

## The Day We Were Dogs: Mental Vulnerability, Shared Reading, and Moments of Transformation

Charlotte Etrup Christiansen   
Anne Line Dalsgård 

**Abstract** This article builds on ethnographic fieldwork in shared reading groups for mentally vulnerable young people in Denmark. Shared reading is a technique in which prose and poetry are read aloud with breaks, allowing time for discussion. It is increasingly used in Denmark for mental health improvement. In our analysis, we employ Louise Rosenblatt's notion of the poem as event and the concept of *Stimmung* coined by the literary scholar Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. Drawing on detailed examples from reading group sessions and interviews, we show how participants tuned into an atmosphere of presence that arose from the collective engagement in a literary text. Such moments of presence were significant events for the participants, whose everyday lives otherwise were marked by mental illness and a sense of being different from others. The transformation on which this article focuses relates to the brief disappearance of the troubling sense of self with which the young people had to contend daily. [youth, reading, mental vulnerability, atmosphere, momentary transformation]

Then ...

Yes ...

(silence)

You can't control anything ...

Mhm

You're really ... vulnerable, right?

Yeah ...

Yes ...

Mhm

(silence)

(Transcript from a shared reading group, Copenhagen, May 2019)

Young people suffering from mental illness often need to invest a great deal of effort to establish an everyday life resembling that of their peers. Anxiety, deep depression, or

inner voices disturb their wishes to study, work, find a partner, and build a family. How can reading literature ever make a difference, when obstacles are so intense? This article attempts to provide at least part of an answer. Drawing on fieldwork in shared reading groups for mentally vulnerable young people, we explain how shared reading of literature provided an opportunity for the participants to shed their familiar narrative selves and briefly tune into the collective atmosphere that filled the room and permeated their bodies. This atmosphere was generated not only by subtle indications of attentiveness and emotional support among the participants but also by the words and silences in the texts they read. By describing this effect of shared reading, aided by existing research on the subject (including Dowrick et al. 2012; Longden et al. 2015; Billington 2019; Skjerdingsstad and Tangerås 2019; Steenberg et al. 2021), we aim to add empirically both to anthropological studies on reading and to discussions of the therapeutic effects of the practice for mental health.

We derive analytical inspiration from outside anthropology, in literary studies. In particular, we draw on the work of a pioneer within reader-response theory, Rosenblatt (1964), who argues in “The Poem as Event” that a poem functions “like a chemical element” and becomes alive only when read. But contrary to most reader-response theory, which focuses on the solitary reader’s experience of a literary work, we look at groups of people reading together and the particular atmosphere arising from this practice. Rather than being interested in their individual experiences of the texts, we explore the moment of reading and its reverberations. Our analysis of the emerging atmosphere (or *Stimmung*) owes much to literary scholar Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht.

As a backdrop to our exploration of the moment, we are also interested in the temporality of shared reading experiences. This interest links up to studies of narratives and narrative selfhood, which flourished in the last decades of the last century, also in this journal (see, e.g., White 2000; Mattingly 2001; Vanthuyne 2003; Mattingly, Lutkehaus, and Throop 2008). A central point in this narrative turn was that inscribing events and small plots into coherent stories is a basic human meaning-making act, an act also central to our constitution of self (Bruner 1986, 1990; Ricœur 1992; Ochs and Capps 1996; Mattingly, Lutkehaus, and Throop 2008). Bruner argued that inherent in the structuring of narratives is the realization that things could have taken a different turn (1986, 29), and Mattingly (1998) has shown how the “emplotment” of particular actions into desired narratives can play a healing role in therapeutic settings. Both insights may be relevant to the understanding of our interlocutors’ lives and to their interweaving with the literary narratives read in the groups. But what stands forth in our ethnographic material are not the meaning-making effects of these literary narratives or how they were interpreted in the light of personal life stories. Although our analysis implicitly draws on previous discussions on the self in anthropology (among others Csordas 1990; Ewing 1990) and acknowledges the embodied sense of self as constituted diachronically in social and cultural contexts, we here turn toward experiences of co-presence and synchronicity with others in the shared reading.

Inspired by earlier discussions of narrative among performative theorists, we look at the “doing” of the literary narratives: their “creation of presence” (Schieffelin 1996, 59; see also

Smith 1980). We argue that, although the narrative trajectories of the participants were dominated by mental illness and unwanted senses of self, for a moment they could forget these narratives in the atmosphere of the reading group. While sitting together, with texts, coffee, tea, fruit, and sweets on the table, while the day drew to a close outside, the importance of past and future loosened its grip. This article contributes analytically to this special issue by focusing on such experiences of momentary transformation.

## The Anthropology of Reading and Literature

There is a long tradition within anthropology of describing the effects of introducing literacy into societies. Producing and using texts allows societies to contain and transport knowledge (Goody 1987) and share imaginaries (Anderson 1991) on much grander scales than in oral communities. More specific studies of different forms of reading have been conducted since the 1980s. Boyarin's influential volume *Ethnography of Reading* primarily comprised studies of readings of "important" texts, such as the Talmud or literature, as opposed to everyday readings of the newspaper, mail, or other routine stuff (1993, 7). This tendency has marked later ethnographic reading studies, for example, studies of the Bible (Bielo 2009) or literary fiction (Radway 1997; Long 2003; Reed 2011). These studies have clarified that reading is not one homogenous practice, but exists in a myriad of changing shapes and settings, which open interesting questions for anthropologists to explore. One example of a recent development is the rapid, worldwide increase of digital text reading (see Allington and Pihlaja 2016). However, the ethnography of reading and literature is still underdeveloped (Rosen 2015; Reed 2018, 34). In his recent review article, Reed calls for further studies of reading, in particular on character reading, and studies "contemplating the kind of time that reading invokes or actually enacts" (2018, 41). This article answers the latter call.

Literature is a medium for exploring subjective temporalities. Narrative, poetic presence, and biography are well-known elements of literary texts, where fiction writers permit themselves to write out other (fictional) people's subjective worlds, their secret lives, and private imaginaries (Rapport 2008, 335). Our fieldwork in shared reading allowed us to begin to investigate the subjective domains laid bare in literary writing, together with our informants. We primarily participated in the reading groups to learn more about the reading groups per se, but reading together also allows a rather intimate insight into participants' thoughts as well as their lives outside the group. As Billington writes about research on shared reading in the United Kingdom: "Shared Reading aloud is the nearest we have for research into private acts of thinking made live during reading, not least because, as we will see, the private emerges within a group made unusually intimate by the presence of the poem or book" (2019, 4). In this way, shared reading may also serve as a point of entry rather than an empirical object in itself (see also Rosen 2019, for a similar observation). In addition, ethnographic studies of reading interventions for mental health can deepen our understanding of context and the effects of interventions more generally within the growing field of arts and health.

An examination of the mechanisms of literary reading is currently taking place within empirical literature research and is dominated by a cognitive and a phenomenological approach.

Cognitive empirical reading research assumes that literature through simulation constitutes a privileged, social learning space that enables readers to achieve incremental personal change on their own terms (Oatley 2012). The effect of literature on pro-sociality, that is, behavior intended to benefit others (Mar et al. 2006; Peskin, Mar, and Bischoff 2009; Johnson 2011; Bal and Veltkamp 2013), and the possible mechanisms (e.g., mentalization, the capacity to understand one's own and others' behavior) that govern this, are being examined. Within these studies, the concomitant therapeutic effects of reading literature have been ascribed to mechanisms, such as mirroring, which enhance self-reflection and empathic understanding (Mar and Oatley 2008). Also under the rubric of bibliotherapy, research indicates that a positive mirroring between lived narrative and textual narratives help readers to process emotional issues (Schechtman 2006, 645–46; Brewster 2018, 46; Troscianko 2018, 209).

The phenomenological reader-response-inspired branch of empirical reading research, on the other hand, draws on Rosenblatt's (1978) definition of literary reading as a "living through" of the content of a text. On this background, these studies argue that the literary experience itself is the mediating factor for the emotional transformation of the self that may take place in literature reading (Miall and Kuiken 2002; Kuiken, Miall, and Sikora 2004). Adding to this, our research suggests that instead of relating the stories of literary characters to their own, it may be just as helpful for readers to abandon the narratives of self (and others) with which they live on an everyday basis, and tune affectively into the text and the setting in which they are reading.

### **Conducting Research in Shared Reading Groups**

The groups in focus here met once a week. For an hour and a half, the group participants (often five or six) engaged in the reading aloud of literary texts (prose and poetry) and shared reflections, mediated by a facilitator. The sessions we observed were structured more or less in the same way each time: participants would arrive, often with little small talk, we would find our places around the table, where beverages and sweets were provided, and the reading facilitator would read the text aloud and then pause for reflection. Indeterminacies in the text, or narrative "gaps" (Iser 1972), would make us stop and think, and fumbling speech and what might be called emergent thinking (Longden et al. 2015, 3; see also Steenberg et al. 2021) would slowly begin. In the long silences or while expressing something more intimate, we would look down to our photocopied texts, or perhaps out of a window. As noted in shared reading groups in another context: "having the text in front makes it easy to regulate eye contact, as it is perfectly legitimate to look down and concentrate on the text, and there is no pressure to say anything" (Skjerdingsstad and Tangerås 2019, 6).

Previous research indicates that shared reading both generates a sense of social community and promotes individual processes of change (Dowrick et al. 2012; Billington, Davis, and Farrington 2013; Steenberg, Bräuner, and Wallot 2014; Longden et al. 2015; Steenberg 2016). Specifically, it has been reported that shared reading has healing effects and the potential to alleviate depression and anxiety as well as creating existential meaningfulness and well-being.

The literary content, how reading is organized, and social group processes have all been identified as components of this positive process. In this article, we recognize what Longden et al. (2015) describe as the “doing” of a text in shared reading. Our article contributes to existing research on shared reading by providing ethnographic insight into the everyday lives of the participants, as well as data obtained from participant observation in reading groups over lengthy periods of time. The article also analytically unfolds the temporal relationship between reading group sessions and everyday life and puts previously observed processes of change into perspective.

Our data stem from participant observation in two reading groups and from individual and group interviews with 24 participants over an 18-month period.<sup>2</sup> The participants were diverse in age, social background, and mental health, and the article’s kaleidoscopic representation of their perspectives may seem overwhelming. However, we consider the exchange and momentary confluence of perspectives a strength of this particular reading method (see also Christiansen 2021b) and we have wished to mirror both diversity and confluence in our style of representation. Thus, the reader meets the individual participants including us, the researchers, as representatives of possible viewpoints.

Being present while observing in our case involved sitting in the groups with the reading facilitator and the participants, engaging ourselves in the reading. Participating in the groups has led to understanding of the nonspoken elements of the interaction. We have been present in the silences that sometimes occurred and from this we know how silence could be so comforting to be part of. As could laughter, the sense of release when someone told a joke, and the way we allowed ourselves to move closer together when bodies relaxed and the atmosphere became sweeter. And we have been present when, from the vibration of a voice, we all understood how painful life could be. This made us attend to affective aspects of experience when we interviewed the group participants.

Atmospheres are ephemeral phenomena, fleeting in time and difficult to prove empirically. We voice-recorded the sessions and made our notes afterward (see an edited selection of these in Christiansen 2021a). In addition, in interviews with participants, we always asked for significant experiences in the group and often referred to specific situations. Like in the interview excerpt below, we asked, “how do you know you share the experience with others?” and got the same answer, as we ourselves found: the others nod, say “mhm,” or you just feel their presence. But one might well ask, as Bille, Bjerregaard, and Sørensen do, if our methodological means of approaching atmospheres—and our language for representing them—are adequate (2015, 33). In the edited volume *Exploring Atmospheres Ethnographically*, Schroer and Schmitt state that “[m]ore than any other concept, atmosphere helps us to grasp the ethnographer’s position as both a maker and perceiver, (mis)interpreter and co-creator of atmospheric worlds,” and they argue for the writing of “thick and vivid ethnography” as a way of cultivating sensitivity and attention to atmospheres in the field (2018, 6). We have tried to do so.

The following is a description of a reading session based on notes, because the recorder was not working on this day, from the reading group Dalsgård participated in, and thus her telling. It describes her experience of participation, but it also does more than that: It introduces the idea of two days in one, a notion of temporal duality that we use as analytical grip in this article. The text was a short story by the Mexican writer Garro (2015).<sup>3</sup>

## The Day We Were Dogs

This particular day I arrived a bit late. I came from the city center, walking over the bridge. The delay was due to a strike among the train drivers, which caused my train to stand still for some time. The others were sitting around the table when I arrived. Anna with her back to the door, Mathias along the side of the table on her right-hand side. His gaze was alert, but otherwise the disturbing voices in his head were invisible. On Anna's left, Frida was sitting on the front edge of her chair; I could not see why. Asta was sitting next to Frida, and the new participant (whose name I did not remember) opposite to Asta. Asta read, stopped from time to time, and asked questions. The rest of us followed the reading in our own texts:

The day we were dogs was not just any day, although it began like every other day ...

We woke up at six in the morning, and immediately noticed that it was a day with two days in one.

The story was weird. We could not really locate it. I said something about "in the South" because the word "patio" appeared. And there were servants, afternoon heat, beans, and rice. Men in white clothes and hats made of palm leaves. No narrative transparency, no time and place mentioned. Just two girls:

Eva was lying on her back when she opened her eyes; and without changing her position, she looked first at one day and then at the other. I myself had been awake for a while already, and lay looking at her so I didn't have to look at the endless, empty house. Why hadn't we gone into town with the others?

The grown-ups had left the girls behind. No one was looking after them, and soon they went to the courtyard and laid down next to the dog Toni. Later there were gunshots from the street, first one, then another. The girls were dogs now. They ran out and sat on the curb and watched the men fighting. Both men were bleeding. One had a gun, the other knelt. The sound of the shot that penetrated the forehead of the man kneeling. The dogs saw him falling back, lying there, looking at the sky. Silence now:

A fly leaned over the wound on his forehead, then washed its legs and walked up to his hair. A little later, it returned to his forehead, looked down in the wound, and washed its legs again. Just as the fly got back to the wound, a woman turned up and threw herself over the dead man. He didn't care about the fly or the woman – he just went on staring indifferently at the sky.

Later, at night, the girls were afraid. In their beds, overwhelmed by fear, they felt alone. When Asta finished the reading, we all talked, tentatively and searching. About feeling that you are on the fringes of other people's lives; about observing without acting; about boring Sundays which the grown-ups tell you are healthy; about how indifference (*lige glad*) means being never glad (*aldrig glad*); about being left behind; and about having two days in one. Afterward the poem beginning with the words: "The grass seems strangely tall to me/As I lie here nose to the ground." We thought that it was about dying. About considering death and then still clinging onto life, joyously. I let my thoughts drift. I thought of a young man who I had known well when he was a child. He was killed by a train the other day, after a period of mental illness, and no one knew whether it was suicide or an accident. They would never be able to tell. The moment melted into the feeling of sitting there on the curb in the stagnant afternoon heat and watching two men fight. Which melted into the smell of soil and warm grass. Which became a question without answer. Which became a warmth in your body and a joy of sitting here together. Outside time. Listening.

### **A Life beside Others**

The atmosphere in the reading group, this sense of presence and timelessness, was a contrast to the participants' everyday lives. Their life narratives were dominated by the onset of mental illness and by "falling," as some of them described the very painful moments when they had to surrender responsibility for their own lives and let the mental health system and medicine take over.

All the participants in the two groups identified themselves with the term "mentally vulnerable," as this was how the groups were announced. The term "mental vulnerability" appeared frequently in the Danish media and public debate, during our fieldwork, where young people's mental health was a recurring concern. However, it was used more frequently in social work than in healthcare institutions (see Christiansen 2020, for a detailed treatment of "mental vulnerability"). The term denotes a state of both social and mental health marginalization, and social workers typically use it to signify people not given a specific diagnosis, but who do need special consideration in their workplace or educational institution (interview with case worker, Aarhus). However, the term is somewhat diffuse and flexible. It is used for people able to perform everyday activities, but not thriving mentally, as well as for people in the psychiatric system with diagnoses such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

The reading group participants fell into various categories. Some were on sick leave and covered by an unemployment insurance scheme, while others were living on basic unemployment benefit. If they were under 30, they might be living on a student grant; while others would be involved in a process of rehabilitation to return to the labor market. The Danish welfare state provides for people who cannot provide for themselves. It has a variety of rules and regulations governing this area of the welfare state. In cooperation with the local job center, other municipal bodies and health professionals, the persons concerned have to decide when they are fit enough to take on a job or start a course of education.

Danish social policies focus increasingly on job market integration (Ministry of Employment 2019). Similarly, within the psychiatric system, recovery has become a primary ideology since the 2000s. This ideology often entails a focus on dynamic development for psychiatric patients, leading ultimately to financial independence (Rahbæk and Johansen 2015, 69–70). If a social worker and a client agree that the person concerned is not ready to take on employment or education yet, due to mental or physical illness, they work together to achieve this goal, for example, by attending psychoeducation classes or doing internships. If they conclude after a lengthy rehabilitation process (often lasting several years) that the person concerned is incapable of taking employment or starting a course of education, she may be granted early retirement benefits for the rest of her life. In Denmark, early retirement benefits granted owing to diagnosed anxiety increased by 51% during the period 2013–2016, although consecutive governments have tried to counteract this development (Bræmer 2017).

The participants in the reading groups ranged in terms of age between the mid-twenties and mid-thirties, but still regarded themselves as young. Some saw themselves as temporally displaced from their peers. They had come to a halt, for a brief or longer period of time, while many of their peers were studying, or building a family. This was, after all, the stage of life when studying, marrying, and having children are regarded as the norm in Denmark. For instance, in 2018 the average age of Danish women giving birth to their first child was 29.3 (Danmarks Statistik 2021). In our interviews, we heard statements such as

People with mental illness often have a displaced relationship to their age. They are young for a longer period in their lives. If you have been in a psychiatric ward for five years, and you come out when you are 30, it's not like you don't need to live those five years of youth anymore. You still need those years of youth, so when you're 30, you act like you're 25.

(Volunteer in a mental health NGO, diagnosed with bipolar disorder)

I try to do something about the feeling that time is running out for me. All the things I had imagined for myself, a family, children, a job, have just not materialized. And now I'm in my thirties.

(Reading group participant, 31 years old)

[The school] will always advise against saying something about your diagnosis. You must never mention it. But then I have a hole in my resume. If I don't mention [my illness], it just seems like I've been watching Netflix.

(Reading group participant, 32 years old)

It's funny because there are things that [my friends] just take for granted, for example, something like becoming parents, they never questioned it, they just want to ... it's the kind of thing where I think 'gosh, I want that too' ... it's just such a great privilege.

(Reading group participant, 27 years old)

An experience of desynchronization with the expected life of your age group is not specific to our interlocutors. Dalsgård knows it well from urban Brazil, where young people from



poor family backgrounds struggle to fit into the definition of an adult person (Dalsgaard [Dalsgård], Franch, and Scott 2008), and the anthropological youth literature is generally full of such cases (Christiansen, Utas, and Vigh 2006; Hansen et al. 2008; Jeffrey 2010; Amit and Dyck 2011; Frederiksen 2013). However, people in the category “mentally vulnerable” may feel they have a different *self*, deviating from dominant ideas about what a self should be (see also Vanthuyne 2003). They may hear voices, become depressed for long periods of time, suffer from paralyzing anxiety or mental and bodily fatigue—all experiences that make it difficult to cope with the demands of further education or employment.

However, beyond sharing this lack of synchronicity with the life trajectories of others, the reading group participants varied a great deal in terms of their life situations and backgrounds. These three cases taken from recorded interviews with participants illustrate this gap<sup>4</sup>:

Caroline, 34 years old:

She had been on social benefits and various schemes preparing her for the labor market since she was 18 years old, but had not yet found her place in life. She had also been diagnosed with different and changing conditions, such as personality disorder, and later ADD. Her general practitioner thought that Caroline had a lower level of dopamine than other people. A social worker had been allocated to her, visiting her in her two-room apartment every week to help her gain structure. When Caroline began in the group, she was relatively lonely and missed having a social network. After some months she got a boyfriend, but this relationship spiraled out of control, and they had a dramatic breakup on Caroline’s initiative. At the time of the breakup, she was trying to sort out her diagnosis, her job, and her love life—as well as considering sterilization. She saw several friends, but that became stressful, and she tried to cut down contact. Then she saw another boyfriend, but found it hard to maintain her own space. It was as if she oscillated between too much and too little connection with other people—an oscillation not completely under her own control.

Tina, 26 years old:

She saw a loved person die when she was 10 years old. “Right there in front of me,” as she described it. Afterward, Tina got psychological problems and withdrew into isolation, unable to relate to others. When we met her, she suffered from anxiety and occasional hypomania, with too many thoughts in her head, which scared her. She used to see a psychiatrist, but this dragged her down. She summarized her present situation:

I am at the stage in life when I know a lot about myself and my problems. I don’t need a professional. I may not be able to do what is needed, but I know what I should be doing [...] I start with an episode of hypomania, when I am too happy. I feel it inside my head, I get very confused to talk to. From there to a depressive episode, I lose all logic, can’t have it inside my head at all. The thoughts queue up and press forward, and I can only think one at a time. Lately I’ve had suicidal thoughts, but I wouldn’t ... that’s why I had to get better. When I go down, I can get a lot of headaches, my body gets heavy, sometimes I

forget to eat but [there is] nothing else to do but give it time, and then I come up again. I know it, I've had it so often.

Maria, 28 years old:

She suffered from severe winter depression, which prevented her from working or studying for around four months. From the very beginning, she had a bad time at school. She got worse and worse, and when she was about 13 years old, she stopped going to school because of depression and anxiety. "Everything possible," as she said herself. She was bullied a lot. Over time, she had been diagnosed with numerous diagnoses, and she was told that she was "a complex person." The time she spent going to see doctors was exhausting. Lately she had been told she had Asperger's. It made her sad. She was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder when she was 15 years old, and it is possible to recover from this diagnosis. But Asperger's is for life. As she herself said:

I'll always have challenges. I'm just who I am, and that's how it is. I want to get some help, some intensive help that can benefit my life. I want a job, education, family. I have a normal intelligence, if not high, but I can't do any of these things right now because I don't feel well. I want to escape from the situation of never doing anything, but it's hard to get a job when you're off sick for four months every year.

The participants in the reading groups had all been through psychiatric medical clearance, perhaps multiple times, and several had more than one diagnosis. They had been sitting alone with a doctor or therapist, or in groups with peers, talking about themselves and their suffering. They sometimes needed others to tell them that they were ill or help them discover how to deal with it. "Because I can't feel it . I tell myself that I'm well," as Miriam said. She had learned that when she began to count calories and avoid eating with other people, this was a warning—a sign that she was on her way down. But she could not trust herself completely. As she said to Christiansen: "Do you drink wine because you enjoy life, or are you actually suppressing pain?" She knew her pain only in retrospect. Looking back, she said: "A year ago, I didn't trust anyone, wasn't sure that people wished me well, felt uncertain all the time."

In the uncertainty of what to trust, a stable self-narrative can be difficult to maintain. Here diagnostic categories may offer help for psychiatric patients in providing a discursive model for understanding who they were, who they are now, and how they can handle the future (Larsen 2005). But as Miriam said: "It is still difficult to get people to understand a mental disorder, because it is invisible compared to having broken a leg. Okay, anorexia may be obvious, but depression, for example, is not. So, people may say something like 'pull yourself together!'" This was why the reading group participants generally appreciated that the group was for mentally vulnerable people, so they needed not explain their conditions to anyone. It was simply understood. As 27-year-old Anna said:

We didn't talk about it, but we knew we had in common that we struggle with certain things [...] Someone put something into words, and I thought: "Yes, that was nice because I have thought or felt it, too." But also just to see [she hesitates] that they had something to offer [lowers her voice]. Then you see that you yourself also have something

to offer. Because when you have these problems, you aren't necessarily unintelligent or anything like that. You could hear that wasn't the case with the other participants. It felt good.

## An Event in Time

In the complexity of temporalities and spaces that everyday life offered each one of us, the reading group stood apart. Connections to the rest of life were unintended, as when participants ran into each other in the street, or spontaneously found a text at home and remembered reading it with the group. They barely knew each other's names. No diagnoses or illness narratives had been shared beforehand. Although certain facts could be divined from the exchanges that took place in the group, the only information participants had about each other was that they had all signed up as mentally vulnerable young people. As one participant explained (Yvonne):

It has been interesting, this fact that I barely knew what people's names were. I mean, it has been a slightly mysterious way to meet people, when you had no idea what they were really called, but... when I've met them in town, I've said hi, and people have asked who are they, and then I'd say well, I actually don't know their names. I just meet with them on Tuesdays! (laughs). Very funny. But I think it's very nice also because you know that you have something in common in some way. We might come from some of the same thoughts, or from somewhere. I think that has been... very interesting.

The participants enjoyed reading texts that were not particularly related to their situation and engaging in an activity which could be for anyone—not necessarily just “mentally vulnerable” people. While the texts did not focus in particular on situations comparable to their own, the participants often found aspects of the lives described which resonated with their own situation and gave them the opportunity to say something about themselves. However, diagnoses were not normally mentioned. One participant found that telling people about a diagnosis would distinguish him from the others, while what was needed was identifying himself with the group: “It becomes a way of identifying myself, when I need to say [my diagnosis] out loud. It's annoying. You're focusing on yourself instead of focusing on the group” (Matthias).

After a group session, one could linger on what was said and whether people liked one's company, because as one participant, Anna, said: “That hasn't got to do with the group and the others, it just happens every time you are with people.” But as she also continued, the only thing she knew for sure in this group was that everyone was participating voluntarily and could simply stay away if they did not like the company.<sup>5</sup> Although some had left, many participants stayed in the group, and we (and Anna) concluded that their pleasure in participating was stronger than their self-criticism or discontent.

What carried the most potential for a transformative experience here, lay in the dual temporality of the self: the self in narrative time, where participants had a sense of who they were, with a past and a future (Ricoeur 1992), and the open responsive self, who

for a moment forgot this identity and allowed itself to be permeated by the atmosphere. This atmosphere, we found, emerged between the text, the readers, and the physical environment. Rosenblatt defined text and poem as separate phenomena. The poem, to Rosenblatt, is not inherent in the text itself, but emerges when a reader engages in it: “The poem’ is what the reader, under the guidance of the text, crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, image, thought, and feeling which he brings to it” (1964, 126). The poem, as well as other literary genres, is thus the lived-through literary experience guided by the specific pattern of words in a text; and the literary experience happens as an “event in time” (Rosenblatt 1964, 126). This event is an “intensely complex and evanescent web of ideas, feelings, sensations, attitudes,” which the reader weaves between himself and the words on the page (Rosenblatt 1964, 128). Thus, following Rosenblatt, literary works do not exist in and for themselves, but are actualized by readers’ creative engagement in them. This engagement also means that the literary experience a specific text provides is not predictable; an idea that was supported in our fieldwork because the same texts were often read differently in the two groups. The literary experience that Rosenblatt describes can be said to be “broadened” in shared reading, which involves a group of people rather than solitary individuals.

From Rosenblatt, we derive the idea that a literary work stands out as a delimited event. Similarly, the reading sessions we participated in stood out as gaps in time in which the participants encountered very few demands, besides the expectation they would engage in the text of the day and respond to the words (and silences) of the other members of the group. These statements are typical of the comments made in our interviews:

You get happy from being in the reading group, because you shared a feeling. You did not just have it for yourself, as when you read something at home.

(Caroline)

There are several times I haven’t been there because I wasn’t feeling well. At first it was a bit hard. But I think it developed into the highlight of my week. It’s been so cozy. A breathing space. Free space. It was difficult to concentrate [on the reading], but just being there...

(Bea)

It’s nice to have a community where the others have something as well. I don’t know what the others have. But [the group] is for the mentally vulnerable. And it’s nice to sit in a room and say that there is enough room for all of us, and we feel as we do. Then we also have something to talk about which is not just that. I think that’s nice.

(Maria)

I like to be introduced to different kinds of literature, really good. (...) Sometimes I remember dialogues we have had, left feeling happy, sometimes afterwards I can beat myself up, but I have never left in a bad mood.

(Mathias)

For some participants, the reading group was their only social event in the week. Others, for example Miriam, had an almost full schedule except on Tuesday evenings, when she prioritized the reading group. Miriam's reason for joining the group is illuminating in this context: she started in the group after recognizing that she needed to do something pointless in her life, something that was just about enjoying what literature could give, without any goals. Reading, both by herself and in the group, provided moments of happiness that disappeared again quickly. Reading therefore did not have the same direct effect as therapy, she found: "It's an escape when I read literature." Normally, she would do a lot of things which "in sum" should make her happy, such as seeing friends and exercising. "I've been so rational for so many years," she explained. But she had realized that happiness was not something you could achieve once and for all, nor the result of a mathematical calculation: "[happiness] happens in the gray space," she said, "where things are neither black nor white." And for Miriam, shared reading constituted such a gray space. She described it as "a lot of things humming" without any particular answer.

In a Danish context, meeting up in a peer group to discuss your suffering is not unusual, and group therapy was often part of psychiatric treatment for the participants. Some of them took courses in psychoeducation, learning about their illness and how to handle it, together with their peers. Some went to groups for people who struggled with loneliness, others to grief support groups or support groups for children of alcoholics. Ideas about the effectiveness of the peer-structured group are typically based on the premise that the helpers and the ones needing help share a background and experiences, which is supposed to give more credibility, positive role models, and empowerment (Green 2001). However, the uncertainty and open surrender to a literary work in the reading group allowed for a momentary transformation, which a more focused, instrumental group process does not permit. Simply because the latter is part of your narrative self, imbued with illness, while in the atmosphere of the reading group, participants could forget this identity for a while.

### **Moments of Presence**

The atmosphere of the reading group was created by the way the participants tuned into the literary work and each other. As there was often no clear indication of what the texts were about, and as the texts were read as enigmatic (the facilitator asked questions while the text unfolds), they spurred many kinds of reactions and could be interpreted in various ways. The reading facilitator often stressed the dogma of shared reading, namely that "there are no right or wrong viewpoints", which encouraged a circling talk (or *humming*, as Miriam expressed it). When participants brought up experiences from their own lives, it served not only as information about themselves, but as contributions to the joint investigation of the text. This investigation was done with hand movements, silences, yes's, *hmms*, and stories about concrete situations.

As a reading facilitator, one is trained to make this happen. Facilitators are trained in choosing texts, reading aloud, showing openness through body language, and asking good questions.

The goal of a shared reading session is a joint experience of literature. Facilitators are taught how to make the text the focal point in the group and invite people to participate in a verbal exchange about it. The role that the reading facilitators Asta and Louise inhabited was thus important for the tuning in process (see also Steenberg et al. 2021). However, so were the texts. In his book, *Production of Presence*, literary scholar Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht proposes “presence,” and describes it as a state of being lost in focused aesthetic intensity (2004, 104). Drawing on Heidegger’s notion of *thrownness* (see Heidegger 1962, 174), Gumbrecht sees texts as always already in a relationship with our bodies: “Texts, as meaning realities and material realities, quite literally surround their readers, both physically and emotionally” (Gumbrecht 2008, 216). Before any interpretation or meaning arises, we touch them, and they touch us, in an all-encompassing mood, or as Gumbrecht writes, a *Stimmung*. In line with Rosenblatt, Gumbrecht does not see *Stimmung* as a feature of a text per se. Rather, he finds it in the moods or attunement that can emerge between a reader and the literary text. Another, slightly more inclusive word for the emerging *Stimmung* would be “atmosphere” (which is the term we have used here), defined by Böhme as an *interface*, or space “‘tinctured’ through the presence of things, of persons or environmental constellations” (Böhme 1993, 121). Neither objective nor subjective, the atmosphere is sensed in human bodies by filling the space with “a certain tone or feeling like a haze” (Böhme 1993, 114).

Like atmosphere *Stimmung* is not a singular emotion, but rather like a climate, weather, or music (Gumbrecht 2008, 215). Swedish poet Thomas Tranströmer, whom we read in one of the reading groups, pinpoints the light but all-encompassing quality of music in his poem “Allegro” (2011): “The music is a house of glass standing on a slope;/ rocks are flying, rocks are rolling./The rocks roll straight through the house/but every pane of glass is still whole,” and as we understand him, it is this penetration or “tincturing” of materiality that Gumbrecht is referring to. The texts we read in the groups made connections with their readers and among them; and whatever presence the texts constituted merged with the chocolate, tea, the afternoon light, bustling sounds of workers in the artist showroom next door, a young mother passing by the window facing the street, and, not least, the participants’ attention and emotional engagement. In the groups, we may have tried to interpret the stories, figure what was going on. But the atmosphere changed the moment someone was touched. As Anna said in an interview:

In a way you are trying to relate to the text in an objective, academic way. But it just makes so much more sense when you say something. These are also the texts you remember most clearly. It’s when telling other people a few things that something real is at stake, both for yourself and for others.

The tuning in developed through the resonances in the listening bodies. “How do you know you share the experience with others?” we inquired in one interview. “I think you know because we are all participating and listening and active. Everyone participates and provides input. I guess they nod (laughs). They nod as they listen. Some people, and I do this myself as well, space out sometimes. But you can still be part of it, even so”. Of course, not all texts produced this presence—some texts were just perceived as bland, the talk digressed and became unfocused. An example of attunement is presented below. This is an excerpt

from another reading of the poem, “Grass” (also mentioned previously). In this particular period, the two groups read the same texts, and this group therefore also read, “The day we were dogs” before reading “Grass”. The following is Christiansen’s account.

### **A Hall of Straw**

We met at 7 p.m. Lola and Bea early as usual. It was the beginning of November and already completely dark outside. The cold wind stayed in my body while we placed ourselves in the worn velour sofas. The small wooden tables were crammed with cups, cans, mint chocolate, and almonds. I sat opposite Miriam and noticed she was wearing less makeup, and sneakers instead of the high heels she wore the first time she participated. Perhaps she did not feel a need to dress up anymore? Caroline, Ida, and Sandra entered the room. Offhand they looked so different from each other, yet they met here, in downtown Aarhus, every Tuesday evening. Louise could begin to read:

The day we were dogs was not just any day, although it began like every other day ...

It was a weird story about two kids who have been left alone in a big mansion somewhere in the South. We did not say much. The discussion remained superficial and died out, and a nervous tenseness grew in my body. I was relieved when we got to the poem and the scene changed. Louise began to read it in her steady, staccato rhythm<sup>6</sup>:

The grass seems strangely tall to me

As I lie here nose to the ground

[...]

We listened, all focused on the solemn world of the text:

Inside the dawning halls of the straw

There is a voice that wakes up and calls

A rising ‘are you coming now?’

[...]

After reading, Louise asked if anyone wanted to read it again. “I can do it! I just need to finish chewing”, Caroline said, and we laughed. Caroline read the poem in a slightly softer rhythm, ending on:

But when my madness is over,

When my dreams of splendor are over,

Then I will come, then I will come

Then I will be small and happy enough.

Louise: Thanks

(silence)

Charlotte: mhm

(long silence)

Caroline: It might be something about the transition from adult to child, or no – from child to adult, that... there is a kind of... voice he needs to obey ... it wants him to follow but uhm... he's not ready for it.

Louise: (high pitched) mmmhghm

(silence)

Louise: Did anyone else think the same thing?

Bea suggested that he might not be growing up, but actually dying:

I thought... that... well ... I actually think that he is an adult and .... I actually thought that these “dawning halls of the straws” meant the earth was calling for him. I read death into it, but maybe it’s just me... reading some strange stuff into it?

Louise: mhm

Bea: But that’s just because he says that thing with... “when my madness is over, when my dreams of splendor are over, then I will come, then I will come”. It is like he’s ready to...

Louise: ooh (she dragged the sound)

Bea: ...die and be buried

Louise: Yes

Several: Aah

Bea: ...be put to rest

We started discussing life transitions and the age of the “I” in the poem. The discussion was lively now. Ida said she thought about ways of living humbly. That the poem might be the words of a poet who wished to give up on his writer’s career in the middle of his life. I recalled that Ida had been writing literature herself and I wondered if she saw herself in this poet. But like Bea, I was more struck by the lines: “But when my madness is over, when my dreams of splendor are over, then I will come...” I was convinced that the calling voice was a partner, a friend or a family member, and I wondered why I could never fully relax and just be with my loved ones. I kept it to myself, though, and pointed to the first part of the poem instead: “The grass seems strangely tall to me.” I said that it was like seeing the world from the view of a small bug, and we talked about seeing things from a child’s perspective. Or was it maybe a religious worshipping of Mother Earth? Miriam thought so, and Ida agreed. Ida also liked the image “Inside the dawning halls of the straws.” It was somehow a bit elevated, she said.



Like a church hall. Perhaps the calling is God, she said. We drank tea, ate chocolate, and the talk drifted into tree-hugging, mindfulness courses, walking in nature and other practices that reminded us of our own smallness in the world. Bea read the poem one last time, then we washed the cups and said goodbye.

## Reverberations

We have interviewed participants several times, participated in project-related workshops and public literature events, had coffee, visited some at home, and visited art museums or antique book shops with others. We wanted to know what participation in the reading groups meant to them. You can ask in an interview, and you get a polite answer, as is evident above. But we equally trust the uncalled-for hints of reverberations from the reading group, which surfaced in conversations and unanticipated situations. Here just a few:

The poems we read were so fantastic. I've also put one of them up on my fridge. The one with the grass. That was a really, really good poem. Really beautiful [...] this thing about surrendering. Submitting to belief. Not knowing if there is something there, and then surrendering completely. Taking that step.

(Reading group participant)

I've been here a lot this summer. It's such a nice place. Some of the texts I have taken home and given to people, telling them that they really should read them. I have a friend who suffers from deep depression. In one of the poems we read in the group... I read a phrase which said something like: 'Now I no longer have any plans for my life, other than surrounding myself with people I love.' That poem, I gave it to her, underlined those lines [...] I gift-wrapped it with a nice little ribbon.

(Reading group participant)

Last time we talked about how [the reading group] had actually been influenced by a lot of heavy texts. Some said they felt the text stayed in them like a kind of heavy experience. I didn't feel that, actually. I talked to a friend, because she asked what kind of texts we read. I said they were actually maybe a bit heavy. She said she liked reading that kind of stuff. It made her feel good to read about other people's problems. She felt less lonely. Maybe that's what it can give you, that you feel recognized.... instead of being alone with it, thinking everyone else feels great. Like if you've had a nice evening with a friend. Like wellness for the soul. Some things get massaged away which might otherwise develop into hard... muscular cramps.

(Reading group participant)

And here, a final ethnographic account from Dalsgård:

After the reading group season ended, I met two participants for an interview at a café in the center of Copenhagen. The moment I saw Jonas, I knew he did not feel well. The café was not full, but there were people here and there, some writing on computers, some talking to each other; and unlike the other times I had been there, I found no space for an interview.

How stupid I was to think that it would be possible! We looked for a table outside. Someone was sitting by the open window, but she was writing on a laptop and looked as if she was lost in her own thoughts. I had my doubts, Jonas did not look happy, but we sat down. Then Anna arrived, and everything got better. She smiled her warm smile, laughed. I called her by the wrong name, and she said, “It’s ok, we’re freestyling,” and he laughed, because—as he said later—Anna always had a bright remark. At the table, I sat across from them. The noise from the street prevented the three of us from being heard. A miniature train passed by a couple of times, one that usually runs in the amusement park. It was packed with tourists and drove close by the table. It felt completely silly. The tourists looked at us, and we looked back at the tourists as they sat there, motionless on the train. Anna looked at Jonas, and he looked at her, and often they talked to each other, not me. Sometimes, Anna got very emotional, and her voice shook. But she smiled, when she finally said about diagnoses: “They aren’t that bad, either.” After the interview, I quickly headed toward the bus stop, while Anna and Jonas walked in the other direction. I heard her ask him: “What are you going to do now?”

## Conclusion

This article has dealt with shared reading groups. We have described the life situations of a group of readers, which were marked by mental suffering and repetitive setbacks, and we have asked how reading literature together could ever make a difference in their lives. Our question was based on previous research and different indications of positive effects, not least the fact that the participants valued the time they spent together in the group. With the help primarily of Rosenblatt (1964) and Gumbrecht (2004), we have suggested that a recurring momentary transformation took place in the groups prompted by the aesthetic experience and the relationships arising in the group which had an intense quality of presence, as if relationships to others in the room and, more broadly, “to the world and its objects” (Gumbrecht 2004, xiii), lost their temporal significance.

The meetings in the reading groups were vibrant social events, with the participants sharing coffee, tea, fruit, and sweets as well as each other’s company. But they also offered the rare chance to discuss literature and associated existential questions in a safe environment.<sup>7</sup> The social and literary aspects of these meetings could not be separated. We have drawn upon Rosenblatt’s notion of the poem as an event, entailing a mutual infusion of a reader and a text (1964, 126), but we have also broadened the perspective and included more factors than the text and its reader. With an interdisciplinary ambition, where insights into the workings of literary texts are combined with the perspectives of intersubjectivity and social suffering, not only does the text play a role in generating an atmosphere (including other bodies and the material environment); other readers’ perspectives also blend with one’s own in an intensified experience of presence and open-endedness.

We have referred to earlier narrative studies in anthropology that showed that an individual’s constitution of self has a narrative structure, suspended between past and future, and consequently that a narrative restructuring of experience may constitute a therapeutic

healing of the self (Mattingly 1998; Vanthuyne 2003). However, although we followed the group participants, sometimes for almost two years, and although we saw positive developments,<sup>8</sup> it was still difficult to pinpoint any precise links between reading group participation and improved life situations. So much else was at play: Our interlocutors participated in the reading group for 90 minutes a week. The rest of the week was full of other influences—breakups and reunions, hard-learned lessons, and small victories. They might have met their caseworker or therapist, painted, read books, maybe written a little, watched a TV series, met a friend, attended weekly group therapy, gone for a walk, gone to the gym, gone out of town to visit family, gone to work or school. The amount of darkness and rain increased through the fall season, making it hard to get up in the morning. In the summertime, there was almost endless daylight. And in this meshwork of influences, we see no clear evidence of such causal effects.

Instead, prompted by our observations, we have narrowed in on the singular events as moments of a different temporality, the significance of which is still open and undefined. We have used the term “reverberations” above, as we wish to point to the potential of these moments to reverberate in the rest of the readers’ lives. Sometimes as an incentive to begin a course of education, to start a therapeutic process or simply to get up in the morning; sometimes as a lightening of the mood or a brief thought on a late afternoon; or sometimes as a sad memory of a happy moment in what seemed to be a parallel time. *How* such instances will reverberate and perhaps become manifest eventually, we cannot tell now. But two observations are appropriate here, one based on anthropological insights, the other on ordinary life experience: First, life is in constant becoming (Biehl and Locke 2017). To draw conclusions about the present most often involves implicit predictions about the future, and it may be tricky, perhaps even unethical, to predict what will happen to persons who face stark uncertainty (Dalsgaard and Frederiksen 2013). Second, even an isolated and momentary transformation of one’s sense of self may hold a potential and allow one to carry on.

---

CHARLOTTE ETRUP CHRISTIANSEN holds a PhD in anthropology from Aarhus University and is currently employed as a researcher at Elective Surgery Center, Silkeborg Regional Hospital, Denmark.

ANNE LINE DALSGÅRD is Associate Professor of anthropology, Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University, Denmark.

## Notes

1. We would like to warmly thank the reading group participants for generously sharing their experiences and perspectives with us. We would also like to thank our project collaborators (Mette Steenberg, Helene Forsberg, Nicolai Ladegaard) for their fruitful and inspiring collaboration. Likewise, we wish to thank the editors of this special issue and our co-contributors for helpful comments on earlier versions of the article. Lastly, we received very valuable comments and suggestions from *Ethos*’ anonymous reviewers. We are not aware of any conflicts of interests.

2. The fieldwork was conducted in an interdisciplinary project, in collaboration with the Danish Reading Society, focusing on shared reading groups for mentally vulnerable young people (2018–2021).
3. As far as we know, this short story has not been translated into English. Hence, we use our own translation from the Danish, adjusted occasionally to reflect the original Spanish version.
4. The majority of the participants are women. To protect the anonymity of the few male participants, we have therefore included only female participants in these illustrative accounts.
5. About 12 participants have left, some have returned at a later point, and new members have joined in the years that the reading groups have been active. For ethical reasons, we have not interviewed participants who stopped, unless they explicitly wished otherwise (only two did so).
6. The text below is our translation of Kristensen's (1927) original poem.
7. See Steenberg et al. 2021 for a discussion of the role of the reading facilitator in relation to the creation of this sense of safeness. See also Christiansen (2021b) on the cultural idiom of "free space."
8. We will develop this issue further in a forthcoming article, where we will combine our data with data from our interdisciplinary collaboration.

## References Cited

- Allington, Daniel, and Stephen Pihlaja. 2016. "Reading in the Age of the Internet." *Language and Literature* 25(3): 201–10.
- Amit, Vered, and Noel Dyck. 2011. *Young Men in Times of Uncertainty*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.
- Bal, P. Matthij, and Martin Veltkamp. 2013. "How Does Fiction Reading Influence Empathy? An Experimental Investigation of the Role of Emotional Transportation." *PloS One* 8(1): 1–12.
- Biehl, Joao, and Peter. E. Locke. 2017. *Unfinished. The Anthropology of Becoming*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bielo James S. 2009. *Words upon the Word: An Ethnography of Evangelical Group Bible Study*. New York: New York University Press.
- Bille, Mikkel, Peter Bjerregaard, and Tim Flohr Sørensen. 2015. "Staging Atmospheres: Materiality, Culture, and the Texture of the in-between." *Emotion, Space and Society* 15: 31–38.
- Billington, Josie, Philip Davis, and Grace Farrington. 2013. "Reading as Participatory Art: An Alternative Mental Health Therapy." *Journal of Arts & Communities* 5(1): 25–40.
- Billington, Josie. 2019. "Introduction." In *Reading and Mental Health*, edited by Josie Billington, 1–11. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Boyarin, Jonathan. 1993. "Introduction." In *The Ethnography of Reading*, edited by Jonathan Boyarin, 1–10. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Brewster, Liz. 2018. "Bibliotherapy, Illness Narratives and Narrative Medicine." In *Bibliotherapy*, edited by Sarah McNicol and Liz Brewster, 41–58. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bruner, Jerome S. 1990. *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, Jerome S. 1986. *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bræmer, Michael. 2017. "Angstbølge: Angst sender rekordmange danskere på forlids pension." *Ugebladet A4*, May 21. <https://www.a4medier.dk/artikel/angst-sender-rekordmange-danskere-paa-foertidspension>.
- Böhme, Gernot. 1993. "Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics." *Thesis Eleven* 36: 113–26.
- Christiansen, Catrine, Mats Utas, and Henrik E. Vigh. 2006. *Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthood. Social Becoming in an African Context*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Christiansen, Charlotte. 2020. "The Merits of Context: Unfolding Mental Vulnerability as Category and Experience." In *Ethnography*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138120940757>.
- Christiansen, Charlotte E. 2021a. "Eighteen Postcards and Three Letters." *Anthropology and Humanism* 46(1): 198–202.
- Christiansen, Charlotte E. 2021b. "Does Fiction Reading Make us Better People? Empathy and Morality in a Literary Empowerment Programme." *Ethnos*. doi:10.1080/00141844.2021.2007158.
- Csordas, Thomas J. 1990. "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology." *Ethos* 18(1): 5–47.

- Dalsgaard [Dalsgård], Anne Line, Monica Franch, and Russel P. Scott. 2008. "Dominant Ideas, Uncertain Lives. The Meaning of Youth in Recife." In *Youth and the City in the Global South*, edited by Karen Tranberg Hansen, 49–73. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Dalsgaard [Dalsgård], Anne Line, and Martin Demant Frederiksen. 2013. "Out of Conclusion: On Recurrence and Open-Endedness in Life and Analysis." *Social Analysis* 57 (1): 50–63
- Danmarks Statistik. 2021. "Gennemsnitsalder for fødende kvinder og nybagte fædre efter kommune." *Danmarks Statistik*. <https://www.statbank.dk/statbank5a/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?Maintable=FOD111&PLanguage=0>.
- Dowrick, Christopher, Josie Billington, Jude Robinson, Andrew Hamer, and Clare Williams. 2012. "Get into Reading as an Intervention for Common Mental Health Problems: Exploring Catalysts for Change." *Medical Humanities* 38: 15–20.
- Ewing, Katherine P. 1990. "The Illusion of Wholeness: Culture, Self, and the Experience of Inconsistency." *Ethos* 18 (3): 251–78
- Frederiksen, Martin Demant. 2013. *Young Men, Time, and Boredom in the Republic of Georgia*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Garro, Elena. 2015. *Farvernes Uge*. København: Skjodt.
- Goody, Jack. 1987. *The Interface between the Written and the Oral*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Green, Jackie. 2001. "Peer Education." *Promotion and Education* 8(2): 65–68.
- Gumbrecht, Hans. U. 2004. *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Gumbrecht, Hans U. 2008. "Reading for the *Stimmung*? About the Ontology of Literature Today." *boundary 2* 35 (3): 213–21.
- Hansen, Karen Tranberg, with Anne Line Dalsgaard, Katherine V. Gough, Ulla A. Madsen, Karen Valentin, and Norbert Wildermuth. 2008. *Youth and the City in the Global South*. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Iser, Wolfgang. 1972. "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach." *New Literary History* 3 (29): 279–99.
- Jeffrey, Craig. 2010. *Timepass—Youth, Class, and the Politics of Waiting in India*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press
- Johnson, Dan R. 2011. "Transportation into a Story Increases Empathy, Prosocial Behavior, and Perceptual Bias toward Fearful Expressions." *Personality and Individual Differences* 52(2): 150–55
- Kristensen, Tøm. 1927. "Græs." In *Værdselige Sange*. København: Rasmus Naver.
- Kuiken, Don., David. S. Miall, and Shelley Sikora. 2004. "Forms of Self-implication in Literary Reading." *Poetics Today* 25 (2): 171–203.
- Larsen, John A. 2005. "Becoming Mentally Ill: Existential Crisis and the Social Negotiation of Identity." In *Managing Uncertainty. Ethnographic Studies of Illness, Risk and the Struggle for Control*, edited by Richard Jenkins, Hanne Jessen, and Vibeke Steffen, 197–223. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum.
- Long, Elizabeth. 2003. *Book Clubs. Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Longden, Eleanor, Philip Davis, Josie Billington, Sofia Lampropoulou, Grace Farrington, Fiona Magee, Erin Walsh, and Rhiannon Corcoran. 2015. "Shared Reading: Assessing the Intrinsic Value of a Literature-Based Health Intervention." *Medical Humanities* 41: 113–20.
- Mar, Raymond A., and Keith Oatley. 2008. "The Function of Fiction is the Abstraction and Simulation of Social Experience." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3(3): 173–92.
- Mar, Raymond A., Keith Oatley, Jacob Hirsh, and Jordan B. Peterson. 2006. "Bookworms versus Nerds: Exposure to Fiction versus Non-Fiction, Divergent Associations with Social Ability, and the Simulation of Fictional Social Worlds." *Journal of Research in Personality* 40(5): 694–712.
- Mattingly, Cheryl. 1998. *Healing Dramas and Clinical Plots*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mattingly, Cheryl. 2001. *Narrative and the Cultural Construction of Illness and Healing*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Mattingly, Cheryl, Nancy C. Lutkehaus, and C. Jason Throop. 2008. "Bruner's Search for Meaning: A Conversation between Psychology and Anthropology." *Ethos* 36 (1): 1–28.
- Miall, David S., and Don Kuiken. 2002. "A Feeling for Fiction: Becoming What We Behold." *Poetics* 30 (4): 221–41.
- Ministry of Employment (Beskæftigelsesministeriet) 2019. *Lov om Aktiv socialpolitik. LBK no. 981*. <https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=209997#idecl5661-4408-416a-bfa0-a510cbec8061>.
- Oatley, Keith. 2012. "The Cognitive Science of Fiction." *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science* 3 (4): 425–30.
- Ochs, Elinor, and Lisa Capps. 1996. "Narrating the Self." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25: 19–43.
- Peskin, Joan, Raymond A. Mar, and Theanna Bischoff. 2009. "Advanced Social Cognition in the Literary Arts." In *The Arts and Human Development*, edited by C. Milbraith and C. Lightfoot, 249–57. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Radway, Janice. 1997. *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-class Desire*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Rahbæk, Julie M., and Katrine S. Johansen. 2015. "Spændingsfeltet Mellem Dynamik og Stabilitet." *Tidsskriftet Antropologi* 72: 67–87.
- Rapport, Nigel. 2008. "Gratuitousness: Notes towards an Anthropology of Interiority." *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 19(3): 331–49.
- Reed, Adam. 2011. *Literature and Agency in English Fiction Reading: a Study of the Henry Williamson Society*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Reed, Adam. 2018. "Literature and Reading." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 47: 33–45.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1992. *Oneself as Another*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Rosen, Matthew. 2015. "Ethnographies of Reading: Beyond Literacy and Books." *Anthropological Quarterly* 88 (4): 1059–84.
- Rosen, Matthew. 2019. "Reading Nearby: Literary Ethnography in a Postsocialist City." *Anthropology and Humanism* 44 : 70–87.
- Rosenblatt, Louise M. 1964. "The Poem as Event." *College English* 26 (2): 123–28.
- Rosenblatt, Louise M. 1978. *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Schechtman, Zipora. 2006. "The Contribution of Bibliotherapy to the Counseling of Aggressive boys." *Psychotherapy Research* 16 (5): 645–51.
- Schieffelin, Edward. 1996. "On Failure and Performance: Throwing the Medium out of the Science." In *The Performance of Healing*, edited by C. Laderman and M. Roseman, 59–90. New York: Routledge.
- Schroer, Sara Asu, and Susanne B. Schmitt. 2018. *Exploring Atmospheres Ethnographically*. London: Routledge.
- Skjerdingsstad, Kjell, and Thor Magnus Tangerås. 2019. "Shared Reading as an Affordance-Nest for Developing Kinesic Engagement with Poetry: A Case Study." *Cogent Arts and Humanities* 6: 1688631.
- Smith, Barbara H. 1980. "Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories." *Critical Inquiry* 7(1): 209–39.
- Steenberg, Mette, Pernille Bräuner, and Sebastian Wallot. 2014. "Text Technology: Building Subjective and Shared Experience in Reading." *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 14(4): 357–72.
- Steenberg, Mette. 2016. "Literary Reading as a Social Technology: An Exploratory Study on Shared Reading Groups." In *Plotting the Reading Experience. Theory/Practice/Politics*, edited by Paulette M. Rothbauer, Kjell Ivar Skjerdingsstad, Lynne McKechnie, and Knut Oterholm, 183–98. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Steenberg, Mette, Charlotte Christiansen, Anne Line Dalsgård, Anne Maria Stagis, Liv Moeslund Ahlgren, Tine Lykkegaard Nielsen, and Nicolai Ladegaard. 2021. "Facilitating Reading Engagement in Shared Reading." *Poetics Today* 42 (2): 229–51.
- Tranströmer, Thomas. 2011. "Allegro." In *The Great Enigma. New Collected Poems*. Vol. 65. New York: New Directions Books.
- Troscianko, Emily. 2018. "Fiction-Reading for Good or Ill: Eating Disorders, Interpretation and the Case for Creative Bibliotherapy Research." *Medical Humanities* 44: 201–11.
- Vanthuyne, Karine. 2003. "Searching for the Words to Say It: The Importance of Cultural Idioms in the Articulation of the Experience of Mental Illness." *Ethos* 31 (3): 412–33.
- White, Geoffrey M. 2000. "Histories and Subjectivities." *Ethos* 28(4): 493–510.