

Reading Audiobook Platforms: infrastructure, algorithms and corroded cultural environments

Montag, 17. November 2025 09:20 (20 Minuten)

Audiobooks are accessed through interconnected platforms and interfaces, generating infrastructural entanglements between stakeholders in the production, circulation and reception of books in audio formats. The nested and interconnected platforms, whether Amazon's Audible, Overdrive's Libby, Spotify, Librivox or other services, offer different infrastructural characteristics that influence the experience and interpretation of the books. Beyond the digital materiality of the audiobook, the platforms in which the files are housed, with their in-browser and in-app environments augment the reading experiences and stakeholder interactions. The infrastructural and interface environments of audiobook reading are not neutral. James Smithies argues that "infrastructures are dynamic and sociopolitically contested" presenting "an additional layer of interpretative complexity because of their combination of technical as well as sociopolitical (and perhaps aesthetic) complexity" (2017, p. 113). Meanwhile, in looking at music streaming, Hesmondhalgh et al (2023) have argued that where once digital platforms enabled "the democratising and emancipatory possibilities afforded by the (always partial) commons-based open-ness of internet infrastructure", that is no longer the case. This aligns with what Cory Doctorow calls "enshittification" and "the decay of online platforms" (2025). Doctorow describes his own experiences as a writer seeking to balance readers' needs with authors' rights in the context of some publishers' increasing exploitation of both.

This interdisciplinary paper draws on publishing studies, digital humanities, platform studies and cultural policy studies to consider the layers of interpretive complexity through which readers experience the cultural artefact of the audiobook. The paper provides a reading of the infrastructures and interfaces of cultural platforms, and contributes to the growing platform analyses of digital audiobook environments and the social, political and cultural contexts in which they are framed. In exploring the infrastructure of platforms such as Audible, Libby, and Librivox, this paper seeks to uncover the tensions between reading experience and platform decay.

Bio notes:

Rebekah Badcock is a doctoral candidate in the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at Flinders University in South Australia. Her research considers the effect of recommendation algorithms on publishers, authors, and readers through digital platforms and what this might mean for the future of the book.

Tully Barnett is Associate Professor in Creative Industries at Flinders University. She is an interdisciplinary researcher with a focus on arts and cultural policy and digital humanities approaches to cultural work in digital environments. Her research on digital cultural spheres considers digitization as a cultural practice and the platforms through which digital and digitized cultural labour is made available as socio-technocultural assemblages. For this work, she was recipient of an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award. Tully is serving as Vice President of the Australasian Association for Digital Humanities and in 2024-2025 is serving on the UNESCO reflection group on the diversity of cultural expressions in the digital environment.

Hauptautoren: Frau BADCOCK, Rebekah (Flinders University); BARNETT, Tully (Flinders University)

Vortragende: Frau BADCOCK, Rebekah (Flinders University); BARNETT, Tully (Flinders University)

Sitzung Einordnung: Platformed Production and Reception