the story.

Another example from Malin's visit to Stockholm reflects how the story describes specific places in details:

> The property was situated at Järntorget, a small square with cobblestones in the opposite end of Gamla Stan. Here were several cafés, wine bars, and restaurants, and

> something that looked like an old pump painted green was surrounded by a heap of
> café tables and chairs that were used for outdoor serving for at least two cafés, as
> far as Malin could see. [...]. Malin crossed the square, walked past the green pump
> toward a charming house painted red with old windows, the door of which was situ-
> ated between Järntorgspumpen Bar & Restaurang and Sundbergs Konditori, estab-
> lished in 1785. (Melander, 2020, pp. 371-372)

Visitors to Järntorget will find this description accurate down to the smallest detail, such as the names and locations of the restaurants. In this way, Melander establishes a connection between the fictional story and a real-life setting, also when it comes to the tourist's view of Stockholm.

By naming and describing real places in detail, series such as *Askehave* make it possible for the user to project the fictional world of the audiobook into his or her immediate surroundings. Thus, the series paves the way for what Wittkower calls 'a local, but imaginary community'. The fact that listeners do use Storytel's series in this way is reflected in the following comment from a reader of another Originals series, *Virus* by Daniel **Åberg**.[8] Like *Askehave, Virus* describes its setting in Stockholm in great detail, and the reader notes:

> When *Virus* came out, it opened an entirely new door because the story was situated
> in a context where I feel at home, in places such as Södermalm and Sickla. Those are
> places where I often go, and it produced a whole new feeling of being able to relate to
> the story, fantasising about how it would be if this took place in real life. (von Friesen,
> 2020, n.p.)

The local setting allows the listener to project the fiction of a global pandemic into his or her everyday surroundings. Storytel promotes such local reading experiences, as reflected in the fact that—when they translate the Originals series—the physical settings in the stories are often changed. For instance, when the Swedish series *Byvalla* by Karin Jansson was translated into Danish, the setting changed from a Swedish village outside of Stockholm to a Danish town, Bykøbing. Similarly, the *Virus* series is planned to be presented in new versions, adjusted to the Indian and the Dutch markets.[9] In this way, as a major transnational actor in the publishing industry, Storytel produces texts that promote local and site-specific reading experiences for the mobile listener.

Listening at home

Audiobook users are, however, not always on the move. As noted by Have and Pedersen (2016), many people report that they listen to audiobooks at home, especially in bed. The home as a listening space became visible during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, when many people had to stay at home to prevent the virus from spreading.

This global shift in everyday routines also meant a shift in the places in which we listen to books, a shift which became visible in Storytel's app. The app is organised to help users select books from among the 800,000+ available titles. Thus, the user is offered recommendations in different categories. Before the virus, many of these recommendations focused on the mobile listening situation. For instance, one category in the Swedish app was called 'Snabblyssnat' ('quick listenings') and presented books suitable for a 20-minute commute. However, the recommendations changed during the pandemic: presuming that people would have more time to read when they stayed at home, the category 'long reads for the lockdown' appeared in the Danish app. Another category was called 'Dream yourself far away', with recommendations for books on travelling—reflecting the concept of reading as transportation discussed above and suggesting that listeners should use books to 'dream themselves away' from the isolation at home.

Apart from adjusting its recommendations to the changing everyday rhythms during the pandemic, Storytel also developed content that reflects the home as a space for living and listening during the crisis. In March 2020, the Swedish Original series *Dagbok från Coronabubblan (Diary from the Corona Bubble)* was launched. Here, in a diary format, journalist Cecilia Garme reports on her daily life during the crisis, where she, as she says, 'got stuck in the 'corona bubble' (Garme, 2020). Garme includes the political events taking place in Sweden during the crisis. However, the emphasis is on her personal everyday experience, her virtual dinner parties with family and friends, daily walks, worries about her job, and not least her experience of the isolation at home. Adding to her portrayal of the corona bubble, she describes how she records the diary from her home: she uses her closet as a studio and records her reading of the diary with her mobile phone which hangs from a nylon stocking, reflecting a situation where not only the listening, but also the recording of audiobook content take place within the home. This homely recording situation is audible in the final product. We hear Garme rustling with the pages as she reads and, at one point, we even hear a distant voice from outside the closet. These 'noisy' sound effects emphasise the intimate atmosphere which is indicated by the diary format. In this way, the recording at home, in the closet, produces a sense of authenticity, of being close to the person speaking, and of listening to something that is recorded from within a personal bubble.

The notion of the corona bubble resonates with Bull's idea of sound bubbles, suggesting the isolation of the individual from the outside world. However, while Garme may describe the feeling of being isolated, listening to her diary far from isolates the listener. On the contrary, it produces a sense of community by communicating the feeling of being isolated, which was widespread at the time of publication. In this context, Garme's diary may be compared to the podcast medium which is often defined by its ability to produce such intimacy. Lukasz Swiatek describes

podcasting as 'an intimate bringing medium' which evokes 'the intensely personal and intimate nature of listening [...] and return[s] the emotion, connection and community [...] to the activities of publics around the globe' (2018, p.174). According to Swiatek, podcasting connects people because of its mediation through sound. He notes that 'it is the sonically generated relationality of podcasting, in giving listeners the impression of directness and closeness, that makes it such a compelling way to bridge spatial and temporal divides. [...] Most people are listening to it [podcasting] on their headphones. We are literally whispering in people's ears' (Swiatek, 2018, p. 174).

Swiatek's description is interesting because it emphasises a social dimension of listening, which also applies to audiobook consumption. A study of Swedish audiobooks revealed that most listeners report that they listen to audiobooks for social reasons, suggesting that listening to audiobooks gives them a feeling of human presence (Hedda, O'Connor, & Wikberg, 2019, 29). During the corona crisis, when many people were isolated, this motivation may have been even stronger, as reflected in Garme's diary. The diary produces intimacy through its para-social dimension, making us feel very close to Garme who is 'whispering in our ears' from her closet. Furthermore, it also functions as a point of departure for real communication, and thus for developing a 'real' community between the listeners, many of whom comment on the diary through the review function in the Storytel app.[10] While there are a few negative reviews, most users respond very positively to Garme's diary. Several users indicate that the diary helps them deal with their own changing everyday lives during the pandemic. They generally emphasize the aspect of familiarity and recognition in listening experience, the feeling of 'being in the same boat' as Garme and sharing her experience of the current crisis. In this way, the commenting space in the Storytel app becomes a social space, where listeners share and reflect on their individual experiences of the corona crisis. In this sense, Garme's diary produces the 'real, but non-local' listening community that is described by Wittkower in relation to audiobook consumption. The diary and the surrounding listening culture may accordingly be described as an attempt to break out of the 'corona bubble' by moving into the closet, so to speak: building a social listening space by sharing the experience of isolation.

The case of Garme's diary illustrates how the COVID-19 pandemic has complicated the typical association of audiobooks with the possibility of bringing literature out of the home and integrating it into modern, mobile, everyday life. Amid the pandemic, the audiobook was, rather, promoted as a means of filling up time at home and producing a sense of intimacy and social connection for those isolated at home. Thus, the diary may become a point of departure for considering how audiobooks should not, or not only, be associated with mobile listening: how, on the

contrary, born-audio texts such as Garme´s diary may also throw new light on the significance of traditional reading places, such as the home.

Conclusion

Reading was always a situated activity, but our modes of reading change when the places and situations in which we read, are changing, when new technologies make it possible to listen to books on the move, or when a global pandemic demands that we stay at home. This article has explored how born-audio narratives are adjusted to mobile readers and to changing private and public listening spaces. Storytel's series, including *Askehave*, promote situated reading experiences in which the story resonates with shifting local contexts, thus promoting a 'local, but imaginary' community. This practice reflects a culture in which cultural content increasingly becomes adjusted to the individual user, reflecting Bull's idea that modern consumers move around in individualised sound 'bubbles.'

However, this tendency toward increasing individualisation is also challenged. As noted by Jenkins (2006), modern culture is participatory, and the social dimension of cultural consumption, including reading, becomes increasingly visible, as, for example, social media and online forums make it possible for users to interact with each other. Thus, while mobile listening in public spaces may often serve to privatise and fictionalise the experience, listening at home may serve to introduce a sense of community within a private and intimate space. Cecilia Garme's diary from the corona bubble exemplifies this latter tendency, as it shares the very feeling of being isolated at home. Thus, in Wittkower's words, it produces a real, but non-local, virtual community, a social listening space. Future studies on audiobook culture may further examine this social aspect in audiobook consumption. Focusing on the social spaces that arise in relation to individual mobile listening, this article has demonstrated how mobile technologies and shifting listening spaces potentially influence the content and reception of contemporary audiobooks.

Where will you be listening next?

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Notes

1   Notably, mobile reading is nothing new. It is possible to trace a development in literary history toward increasing mobility: the codex book was already more portable than the scroll, and the printed book was easier to handle than manuscripts. Digitalisation has taken mobile literature to a new level as people read and write texts on their mobile phones. Audiobooks, as discussed above, just represent yet another step toward further mobility.

2   For a discussion of literary resonance, see Dimock, 1997, pp. 1060-1071.

3   The third type of community, that is real and local is 'unexperienced', according to Wittkower. It is, however, possible to question this assumption. As noted by Deborah Philips 'the audio book offers the potential for a shared experience of a text; a family group can now share a recorded book in the car or in the home, whether this be Postman Pat or John Le

Carré' (Philips, 2007, p. 299) and Colbjørnsen further emphasises the importance of the car for the audiobook's success (2015, p. 86). While recognising that shared mobile listening does exist, my analyses center on the two former types of communities that arise in relation to individual listening via mobile devices.

4   For a discussion of the Storytel Originals in relation to television production, see Have & Raabye Jensen, 2020.

5   The case of Storytel Originals thus exemplifies how the digital audiobook complicates the publishing communications circuit, presented by Robert Darnton (1982). Darnton's circuit model presents how a printed text moves between actors: from the author, to the publisher, to the printer etc. The model was updated by Murray and Squires (2013), reflecting the changes brought about by digital publishing. Have and Pedersen (2020) discuss how the audiobook transforms the circuit, introducing such actors as the audiobook publisher and the streaming service. However, their model does not include born-audio formats which further complicate the circuit as, for instance, the status of the author may change.

6   In a recent report, Storytel notes that the serial format applies well to audiobook consumption since the short episodes fit the 'shortening attention spans' of modern listeners. See Anderson, 2018.

7   All quotes from Storytel Originals are translated from Danish and Swedish by the author.

8   For an analysis of Åberg's *Virus*, see Linkis, 2021b.

9   Notably, it is possible to point to tension between Storytel's ambition to produce such locally relevant material and the company's status as a transnational actor in the publishing industry. For an analysis of how this tension plays out in relation to the case of *Byvalla*, see Linkis, 2021a.

10   For ethical reasons, in order to avoid violating Storytel users' privacy, I do not quote individual users but summarize comments and reviews of Garme´s diary, published in the Swedish version of the Storytel app in March 2020.