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# The Digital Reading Practice between Content-Related Involvement and Playful Immersion

## 1. Proposing a Literature and Media Theory-Based Praxeology of Reading

The evaluation of relevant studies on the importance of reading in everyday life and on reading behavior when dealing with new media shows that reading, as an unconscious everyday activity, has increased, and there is a general downward trend in reading as a conscious leisure activity.<sup>1</sup> Reading is considered »a key competence and basic act of socio-cultural participation in all kinds of social processes«. <sup>2</sup> Literary studies locate reading either as a strictly theoretical concept<sup>3</sup> or as a literary object in the form of literary

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**1** | Most popular is the *Stavanger Declaration*, which was the starting point for a series of EU-funded empirical studies and inquiries of E-READ COST. This acronym signifies the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) of more than 200 interdisciplinary scientists to explore the Evolution of Reading in the Age of Digitisation (E-READ) and its empirical effects. This pamphlet on digital reading attracted wide media attention in 2019. Cf. E-READ (ed.): »Stavanger Declaration Concerning the Future of Reading«. Stavanger 2019. <https://ereadcost.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/StavangerDeclaration.pdf> (accessed January 31, 2022); cf. Stiftung Lesen (ed.): *Lesen in Deutschland 2008. Eine Studie der Stiftung Lesen*. Mainz 2009; Börsenverein des deutschen Buchhandels (ed.): *Umbruch auf dem Buchmarkt? Das E-Book in Deutschland*. Frankfurt / M. 2011; cf. Forschungsschwerpunkt Medienkonvergenz (ed.): *Unterschiedliche Lesegeräte, unterschiedliches Lesen?* Mainz 2011. <http://www.medienkonvergenz.uni-mainz.de/forschung/lesestudie-unterschiedlichelesegerate-unterschiedliches-lesen> (accessed January 31, 2022); as well as the comparative study of different reading formats cf. Franziska Kretzschmar et al.: »Subjective Impressions Do Not Mirror Online Reading Effort: Concurrent EEG-Eyetracking Evidence from the Reading of Books and Digital Media«. In: *PLoS ONE* 8.2 (2013), pp. 1–11.

**2** | Axel Kuhn a. Svenja Hagenhoff: »Kommunikative statt objektzentrierte Gestaltung. Zur Notwendigkeit veränderter Lesekonzepte und Leseforschung für digitale Lesemedien«. In: Sebastian Böck et al. (eds.): *Lesen X.o: Rezeptionsprozesse in der digitalen Gegenwart*. Göttingen 2017, pp. 27–45, here p. 27 (my translation).

**3** | The active inclusion of the role of reading and the reader found its way into literary theory, especially with the media-technological changes of the 1960s and 1970s. Cf. Oliver Jahraus: »Literaturwissenschaftliche Theorien des Lesens«. In: Alexander Honold a. Rolf Parr, (eds.): *Grundthemen der Literaturwissenschaft: Lesen*. Berlin / Boston / MA 2018, pp. 123–139; cf. especially for the reception aesthetics (Rezeptionsästhetik) of reading Hannelore Link: *Rezeptionsforschung. Eine Einführung in Methoden und Probleme*. Stuttgart / Berlin 1980.

thematization.<sup>4</sup> A praxeological consideration of reading, that combines literary theory with the material practice of reading has been a desideratum of literary theory and only recently came into focus of reading research.<sup>5</sup>

Linking literature to the digital has produced a diverse discourse on reading. The newly emerging literary formats and their reading, the redistribution of the roles of writers and readers, the value of digital literature and what is to be understood by it are negotiated. While digital technological possibilities produce all kinds of literary innovations, I focus on a contrastive consideration of the pioneering projects *Die Aaleskorte der Ölig* (The Ölig's Escort of Eels) by Frank Klötgen and Dirk Günther, *Der Trost der Bilder* (The Consolation of Pictures) by Jürgen Daiber and Jochen Metzger, and the more recent WhatsApp novel *Morgen Mehr* (More Tomorrow) by Tilmann Rammstedt.<sup>6</sup> The methodical approach to it however faces two challenges: First, digital narratives are analyzed with reception theorems (as here with Wolfgang Iser), which have been developed over many years with an eye to non-digital texts. These theorems must be adapted to their digital subject of study to avoid results that are blind to the digital form and material. Second, research into these digital texts tends towards a less literary and much more socio-cultural view of these new text formats and their reception. The investigation of digital literary texts must also be possible independently of their creation context, as the Constance school demonstrated for non-digital literature. This article attempts to address both.

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4 | See for a detailed overview cf. Günther Stocker: »Lesen« als Thema der deutschsprachigen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts. Ein Forschungsbericht«. In: *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 27.2 (2007), pp. 208–241; Dorothee Birke also deals with reader characters and fictional readers or addressees; cf. ead.: »Der Leser als Adressat«. In: Honold a. Parr (eds.): *Grundthemen der Literaturwissenschaft: Lesen* (ref. 3), pp. 165–176.

5 | Steffen Martus a. Carlos Spoerhase bring together a range of discussions including social reading, marketing strategies and readers' habitus. Cf. eid. (eds.): *Gelesene Literatur. Populäre Lektüre im Zeichen des Medienwandels. Sonderband Text+Kritik*. Munich 2018; Deborah Duarte Acquistapace discusses the production of meaning from the sociological perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Cf. ead.: »Lectura y habitus: un acercamiento a la sociología de la lectura [engl. Reading and Habitus: An Approach to the Sociology of Reading]«. In: *Literatura: teoría, historia, crítica* 1.22 (2020), pp. 321–338. DOI: 10.15446/lthc.v22n1.82301 (accessed January 31, 2022).

6 | The choice of examples ties in with electronic literature as a pioneer of digital literature and sets them in contrast to reading short message services as a widespread reading (my translation).

## 2. Reading as a Research Topic

The Digital Humanities point out how digitization changes methods and approaches in the Humanities and contribute to the digital transformation through the digitization of archives, their methodical evaluation, and enhancing the digital access to these archives.<sup>7</sup> Their current research on digital reading focusses on the extratextual social context<sup>8</sup> of reading rather than its text-bound literary aspects, as is the case in Reception Aesthetics.

The Constance School of Reception Aesthetics asks about the perception of artistic works apart from the author's intention. Reader-centered research approaches were established, among others, by Hans Robert Jauß and Wolfgang Iser, who shift the focus from the author to the recipient or the reception.<sup>9</sup> Umberto Eco conceives of the reader as a structuring element rather than an empirical subject.<sup>10</sup> With the subdivision of reading-specific processes into reading techniques, concepts and practices, Matthias Bickenbach proposes a differentiated approach to reading that aims to clearly distinguish itself from the subject of the reader as well.<sup>11</sup> Following these positions, I do not look at the reader empirically, but as a ›role‹ offered to the reader (Iser), which enables me to design reading dispositives based on the text disposition.

Furthermore, research speaks of reading strategies and reading modes.<sup>12</sup> Reading strategies describe the procedures and practiced actions that readers acquire in order to cope with the text and achieve their individual goals.<sup>13</sup> Reading serves a specific purpose, which motivates a specific attitude (aesthetic, functional, etc.) – be it the acquisition of

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**7** | For the self-description of the research network *Digital Humanities im deutschsprachigen Raum* cf. DHd (eds.): »Thesen: Digital Humanities 2020«. <https://dig-hum.de/thesen-digital-humanities-2020> (accessed October 10, 2021); on the associated publication organ cf. DHd et al. (eds.): *Zeitschrift für Digitale Geisteswissenschaften*. <http://www.zfdg.de> (accessed January 31, 2022); on the weblog of the literature and media practice editors at the University of Duisburg on the subject of literary digitization, which exists since 2013, cf. Thomas Ernst a. Rolf Parr (eds.): *Digitur – Literatur in der digitalen Welt*. <http://digitur.de> (accessed February 01, 2022); cf. Matthew K. Gold (ed.): *Debates in the Digital Humanities*. <http://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/> (accessed November 06, 2020).

**8** | With some notable exceptions. For a recent discussion of the experimental role of digital technologies for literary studies and the challenging division of *close* (human based) and *distant* (quantified computational or algorithm based) *reading*, cf. Martin Paul Eve: *The Digital Humanities and Literary Studies*. Oxford 2022, pp. 129–154. In the German academic discourse, Gerhard Lauer takes an optimistic position that includes the debates about cultural criticism of the digital and the nostalgia about the perceived loss of the book format. See Gerhard Lauer: *Lesen im digitalen Zeitalter* (Geisteswissenschaften im digitalen Zeitalter, vol. 1), Darmstadt 2020.

**9** | Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauß, Karlheinz Stierle and others focus on the description of the conditions of the reading process to enable a theoretical description of the aesthetic effect of the text. Cf. Hans Robert Jauß: »Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft«. In: Rainer Warning (ed.): *Rezeptionsästhetik. Theorie und Praxis*. Munich 1994, pp. 126–162.

**10** | See Wolfgang Iser: *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*. Munich 1974; cf. Umberto Eco: *The Role of the Reader Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. Bloomington 1979.

**11** | Cf. Matthias Bickenbach: *Von den Möglichkeiten einer ›inneren‹ Geschichte des Lesens*. Tübingen 1999, p. 2.

**12** | For reading strategies cf. Michael Charlton a. Corinna Pette: »Lesesozialisation im Erwachsenenalter. Strategien literarischen Lesens in ihrer Bedeutung für die Alltagsbewältigung und Biografie«. In: Norbert Groeben (ed.): *Lesesozialisation und Mediengesellschaft. Ein Scherpunktprogramm*. Tübingen 1999 (IASL. Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur, Sonderheft 10), pp. 103–118.

**13** | Werner Graf: »Leseverstehen komplexer Texte«. In: Ursula Rautenberg a. Ute Schneider (eds.): *Lesen – Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*. Berlin / Boston / MA 2015, pp. 185–206, here p. 195.

information, the cathartic experience of an emotion, the exercise of competence itself, etc. How someone reads is also linked to a motivation or attitude that influences the nature of the practice and the choice of strategy. In addition to the structures and content the text supplies (*affordances*),<sup>14</sup> the need to read and/or its satisfaction also plays a role, initially in the selection of the text, but also in the way in which the text is read.

The selection of texts that are considered to be digital is heterogeneous. Current developments (both changes and stabilizations) in literature range from the so-called »net literature«, which includes new forms of publication and distribution for authors, such as e-publishing<sup>15</sup> to *twitterature*<sup>16</sup> – Reinhard Döhl differentiates between »net texts, texts suitable for the net, and texts in the net«;<sup>17</sup> Hansgeorg Schmidt-Bergmann and Torsten Liesegang speak of digital and digitized literature as editors of an early but very productive anthology.<sup>18</sup> In addition to these approaches – some of which are oriented towards production conditions – Florian Cramer chooses a textual approach, in that he describes the Internet as a »letter being [that] is textually coded«,<sup>19</sup> and concludes that the Internet itself is literature. With »page numbers, tables of contents, term indices and footnotes, [...] cross-references and self-references«,<sup>20</sup> Cramer concludes, books are in no way inferior to hypertexts, rather they are a »special genre of labyrinth texts«.<sup>21</sup>

Both older and current works on digital reading argue and polarize dialogically between tradition and innovation.<sup>22</sup> Jürgen Fauth goes so far as to say that the result of reading hypertext is in no way different from that of a printed text, since it is just as

14 | Bickenbach speaks of affordances as well that originate from the material: cf. Matthias Bickenbach: *Buch oder Bildschirm – Versuch über die Zukunft des Lesens*. Stuttgart 2017.

15 | Cf. Wolfram Göbel: »Die Veränderung literarischer Kanones durch Books on Demand«. In: Matthias Beilein et al. (eds.): *Kanon, Wertung und Vermittlung: Literatur in der Wissensgesellschaft*. Berlin 2012, pp. 225–238.

16 | On the controversially discussed topic of *twitterature*, cf. Alexander Aciman a. Emmett Rensin: *Twitterature. The World's Greatest Books Retold Through Twitter*. New York / NY 2009; Jan Drees a. Sandra Annika Meyer: *Twitteratur. Digitale Kürzestschreibweisen*. Berlin 2013. A recent inventory of experimental digital literature is delivered by Hannes Bajohr a. Annette Gilbert (eds.): *Digitale Literatur II. Sonderband Text+Kritik*. Munich 2021.

17 | Reinhard Döhl: »Vom Computertext zur Netzkunst. Vom Bleisatz zum Hypertext«. In: Hansgeorg Schmidt-Bergmann a. Torsten Liesegang (eds.): *Liter@tur: Computer – Literatur – Internet*. Bielefeld 2001, pp. 27–50, here p. 41.

18 | See Schmidt-Bergmann a. Liesegang (eds.): *Liter@tur: Computer – Literatur – Internet* (ref. 17).

19 | Florian Cramer: »Warum es zu wenig interessante Computernetzdichtung gibt. Neun Thesen«. In: Schmidt-Bergmann a. Liesegang (eds.): *Liter@tur: Computer – Literatur – Internet* (ref. 17), pp. 51–68, here p. 51.

20 | Ibid., here p. 57 (my translation).

21 | Ibid., here p. 58 (my translation).

22 | Cf. Renate Heydebrand a. Simone Winko: *Einführung in die Wertung von Literatur. Systematik – Geschichte – Legitimation*. Paderborn 1996; for optimistic positions, see Nina Hautzinger: *Vom Buch zum Internet? Eine Analyse der Auswirkungen hypertextueller Strukturen auf Text und Literatur*. St. Ingbert 1999; cf. Detlef Bluhm (ed.): *Bücherdämmerung. Über die Zukunft der Buchkultur*. Darmstadt 2014; for negative positions cf. Christoph Kucklick: *Die granulare Gesellschaft. Wie das Digitale die Wirklichkeit auflöst*. Berlin 2014; as well as Umberto Eco: »The Virtual Imagination«. In: *Project Sydicate*, November 07, 2000. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/the-virtual-imagination> (accessed October 12, 2021); Laf Überland: »Gesellschaftswandel. Wie die Digitalisierung unser Leben verändert. Gedanken über Tempodruck und Gedächtnisschwund im digitalen Alltag«. In: *Deutschlandradio Kultur*, November 11, 2014. [http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/gesellschaftswandel-wie-die-digitalisierung-unser-leben.976.de.html?dram:article\\_id=302885](http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/gesellschaftswandel-wie-die-digitalisierung-unser-leben.976.de.html?dram:article_id=302885) (accessed October 12, 2021); cf. Thomas Ernst: »Die Begrenzungen des Textflusses. Vom Urheberrecht der Gutenberg-Galaxis zur Wissensallmende im World Wide Web?«. In: Christine Bähr et al. (eds.): *Überfluss und Überschreitung. Die kulturelle Praxis des Verausgabens*. Bielefeld 2009, pp. 223–237.



linear due to the decisions that the recipient makes.<sup>23</sup> The self-referential nature of digital varieties is also interpreted as a »good, old avant-garde concept«. <sup>24</sup> Accordingly, print-on-demand<sup>25</sup> is not a new concept either, since production was already carried out on request in the Middle Ages.<sup>26</sup> Even the reading practice of surfing has its established forerunners in »browsing, leafing, rummaging or even gliding, floating, circulating, sauntering, strolling«. <sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, there are innovations that emerge on different levels. At the level of media technology, there are new devices such as e-book readers, tablets, and smartphones; reading applications serving as advanced bookstores such as Nook, Apple Books or Amazon Kindle. The application Libby lets readers access their local libraries. Audible and Spritz are services oriented towards a literature-specific performance enhancement.<sup>28</sup> The applications Blinkist and GetAbstract provide abstracts of literary and technical texts. According to Faßler, social networks such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter – but also platforms specifically geared towards literary communication (*social reading*) and interactivity such as Lovelybooks, Goodreads or Book-date – generate an »incalculable potential for resonance«. <sup>29</sup> Another example for that resonance in form of user-generated content is the social reading and self-publishing platform Wattpad.<sup>30</sup> This is also indicated by the »radical shift in meaning from author to reader«<sup>31</sup> that Schmidt-Bergmann a. Liesegang see in digitization. While twenty years ago the concept of the *Wreader* seemed somewhat improbable,<sup>32</sup> the opinion that readers would participate in the creation of digital texts as *Producers*<sup>33</sup> is expressed several times in current works on the subject.

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**23** | Cf. Jürgen Fauth: »Poles in Your Face. The Promises and Pitfalls of Hyperfiction«. In: Wulf Segebrecht (ed.): *Fußnoten zur Literatur* (Elektronische Literatur, Issue 47). Bamberg 2000, pp. 32–43, here p. 34.

**24** | Johannes Auer: »Sieben Thesen zur Netzliteratur«. In: Segebrecht (ed.), *Fußnoten zur Literatur* (ref. 23), pp. 12–17, here p. 15 (my translation).

**25** | This includes just-in-time printing, decentralized and personalized printing-on-demand as well as eBooks. Cf. Erich Maas: »Verlage, Literatur, erweiterte und neue Publikationsformen und Vertrieb im WWW«. In: Schmidt-Bergmann a. Liesegang (eds.): *Liter@tur: Computer – Literatur – Internet* (ref. 17), pp. 141–166, here pp. 146–148.

**26** | Ibid., here p. 44.

**27** | Bernd Scheffer: »Der Mediensurfer als neuer Typus der Lese- und Medienkultur«. In: Segebrecht, *Fußnoten zur Literatur* (ref. 23), pp. 18–31, here p. 19 (my translation).

**28** | The developers of the Spritz app describe reading, in which a text is presented to the eye word for word at high speed, as »Spritzing«. In this way, the eye does not have to be moved and the reading speed is increased many times over. Cf. *Spritz*. <https://spritz.com> (accessed: October 6, 2021).

**29** | Manfred Faßler: *Cyber-moderne. Medienevolution, globale Netzwerke und die Künste der Kommunikation*. Wien, New York 1999, p. 147 (my translation).

**30** | Cf. Lauer: *Lesen im digitalen Zeitalter* (ref. 8), pp. 125–130, 145f.

**31** | Hansgeorg Schmidt-Bergmann a. Torsten Liesegang: »Zur Einführung«. In: eid. (eds.): *Liter@tur: Computer – Literatur – Internet* (ref. 13), pp. 7–26, here p. 15 (my translation).

**32** | Cf. Auer, »Sieben Thesen zur Netzliteratur« (ref. 24), here p. 15.

**33** | Cf. for the origin of the term Axel Bruns: *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond. From Production to Producersage*. New York / NY 2008; Serge Proulx et al.: »Paradoxical Empowerment of Producers in the Context of Informational Capitalism«. In: *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia* 17.1 (2011), pp. 9–29. In their criticism of the self-evident term *producersage*, the authors do not want to consider the term detached from the traditional production process, but rather emphasize the specifics of the practices of online participation in content generation.

Therefore, reading research is also media-usage research examining actions and processes that are carried out on reading media or surfaces in the context of reading practice. The medium that is mostly associated with reading in this context is the book. This is justified by the fact that for a long time reading research was only carried out in the context of book market research. Axel Kuhn and Svenja Hagenhoff see this »lack of integration of media contexts in reading research« as problematic.<sup>34</sup>

Digitization allows for reading media whose attributes such as haptics, spatiality or visuality differ fundamentally from those of traditional material reading media. This leads to changed design options and thus to changed reading processes and reading actions, which are more oriented towards the universal competencies and actions of the operation of computers and their input and output devices.<sup>35</sup>

This article on digital reading ties in with the work of Kuhn a. Hagenhoff as well as Christine Grond-Rigler, who deals with books and eBooks as literary texts,<sup>36</sup> and Martina Ziefle<sup>37</sup> as well as Simone C. Ehmig a. Lukas Heymann,<sup>38</sup> who each contribute articles on reading in the digital age. In addition, the articles in Ursula Rautenberg a. Ute Schneider's *Lesen. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch* (2015) (including Kuhn a. Hagenhoff in particular) are fundamental to my considerations.<sup>39</sup> Rautenberg a. Schneider's handbook and the volume *Literatur und Digitalisierung* (2013) by Grond-Rigler discuss the developments in digital authorship and literary criticism and shed light on the communication structures of magazines as well as the phenomenon of literary follow-up communication.<sup>40</sup>

Studies of specific digital literary examples are still underrepresented in reading research. In addition, the available analyses are not sufficiently linked with one another. With Sebastian Böck's *Lesen X.o*, the most specific volume to date has been available since 2017, which is informed in terms of digital technology and deals with reading and its digital-specific changes.<sup>41</sup> The volume assesses the effects of digitization and considers the output format of the screen, the source code structure of digital texts and designs a theoretical version of digital reading extensions. A more recent compilation, published by the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (KWI) in Essen, discusses digitization in literature in regard to social writing, reading themes and evaluation as well as selection and motivation.<sup>42</sup> This particularly shows how important the work on specific case studies is for digital reading research. The latter sees its research subject located between literary-aesthetic experimentalism (in the production and reception of literature) and the historical routines of reading as a practice or cultural technique.

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**34** | Kuhn a. Hagenhoff: »Kommunikative statt objektzentrierte Gestaltung« (ref. 2), here p. 28 (my translation).

**35** | Ibid.

**36** | Cf. Christine Grond-Rigler: »Der literarische Text als Buch und E-Book«. In: ead., Wolfgang Straub (eds.): *Literatur und Digitalisierung*, Berlin / Boston / MA 2013, pp. 7–20.

**37** | Cf. Martina Ziefle: »Lesen an digitalen Medien«. In: Grond-Rigler a. Straub (eds.), *Literatur und Digitalisierung* (ref. 36), pp. 223–249.

**38** | Cf. Simone C., Ehmig a. Lukas Heymann: »Die Zukunft des Lesens«. In: Grond-Rigler a. Straub (eds.), *Literatur und Digitalisierung* (ref. 36), pp. 251–264.

**39** | Cf. Rautenberg a. Schneider (ed.): *Lesen – Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch* (ref. 13).

**40** | Grond-Rigler a. Straub (eds.), *Literatur und Digitalisierung* (ref. 31); Axel Kuhn a. Svenja Hagenhoff: »Digitale Lesemedien«. In: Rautenberg a. Schneider (ed.): *Lesen – Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch* (ref. 13), pp. 361–380.

**41** | Cf. Böck et al. (eds.): *Lesen X.o* (ref. 2).

**42** | For the conference proceeding cf. Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (ed.): *Unterstellte Leseschichten: Tagung, Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut Essen, 29. bis 30. September 2020*. DOI: 10.37189/duerpublico/74181.



### 3. The Connection to Practice Theory

How can current changes in reading practice be observed and described if historical reading representations are insufficient as a basis and empirical surveys in their micro-theoretical interpretation are not geared towards a connection to literary theory?<sup>43</sup> The answer this article proposes is a *literature and media theory-based praxeology of reading*, which overcomes the observed separation of sociocultural and text-immanent approaches.

Bruno Latour's question about the »missing masses«<sup>44</sup> initiated the *material turn*, a scientific turn to the effect of things and their materiality.<sup>45</sup> The literary study of reading practice is beneficial if its material component is included in the considerations of changes in reading – especially since the change from paper to display is most evident in its materiality.<sup>46</sup> Above all, praxeology offers the opportunity to critically re-locate reading as a practice, in that the »analysis of the material and topological properties of what is written and written on [...] [enables] to design probable reception scenarios«.<sup>47</sup> Practices are »embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding«.<sup>48</sup> At the same time the reconnection to Reception Aesthetic theory allows to gain insights that are not obstructed by the production background from the outset.

The practice theory following Theodore R. Schatzki and Andreas Reckwitz offers the possibility of linking literary theory and historical discourses (*sayings*) with the observation of practical processes that can be sensually experienced (*doings*).<sup>49</sup> The core aspects of praxeology in the reading context consist of the physical, material and media components as well as the affectivity of reading, on which I will elaborate hereinafter.<sup>50</sup>

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**43** | A detailed interdisciplinary discussion on the concept of empirical literary studies can already be found in Achim Barsch et al. (eds.): *Empirische Literaturwissenschaft in der Diskussion*. Frankfurt / M. 1994.

**44** | Bruno Latour: »Where Are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts«. In: Wiebe E. Bijker a. John L. Law (eds.): *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*. Cambridge / MA 1992, pp. 225–258.

**45** | Cf. on the *material turn* in literary studies in particular Markus Hilgert: »Textanthropologie«. Die Erforschung von Materialität und Präsenz des Geschriebenen als hermeneutische Strategie«. In: *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orientgesellschaft zu Berlin* 142 (2010), pp. 87–126.

**46** | In particular, the Sonderforschungsbereich 933 »Materiale Textkulturen« (Heidelberg Collaborative Research Center for Material Text Cultures [SFB MTK]) has set itself the task of bringing »text that is written on things« into focus. Cf. Thomas Meier et al. (eds.): *Materiale Textkulturen: Konzepte – Materialien – Praktiken*, Berlin et al. 2015; CRC (Collaborative Research Cluster) 933 of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) Material Text Cultures. Materiality and Presence in Non-Typographic: »Goals a. Central Ideas«. <https://www.materiale-textkulturen.org/article.php?s=2> (accessed October 04, 2021).

**47** | Markus Hilgert: »Praxeologisch perspektivierte Artefaktanalysen des Geschriebenen. Zum heuristischen Potential der materialen Textkulturforschung«. In: Friederike Elias et al. (eds.): *Praxeologie. Beiträge zur interdisziplinären Reichweite praxistheoretischer Ansätze in den Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften*. Berlin / Boston / MA 2014, pp. 149–164, here p. 149.

**48** | Theodore R. Schatzki: »Introduction: Practice Theory«. In: Karin Knorr Cetina et al. (eds.): *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*. London, New York / NY 2001, pp. 10–23, here p. 11.

**49** | Cf. Theodore R. Schatzki: *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*. Cambridge 1996, p. 68; Andreas Reckwitz: »Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Theorizing«. In: *European Journal of Social Theory* 5.2 (2002), pp. 243–263.

**50** | The discursive level of reading is not listed separately, since all utterances, both historical and present, as well as those made here, can be counted as part of the discourse.

In reading practices, physicality refers to the bodies of the actors, respectively the readers. The subject of reading, the artefact, is presented in various material forms, whereby the research area is expanded to include the aspect of materiality. The material spectrum ranges from stone to papyrus, through paper, to the plastic housings of modern computers. The artefacts' mediality, that means the medial constitution of the material in its conveying function and the degree of fixation of the given structures, determines in which mode the readers can interact with the carrier medium or design their reading paths individually (agency).

Affectivity is related to all three mentioned components. Peter Scheinpflug emphasizes »the central position of understanding [...], together with perception and being affected as well as the resulting cognitive, emotional, and possibly physical (re)actions, [must] be understood as integral processes of every media use.«<sup>51</sup> Reading practice includes processes of perception that go beyond the realm of what can be observed. Motivational-emotional knowledge guides the readers to their preferred reading strategies and media choices. Reading as a practice is connected to a »sensual dimension of the culture of things«,<sup>52</sup> which is related to affect theory. First, things must be perceived, grasped, and understood through the senses and, second, these things influence the recipients themselves, in a way that recipients are »either actively attracted or repelled«<sup>53</sup> by them. These affects are an essential part of media use.<sup>54</sup> In this context, Kuhn a. Hagenhoff speak of the needs of readers being satisfied.<sup>55</sup> The markers of affectivity are the affordances created in the medium.<sup>56</sup> The material disposition of the reading medium specifies the usage structures that are possible in this medium, guided by affordances, and implies actions (repetitions, routines, deviations) and knowledge (*know-how*) that users/readers exercise on it with their bodies.<sup>57</sup>

#### 4. The Instruments of a Literature and Media Theory-Based Praxeology of Reading

For the time being, I recognize four orientations for the field of literary praxeology of reading, while acknowledging the possibility of its expansion in the near future with the development of further research approaches. The research directions, which are

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51 | Peter Scheinpflug: »Augmented Reading. Lesen als multimediale Praktik im Digitalzeitalter«. In: Böck et al. (eds.), *Lesen X.o* (ref. 1), pp. 69–88, here p. 85 (my translation).

52 | Sophia Prinz: »Die affektive Macht der Dinge«. In: Hanna Katharina Göbel a. Sophia Prinz (eds.): *Die Sinnlichkeit des Sozialen. Wahrnehmung und materielle Kultur*. Bielefeld 2015, pp. 53–60, here p. 54 (my translation).

53 | *Ib.*, here p. 55 (my translation).

54 | Cf. Scheinpflug: »Augmented reading« (ref. 51), here p. 85, see also Rita Felski's works on why and how recipients are attached to music, art and texts cf. ead.: *Hooked: Art and Attachment*. Chicago 2020.

55 | Cf. Kuhn a. Hagenhoff: »Digitale Lesemedien« (ref. 40), here p. 372; cf. for the *uses-and-gratification*-approach in general Wolfgang Schweiger: *Theorien der Mediennutzung*. Wiesbaden 2007, pp. 60–136; in reference to expectations about e-books see Dong-Hee Shin: »Understanding E-Book Users. Uses and Gratification Expectancy Model«. In: *New Media Society* 13.2 (2011), pp. 260–278.

56 | Cf. also Bickenbach: *Buch oder Bildschirm* (ref. 14).

57 | In this context, Schatzki speaks of teleoaffective structures; cf. Theodore R. Schatzki: *The Time-Space of Human Activity. On Performance, Society, and History as Indeterminate Teleological Events*. Lanham 2010, p. 73.

constituted by their respective reading practice concept, are the socio-cultural,<sup>58</sup> the text-immanent,<sup>59</sup> the social-historical<sup>60</sup> as well as the proposed literature and media theory-based reading praxeology. In what follows, I present the basics of the latter.

A reading practice based on literature and media theory builds upon four assumptions: First, reading practices can be reconstructed based on artefacts. For the investigation of historical and current reading practices, findings can be gained from the artefacts used, which are recorded based on materiality profiles, topologies and praxeographies. In his remarks on the heuristic potential of material text culture research, Hilgert discusses a specific draft of how reading practices can be reconstructed from a historical perspective.<sup>61</sup> Thus,

not only are the artefacts bearing the text, those »written on«, but also all those artefacts, natural-physical objects and – above all – the acting subjects, who in arrangements of varying density, expansion, and stability of the social reception practices of the written »participate«<sup>62</sup>

central for a reflective approach to material text culture research. The artefacts pre-structure their use and allow conclusions to be drawn about them.

Second, the media-specific nature of the literary text is part of the text-structural level of the reading act according to Wolfgang Iser. The approach to reading practice can be linked to Iser's theory of *aesthetic response*. Iser's *textual structure* and *structured act* as components of his reading act model offer the necessary basis for the literary scholarly classification of the previously discussed observable (*text structural*) and non-observable (*act structural*) aspects of reading practice.<sup>63</sup> The *structured act* includes all those components that are inscribed in the constituted meaning by the reader subject: these are the acts of imagination of the reader, which mean the actual aesthetic effect of the literary text on the reader.<sup>64</sup> *Text structure* describes the specifications contained in the text such as the narrative concept or rules of the reading as well as perspectives of the constructed

58 | Cf. for example Raphaela Knipp: »Literaturbezogene Praktiken. Überlegungen zu einer praxeologischen Rezeptionsforschung«. In: *Navigationen – Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturwissenschaften* 17.1 (2017), pp. 95–116, here p. 107–111; Danielle Fuller a. DeNel Rehberg Sedo: *Reading Beyond the Book: The Social Practices of Contemporary Literary Culture*. New York, Oxfordshire 2013; Niels Werber: »Das Populäre und das Publikum«. In: *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 46.4 (2016), pp. 469–477.

59 | Cf. for example Paul Goetsch: »Leserfiguren in der Erzählkunst«. In: *Germanisch-Romanische Monatshefte* 33 (1983), pp. 199–215; Wolfgang Schröder: »Hingabe, Distanz oder Desinteresse. Entwurf eines Lesertypenmodells aus Beispielen dargestellten Lesens bei Michael Ende, Alfred Andersch und anderen«. In: *Der Deutschunterricht* 40.4 (1988), pp. 9–20. This is followed by the art-historical consideration of the pictorial representation of reading: Cf. Alfred Messerli: »Lesen im Bild: Zur Ikonographie von Buch und Lektüreakten vom 16. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert«. In: *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 39.1 (2014), pp. 226–245; Peter Friedrich: »Repräsentationen des Lesens in Literatur, Kunst, Film und Fernsehen«. In: Honold a. Parr (eds.): *Grundthemen der Literaturwissenschaft: Lesen* (ref. 3), pp. 397–422.

60 | Cf. for example Pierre Bourdieu: *Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Stanford 1996; Jost Schneider: *Sozialgeschichte des Lesens: Zur historischen Entwicklung und sozialen Differenzierung der literarischen Kommunikation in Deutschland*. Berlin, New York 2004; as well as the popular title by Alberto Manguel: *A History of Reading* [1996]. New York 2014.

61 | Cf. Hilgert: »Praxeologisch perspektivierte Artefaktanalysen des Geschriebenen« (ref. 47).

62 | *Ib.*, here p. 151.

63 | See Wolfgang Iser: *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore 1978.

64 | Cf. Iser: *The Act of Reading* (ref. 63), pp. 37–39.

world (characters, plot, etc.). They form the intention<sup>65</sup> that the readers can fulfill in the reading act by following the outlined rules. I extend Iser's concept of *textual structure* to the nature of the medium, since the device a text is read on or the format in which it presents itself create conditions that become part of the construction of meaning while reading. For example, to begin reading a bound book it must be opened first, to continue reading one must turn its pages; whereas the computer must be booted, menus need to be clicked through and text files might be scrolled. The medial access results in different delays, graded levels and phases of immersion as well as media connotations.<sup>66</sup>

Third, typography is an important indicator of the reading mode chosen. The typographical design of the text has a decisive influence on the reading practice that readers exercise on it. Fonts, white spaces, text structuring, highlighting, etc. affect the reader's attention by disturbing and increasing it.<sup>67</sup> Ralf De Jong points out how the typographic disposition can be beneficial or detrimental to the legibility of a text.<sup>68</sup> Hans Peter Willberg, Friedrich Forssman and Jost Hochuli provide essential preparatory work for an overview of digital practical forms, developing a reading typology for the pre-digital reading and linking this to the typographical design of the text that evokes the respective reading.<sup>69</sup> The typographical design varies in its structure from very low (one-column setting, no structuring elements) to strong (headings, graphic elements, multi-column setting). Text hierarchy, text structure and text markup are the typographical factors, the visual overall message of which must not contradict the content of the text. They contribute significantly to the choice of the practical mode that the reader applies to the selected text.

Unlike analogue texts, digital texts are available in two different reading levels: the binary source code text and the user interface text – both can potentially be read. That opens further possibilities for the analyses on the scriptural level. The arrangement of the source code can be analyzed using so-called *reverse engineering* regarding the complexity of the usage offers (*process intensity*). This becomes especially relevant in the study of narrative games and digital gamebooks.<sup>70</sup> The term *procedural literacy* describes the basic understanding of the structure and functionality of source codes and could in future be assumed as the competence of those who examine digital literature.<sup>71</sup>

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65 | ›Intention‹ here by no means refers to the author's intention, but rather the offered range of reading choices available in the text.

66 | For a detailed discussion see Franziska Wilke: *Digital Lesen. Wandel und Kontinuität einer literarischen Praktik*. Bielefeld 2022 (forthcoming).

67 | Cf. Peter Matussek: »Aufmerksamkeitsstörungen. Selbstreflexion unter den Bedingungen digitaler Medien«. In: Aleida Assmann a. Jan Assmann (eds.): *Aufmerksamkeiten*. München 2001, pp. 197–215.

68 | Cf. Ralf De Jong: »Typographische Lesbarkeitskonzepte«. In: Rautenberg a. Schneider (eds.): *Lesen: Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, (ref. 13), pp. 233–256, here p. 255.

69 | Cf. Hans Peter Willberg a. Friedrich Forssman: *Lesetypografie*. Mainz 2010, pp. 14–65; Jost Hochuli: *Das Detail in der Typographie*. Berlin, Munich 1990, pp. 25–50.

70 | Cf. Greg Costikyan: »Where Stories End and Games Begin«. In: *CumInCAD*, March 25, 2003. <http://papers.cumincad.org/data/works/att/b8bc.content.pdf> (accessed January 31, 2022).

71 | Cf. Martin Stobbe: »Quellcode lesen? Ein Plädoyer für Procedural Literacy in den Literaturwissenschaften«. In: Böck et al. (eds.), *Lesen X.0* (ref. 1), pp. 47–68, here pp. 63–65. Stobbe borrows the term *process intensity* from game developer Chris Crawford, who introduced it in 1987. Cf. Michael Mateas: »Procedural literacy: Educating the New Media Practitioner«. In: *On the Horizon* 13.2 (1987), pp. 101–111.

Fourth, the digital reading media's degree of independence from print media serves as an indicator for interactivity, multimodality and agency. Axel Kuhn and Svenja Hagenhoff define that independence according to the range of possibilities that readers are given in the text, regarding textual changeability, navigation in the text, embedded media channels and interactive participation. The degree of independency can be read from their scheme. Kuhn a. Hagenhoff are opening a discourse on digital texts that endeavors to emancipate them from the extensive non-digital text science. They do not aim to define digital texts in a new genre or a text definition, but to determine their range of variation using a range of characteristics. To be able to describe digital reading media in their effect on the reading process, Kuhn a. Hagenhoff are developing a system that stretches between two poles: on the one hand there is the simulation of print media and on the other hand there is the independent status of digital texts that results from their media-technological flexibility. The position that a specific digital text occupies within this spectrum depends on the nature of the text's arrangement, layout, and accessibility.<sup>72</sup>

Consequently, the reading mode a text evokes results from its media-technological disposition, typographical design, the media level structure, and the text-immanent participation options for the reader (agency) – as all four of those factors create affordances. I call the totality of these factors or characteristics the *infrastructure of the (digital) text*. As an excerpt from the detailed reading typology, that I develop in my work on *Digital Reading*, six modes are presented here.<sup>73</sup>

*Linear* reading describes the reading of very low structured, extensive continuous texts, e.g. the book novel. A text that evokes this reading mode is mostly monomedial, consisting exclusively of text elements. It is presented in a one-column setting and contains no or few structuring elements or markers. Texts that evoke *linear* reading contain at most a flat hierarchy between chapter headings and body text, but no individual paragraphs are emphasized. The reading is generally complete and readers are not invited to skip sections.

In the case of *consultative* reading, readers purposefully look for a specific section within a larger body of text. Font size and line spacing are reduced in these formats and set in multi-column blocks in order to be able to display as much manageable content as possible. The text facilitates the reader's orientation by being highly structured through paragraphs, markings and keywords, such as in dictionaries and encyclopedias.

*Selective* reading describes the incomplete reading of highly structured texts in which the order of the sections read is variable. The different sections' contents clearly relate to one another and are not in a hierarchical relationship. By the use of images and color

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72 | Cf. Kuhn a. Hagenhoff: »Digitale Lesemedien« (ref. 40), here p. 376.

73 | From the methodological-theoretical preliminary considerations my draft of a reading typology emerges, which comprises 13 reading modes and can be applied case-specifically. The six forms of reading according to Willberg a. Forssman, already supplemented by Jost Hochuli, are derived from purely print-specific considerations. Their modes are *linear* reading, *informative* reading, *differentiating* reading (which I expand to *differentiating-studying* reading), *consulting* reading, *selective* reading, and *contemplative* reading. I transfer them to digital texts and supplement them by other reading modes that result from the most recent research debates and the issues discussed here. I particularly build on the work of Uwe Wirth and Peter Scheinpflug. Cf. Uwe Wirth: »Literatur im Internet. Oder: Wen kümmerts, wer liest?«. In: Stefan Münker a. Alexander Roesler (eds.): *Mythos Internet*. Frankfurt / M. 1997, pp. 319–337, here p. 319, 328; cf. Scheinpflug, »Augmented Reading« (ref. 51), here pp. 69–88. The additional modes are *meditative-centripetal*, *automatic*, *centrifugal*, *abductive*, *multimedia*, *responsive-participatory*, and *augmented* reading. For a detailed overview and a complete derivation of this reading typology see Wilke: *Digital Lesen* (ref. 66).



markings clarity and reading comfort are increased. You can find this in textbooks, cookbooks and technical books with info boxes and memos, but also in fiction.

If a text contains many links, it can either induce *centrifugal* reading, in which the links lead away from the original text, as in Wikipedia, or *abductive* reading, in which the links represent path decisions that remain within the text, as is the case with hyperfictions. For both modes the length of the texts varies, their structure is determined by the highlighted link markers. The typographical design is not subject to a fixed pattern – single-column blocks as well as strong structuring and multimedia design are possible. The main difference is that with *centrifugal* reading the initial text is left partially read while with *abductive* reading the reception of the initial text corpus is continued even when readers follow the links.

*Augmented* reading results from the term *Augmented Reality* and is therefore based in the gaming context, that is also explored in the debates surrounding *transmedia storytelling*.<sup>74</sup> Texts that evoke this reading mode are combined with other digital carrier media, so-called second screens. Special symbols in the text can be scanned using the camera of a smartphone or tablet and provide additional mostly multimedia content that interrupts and accompanies the reading. This can be found increasingly in experimental novels, in comic books, but also in children's books.

The level of agency depends on the given possibilities for action set out in the text. The readers' room for manoeuvre of changing, expanding or editing the text and the options to participate in form of shaping individual plots, path decisions or interactions add up to the readers' agency. Both depend on the carrier medium presenting the text. However, the reading modes are not tied to specific carrier media, although the multimodal and multimodal reading modes tend to require digital carrier media due to their media-technological disposition (links, audio and video files, scannable markers). The agency is always dependent on the respective carrier medium, but can be additionally strengthened by the structures in the text.

The order in which the reading modes are listed is derived from the increasing agency, increasing multimediality and the positioning of the modes between *content-related involvement* and *playful immersion*. Content-related involvement describes the readers' contemplation on the content level of the text, where readers focus their perception solely on understanding and imagining the meaning of the text in front of them.<sup>75</sup> Playful immersion means the technically motivated involvement, such as the intensive use of the operating elements, i.e. leafing through pages in gamebooks or clicking to choose paths in a hypertext story, as well as increased scrolling or swiping to continue reading on small screens.<sup>76</sup>

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**74** | Cf. Scheinpflug, »Augmented Reading« (ref. 51), here p. 71; for a current overview of transmediality and intermedial narratology cf. Henry Jenkins: »The Reign of the ›Mothership‹: Transmedia's Past, Present, and Possible Future«. In: Denise Mann (ed.): *Wired TV. Laboring over an Interactive Future*. New Brunswick / NJ 2014, pp. 244–268.

**75** | For a distinction between technical immersion, content immersion and sensory immersion cf. Dieter Adlmaier-Herbst et al.: »Digital Storytelling als intensives Erlebnis – Wie digitale Medien erlebnisreiche Geschichten in der Unternehmenskommunikation ermöglichen«. In: Annika Schach (ed.): *Storytelling: Geschichten in Text, Bild und Film*. Wiesbaden 2017, pp. 33–60, here p. 52.

**76** | Cf. Kuhn a. Hagenhoff: »Digitale Lesemedien« (ref. 40), here p. 376.



Similar typological designs, such as the catalog by Werner Graf, are based on reading motivation and competence.<sup>77</sup> Heinz Schlaffer also names 17 stages of reading and negotiates when reading actually takes place and when reading is merely a discursive subject. His focus on circumstances outside the text – such as exchange and follow-up communication, object fetishism in connection to collecting practices, and author reputation – place his remarks in sociocultural reading praxeology.<sup>78</sup>

### Example 1 – Multimedia Reading and Playful Immersion

*Die Aaleskorte der Ölig*<sup>79</sup> (1998) by Frank Klötgen and Dirk Günther and *Der Trost der Bilder*<sup>80</sup> (1998) by Jürgen Daiber and Jochen Metzger are experimental multimedia texts that emphasize playful immersion and were submitted to an Internet literature competition organized by IBM and DIE ZEIT in 1998. Though having been developed over 20 years ago they clearly show the alternation between phases of playful immersion and content-related involvement that can be seen in current literary inventions.

The winner of the competition, Frank Klötgen and Dirk Günther's *Die Aaleskorte der Ölig*, presents itself as the storyboard of a film. The task of the reader is to put the script of the film together.<sup>81</sup> At the beginning of the hypertext, readers are informed about their task in brief, unstructured texts and are told the exact number of clicks they will need for it, »a total of twenty mouse clicks«<sup>82</sup>. The offer of action to readers is initially reduced to the affordance of the initiative button »Start!«.

The following page's title »DREHBUCH – Szene 1/20« [SCREENPLAY – Scene 1/20]<sup>83</sup> is highlighted in capital letters. Below that, a cross line runs across the entire screen, followed by the centered portrait photography of a toddler including a caption. If readers wish to continue with the literary experiment they have no choice but to click on that portrait. That action represents the only intersubjective choice in the narrative path of the story, since it is the only given option for every reader coming across it. After the first click more pictures appear simultaneously and readers are asked to choose one of them to continue. The one-to-three-word captions give minimal indications of the storyline. With every click on one of the pictures presented from now on, the reader shapes an individual link path and creates the perspective of the various scenes of the later shown film.

**77** | Cf. Werner Graf: *Der Sinn des Lesens: Modi der literarischen Rezeptionskompetenz*. Münster 2004, p. 123f.

**78** | Cf. Heinz Schlaffer: »Der Umgang mit Literatur: Diesseits und jenseits der Lektüre«. In: *Poetica* 31.1/2 (1999), pp. 1–25.

**79** | Cf. Frank Klötgen a. Dirk Günther: *Die Aaleskorte der Ölig*. 1998. <http://www.aaleskorte.de> (accessed March 31, 2022).

**80** | This project has been archived by the *Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach*. Cf. Jürgen Daiber a. Jochen Metzger: *Der Trost der Bilder*. 1998. <http://literatur-im-netz.dla-marbach.de/bsz403532760.html> (accessed March 31, 2022).

**81** | For an archived version cf. Frank Klötgen a. Dirk Günther: *Die Aaleskorte der Ölig*. 1998. [https://wwik.dla-marbach.de/line/index.php/Die\\_Aaleskorte\\_der\\_%C3%96lig#cite\\_note-1](https://wwik.dla-marbach.de/line/index.php/Die_Aaleskorte_der_%C3%96lig#cite_note-1) (accessed March 31, 2022).

**82** | Klötgen a. Günther: »Anfang«. In: eid.: *Die Aaleskorte der Ölig* (ref. 79). <http://www.aaleskorte.de/anfang.htm> (accessed March 31, 2022).

**83** | Klötgen a. Günther: »Start«. In: *ibid.* <http://www.aaleskorte.de/start.htm>, (accessed March 31, 2022).

The range of possibilities and the playful immersion through the technical selection of an image may increase the reader's expectation and tension. Every click drives the narrative forward and yet the cinematic result is withheld for the time being. As the non-selected pictures are repeated, readers might tend to click on them without rereading the caption and therefore follow the affordance of a picture rather than a text before making the decisive click. While creating their relatively individual storybook (they still depend on the given range of options), readers either fall into an informative reading that scans the signatures for individual preferences or don't engage with the content level and become immersed on the technical level by clicking through the options without reading. A similar phenomenon can be observed with the hyperfiction *Zeit für die Bombe* by Susanne Berkenheger. It was documented that readers have clicked through the text too quickly to read it, driven by the motivation to find new paths in the story and to complete all given options.<sup>84</sup>

After finishing the compilation process in *Die Aaleskorte der Ölig*, the flip book style film consists of sequentially displayed text-image combinations, which are received in a multimedia format and whose order depends on the decisions made beforehand. The total length of the presented text amounts to 1443 words and corresponds to the length of a short story. This content capacity contrasts with 6.9 billion possible combinations, which are referred to at the end of the first run, and each of which requires another twenty clicks to select the script. The reference to the number of possible variants goes hand in hand with the call for action to ›remake‹ the film.<sup>85</sup> Unlike in monomedial hypertextual structures, readers make their decisions in a limited phase of playful immersion instead of doing so during the entire course of the reading. The phase of increased agency is followed by another phase of content involvement, which is accompanied by multimedia and linear reading. This phase does not intend any active participation other than the aesthetic effect on the reader.

The second-place entry in the competition was the hypertext *Der Trost der Bilder* by Jürgen Daiber and Jochen Metzger. The text presents itself to readers as a supposedly psychological test, the consolation story finder, which individually identifies and displays suitable consolation stories. The common slide-in design for online headings in the 1990s anticipates the multimedial reading mode of the following short stories by presenting the text to the reader in a non-linear manner and accompanied by animations. On the way to the interactive consolation story finder, readers encounter a curious interlude: a centered paragraph appears and disappears immediately, only to be replaced for a second by a single, longer line of text and a graphic moving from right to left before the previous paragraph appears again and remains visible. While automatic reading made it possible to capture previous intermediate texts, the length of this text and the display time are no longer in relation to the human reading speed.

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**84** | For an archived description of the app where Berkenheger discusses how most of her readers were not reading the text, cf. Susanne Berkenheger: »*Zeit für die Bombe* Android App (description)«. <https://elmcip.net/node/522>, (accessed March 31, 2022).

**85** | Cf. Roberto Simanowski: »Lektüre Nr. 3. Struktur«. In: *Dichtung Digital* (1999). [http://www.dichtung-digital.de/Simanowski/18-Aug-99/ansatz\\_3.htm](http://www.dichtung-digital.de/Simanowski/18-Aug-99/ansatz_3.htm) (accessed January 31, 2022); Susanne Donhauser et al.: »Utopische Sexualität jenseits der Geschlechtsidentität? ›Die Aaleskorte der Ölig‹ von Dirk Günther und Frank Klötgen«. In: *Junge Forschung* (ed.): *Hyperfiction. Literaturtheorie und Interpretationsversuche*. <http://www.jungeforschung.de/hyperfiction/aal/aal.html#Anker171209> (accessed January 31, 2022).

Readers are now free to grasp the currently displayed text linearly or selectively *or* to use the button that takes them back to find out what content they have missed previously due to the abrupt presentation and thus the short narrative time. Because of the repetition of the previously displayed page, readers might tend to look at the image again rather than reread the text.<sup>86</sup> The affordance consists in operating the forwarding button, which – so it can be assumed – will display the very briefly presented text again. The expectation of the short display duration increases the reader's level of concentration, which suggests a physical change, such as tensing the muscles, bringing the head closer to the screen, squinting their eyes, etc. In this scenario the readers are now prepared and straighten their gaze to the expected position of the following text.

Quite possibly the readers will have to repeat this sequence (button »back«, button »next«) depending on the individual reading speed until they manage to read in (interrupted) linear mode: »... jetzt reitet hier doch eine Giraffe durchs Bild. Entschuldigen Sie die Unterbrechung«. [... now a giraffe is riding through the picture. Sorry for the interruption].<sup>87</sup> The physical effort involved in interacting with the media user interface contrasts with the information obtained. This interlude is not constructive for the progression of the accompanying narrative, but its repetitiveness can result in an exercise and critical examination of the specifics of electronic literature.<sup>88</sup> It also represents the subversive potential of net literature.

The consolation story finder is an explicit opportunity of participation and evokes *responsive-participatory* reading with interactive affordances. A total of six questions require the reader to comment on statements about literature, lifestyle and life situation. Before answering the first question, by clicking on one of three optional answers, the forward button is absent. Readers must find out for themselves what action is required next. The playful immersion is additionally increased by the search for a continuation or an exit. Here the difference to the printed medium can be seen in the technically induced limitation of the reader's options for continuation. In the format of the book it is impossible to prevent the reader at one point in the reading from turning the pages in a certain direction.

At the end of the supposedly psychological test, the relation between clicks and readable elements changes. To get to the results page, which presents the readers with access to the various stories, thirteen clicks must be carried out (eighteen or more if the reader is exploring the giraffe sequence). The text corpus to be read by then comprises four short and eight very short texts,<sup>89</sup> not including the key words of the symbol images and navigation elements. The consolation stories catalog offers one short to medium text section per click and thus significantly increases the possibility of content-related involvement. Roberto Simanowski speaks of a »gallery of short stories [...] embedded in music and an ›interactive‹ technical gimmick«, a »collection of various forms

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**86** | Lore Knapp speaks of a hierarchy of media in which the reader's attention is drawn first to video, then audio, then image and then text elements. Cf. Lore Knapp: »Christoph Schlingensiefs Blog: Multimediale Autofiktion im Künstlerblog«. In: Ansgar Nünning et al. (eds.): *Narrative Genres im Internet*. Trier 2012, pp. 117–132, here p. 122.

**87** | Daiber a. Metzger: *Der Trost der Bilder*, (ref. 79).

**88** | On the critical attitude towards new media-technological changes using the example of visual reproduction in image, film and cinema, cf. Walter Benjamin, »The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction [1938/1968]«. In: id., *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Translated by Harry Zohn. Edited and with an Introduction by Hannah Arendt. New York 2007, pp. 217–252.

**89** | »Very short« is understood here to be up to approx. 25 words, and »short« up to 100 words.

of expression in digital literature«. <sup>90</sup> The thirteen short stories are presented in text-image combinations with various multimedia overlays. The rows of images often result in an ensemble that evokes quick clicking without reading in order to ensure viewing in the cinematographic manner of a flip book, as seen in the prior example.

The sequence analysis shows that reading *Der Trost der Bilder* and *Die Aaleskorte der Ölig* can be divided into three successive reading phases. The first phase is characterized by a clear text presentation, which introduces the reader to the subject in a fictional or practical manner. The second phase is determined by playful immersion and brings with it an increased use of the material-technological possibilities beyond the navigation-technological operation. It evokes *selective*, *informative*, and *multimedial* reading. In the third phase, readers of both texts explore and assess the results of their technically executed decision-making actions *linearly* to *selectively*, in order to return to phase two and if necessary, repeat it.

The reader's agency is similarly strong in both projects. However, while the short story gallery (phase three in *Der Trost der Bilder*) evokes the individual exploration of the various short stories, the scene composition (*Aaleskorte der Ölig*) presents a finished product, in the order of which readers can no longer intervene at this point. The third phase of *Der Trost der Bilder* therefore prevails both in terms of agency and playful immersion. The order in which readers click through the picture gallery is up to them. The reading paths of the short stories are nonetheless pre-structured and can be continued at individual speed, but not compiled individually. The initially predominant content-related involvement is accompanied by the constant need for operating the user interface. Measured by the volume of the text, it could also be shown on one page. The technical interweaving and multimedia embedding, and portioning in both examples are thus part of their literary concept. This concept focuses on the playful immersion and exploration of the text's infrastructure.

#### *Example 2 – Linear Reading and Content-Related Involvement in Multimedia Reading Devices*

Tilmann Rammstedt's *Morgen Mehr* (2016) is a novel that was created as an online project by the publishing house Hanser. <sup>91</sup> The promoted peculiarity of the novel was that it could be acquired before it was written. Readers were made aware of the project via an advertising campaign by the publisher and were able to subscribe to the novel for eight Euros to receive the text via Whatsapp, by email or on the publisher's website. At the end of the project the novel was published in print format. The printed publication therefore remains desirable even in the digital age, be it due to the accustomed materiality, the literary-critical attribution of value or commercial aspects. <sup>92</sup>

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**90** | Roberto Simanowski: »Trost der Bilder. Kitsch und Technik oder: Die Versuchungen der Multimedialität«. In: *Dichtung Digital* (1999). <http://www.dichtung-digital.de/Simanowski/1-Sept-99> (accessed October 13, 2021).

**91** | Tilmann Rammstedt: *Morgen Mehr*. Berlin 2016.

**92** | Carlos Spoerhase speaks of a material value hierarchy of the printed matter that results from the format, the scope, binding, etc. cf. Carlos Spoerhase: *Das Format der Literatur. Praktiken materieller Textualität zwischen 1740 und 1830*. Göttingen 2018, p. 29; on the value of books as fetishized objects see Jessica Pressmann: *Bookishness. Loving Books in a Digital Age*. New York / NY 2020.

The portion-wise mediation defines parameters such as the time and length of the reading. In addition, there are the conditions that are specified by the user interfaces of mobile reading devices.<sup>93</sup> The text is no longer bound to the book object and appears placeless («ortlos»)<sup>94</sup> until it is published and fixed in book format after its completion. This creates a number of object-related consequences, i.e. a feeling of loss on part of those readers who prefer books as collecting items, as well as the elimination of the sensual experiences of perceiving different weights and surfaces – the smell and the degree of wear of an object. It also opens up new possibilities for the mobility and reach of texts. The different access options offered for *Morgen Mehr* create possible *instant reading dispositives*, necessarily where readers are located when receiving a chapter of the novel. Places already marked by other practices become places of reading.

If readers decide to receive the novel via the WhatsApp news service and use their smartphone as a reading medium,<sup>95</sup> the following scenario could play out. The incoming message containing a portion of *Morgen Mehr* will be signaled on the reading device depending on the individual settings, e.g., by a light signal, vibration or display window on the screen. If the device is already in use, the display interrupts the action currently being carried out. The affordance that emanates from this interrupting display leads, in the strongest case, to the reader clicking or touching it and opening the required program. They switch from their current activity to reading the novel on WhatsApp.

The user interface for this reading is designed as follows. Readers see symbols at the top of the screen that tell them the reception strength and battery charge, etc. This and any incoming information lead to interruptions in reading *Morgen Mehr*, e.g., if the device warns of low battery charge or reports incoming messages. Under this permanently visible header the WhatsApp program-specific banner can be found. It shows a bar highlighted in green with a backward pointing arrow, a round profile picture, the name of the contact, a telephone receiver icon, a paper clip icon and three vertically arranged dots. Each of these elements is a button that leads users to menus with additional functions or information when they activate them on the touchscreen. Each button works as a potential affordance that would interrupt the reading.

The text is set in flush left, ragged right. The low level of structuring, the lack of illustrations, the absence of advertising of the communication service and the subtle design support *linear* reading. The fact that the chapters are shown one after the other in the same chat also contributes to continuity. Readers can return to previous chapters or read the end of the last chapter before starting the new one. However, WhatsApp displays new messages in such a way that readers see the end of a long message first and have to scroll back or up to the beginning of the message. Messages that exceed 23 lines are automatically ended with a continuous link with which readers can fold out the rest of the message. Therefore, users always see the length of a text (or that it is longer than WhatsApp displays) and might *automatically* read single words or fragments that can reveal narrative details.

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93 | Cf. on the media conditions for net authors and internet users Döhl: »Vom Computertext zur Netzkunst« (ref. 17), here p. 41.

94 | Roland Reuss: »Die Mitarbeit des Schriftbildes am Sinn. Das Buch und seine Typografie in Zeiten der Hypnose«. In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* from February 2, 2011. [https://www.nzz.ch/die\\_mitarbeit\\_des\\_schriftbildes\\_am\\_sinn-1.9331415](https://www.nzz.ch/die_mitarbeit_des_schriftbildes_am_sinn-1.9331415) (accessed January 31, 2022).

95 | WhatsApp can also be installed as a program for PC browsers and devices with large-format screens.



In the created chapter structure and the publication as a classic novel, the basic orientation towards the book format becomes evident. However, text access is not provided through a medium that is used solely for reading, as is the case with the eBook reader. Readers cannot set bookmarks; they can only mark individual messages which are then displayed in a separate folder. Orientation in the text is not facilitated in this way. In addition, readers cannot jump back and forth in the text or forward to the end without scrolling through the entire text. Navigating by using the keyword search requires knowledge of the term one is looking for. While reading the device is not operated by buttons specifically reserved for reading, but rather via the input interface, which controls all the functions practicable on the device. The navigation architecture on the website and in the mail program is multidimensional, as readers can move vertically and horizontally in the body of the text. The chat structures in WhatsApp, in which the content is made accessible by moving up and down, are one-dimensional. Depending on the screen size, the content of a chapter extends beyond the visible field of the smartphone's display. To continue with the text, there occurs the repeated affordance of scrolling in all three formats and thus creates at least technical immersion if not playful immersion.

Readers have no decision-making power over text navigation and sequential display. The choice of text access is given through the choice of communication channels (website, email, WhatsApp). There the typography of the text can be gradually changed via the input fields of the device. Font size and color, as well as the background of the e-mail inbox can be set individually on most devices. Readers also have the option of copying the text passages and pasting them at a different location, an option that applies to almost every digital and digitized text.

While the subtle and barely structured design of the text promotes *linear* reading, the reading medium itself evokes *selective* and *multimedia* reading. Due to the simultaneity of the applications, texts are displayed in parallel, which are then read *selectively* or *centrifugally* in the event of a program change. The notifications and signals from different programs act as affordances for readers, whose attention is repeatedly drawn away from the currently received text while reading. The digital-technological requirements of the device lead to the reader's exposure to a broader range of offers and, consequently, a wide range of distractions. The disruptions lead to an increase in attention,<sup>96</sup> which enables *linear* reading on multimedia reading devices within the framework of increased media competence and practice.

## 5. Conclusion

The positioning of the digital reading practice between content-related involvement and playful immersion results not least from the media-technological possibilities. The range of reading options is becoming more diverse: in addition to print products, texts are available on various screens. Digital reading media offer more interactive elements, requests to change media through »migratory cues«<sup>97</sup> and expansions with *second screens* that challenge the reader's attention. The non-linear branching structures encourage readers to actively participate in narrative composition and encourage playful immersion, even if their agency is only an illusion.

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96 | See Matussek: »Aufmerksamkeitsstörungen« (ref. 66).

97 | Marc Ruppel: »Narrative Convergence, Cross-Sited Productions and the Archival Dilemma«. In: *Convergence: The International Journal of Research Into New Media Technologies* 15.3 (2009), pp. 281–298.



The fact that digital texts are code-based gives them a high degree of flexibility in presentation and a wide range of functions. The reading practice therefore develops in two directions: on one hand, to a fleeting practice, and on the other hand, to an intense activity. However, these poles are not tied to specific reading media. It is possible to read a bound novel incompletely and fleetingly. It is also possible to read a long text on the smartphone in a concentrated manner. Digital reading is nevertheless more influenced by affordances than analog reading.

The significant factor is the stability of the media usage and reading strategies learned by the readers. In addition to the basic ability to read, which means deciphering characters and understanding their meanings, digital readers are required to have additional skills. The term *digital literacy* describes the entirety of this know-how, which includes the alphabetical level, the media-technological access level, the text-structural usage level, as well as the knowledge of the *digitality*—the digital being of digital texts.<sup>98</sup>

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98 | More on this in the forthcoming publication cf. Wilke: *Digital Lesen* (ref. 66).

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