

# Echoing: A Theory of the Audiobook

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Audiobooks exercise enormous influence on both the economy and the phenomenology of contemporary literature. As publishers increasingly work to turn texts into recordings, and listeners increasingly read by listening, the nature of the literary event has changed. The ubiquity of the audiobook has given rise to a new set of structures, roles, and reading experiences in the literary field. In this presentation we focus on one such role, the narrator, and the new kind of intertextuality created as readers re-encounter narrators from one text to another. When a reader listens to Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* (2012), Ottessa Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* (2018), and Rebecca Makkai's *I Have Some Questions for You* (2023)—all performed by prolific narrator Julia Whelan—the three texts, their authors, and their genres become suddenly porous to one another. On the page, we might call this “intertextuality”; on the stage, Marvin Carlson has labeled a similar effect “ghosting.” Overlapping with these concepts, but diverging significantly, the narrator function creates an effect that we refer to as “echoing,” a new form of intertextual affiliation born out of the labor conditions, sociological forces, and reading practices of the contemporary audiobook. This presentation examines echoing at work in the narration of Whelan and Edoardo Ballerini—who has given voice to Franz Kafka, Karl Ove Knausgaard, Dean Koontz, L. Ron Hubbard, and Thích Nhất Hạnh—offering a new theory of the audiobook at a moment in which it is ascendant.

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