



Conference

BOOKS AND SCREENS AND THE READING BRAIN

Vilnius University, 27-29 September 2017

From the earliest clay tablets down to the latest touch screens: reading is an interaction of embodied humans with technology. Over time technological developments have caused numerous changes, and even transformations, in reading habits and the reading culture. The introduction of the rotary press together with industrial paper production in the nineteenth century, for example, made available cheap reading materials for the masses. This was followed by a tremendous growth not just in the number of readers but, more significantly, in the demographics of the reading public. By contrast, in the course of the second half of twentieth century, notably after the introduction of television, many unskilled readers stopped reading books.

Similarly, the current wholesale adoption of digital screens – in educational as well as leisure settings – has begun to affect our reading habits. Screens offer a substitute for reading from paper, but equally offer viewing, gaming and listening opportunities on the same device, not to mention the constant lure of the social media. This increases screen time, offering strong competition for people’s leisure time and reducing time spent on sustained (book) reading. It also raises urgent questions concerning small-and large-scale effects of technology on educational outcomes. There is evidence that screens change the reading experience in terms of memory and (in the case of fiction) transportation. It is also likely that digital texts are simply taken less seriously than texts on paper to begin with. Together with the 24/7 availability of huge amounts of searchable information, these and other changes will no doubt affect how we think about knowledge and information. It promotes just-in-time information gathering rather than memorizing of facts, and thinking in terms of smaller fragments of information rather than longer chunks that have already been synthesized into knowledge.

The multidisciplinary EU COST E-READ Action, running between 2014 and 2018 has fostered a great deal of empirical research on the effects of the wholesale adoption of screens for reading. The **conference ‘Books and screens and the reading brain’** is intended to showcase some of the preliminary findings. What really changes and why? But these findings also need contextualization, relating them to the history and present practice of reading and the social history of literacy. They invite pondering the next questions. Issues the conference proposes to address include (but are not confined to):

- Empirical evidence of reading practices, e.g., book industry statistics; library statistics; media use/time-spending surveys;
- How are we to interpret the outcomes of empirical research and what are their implications for the future of reading and the role of reading in education?
- Relations between different formats (e.g., hardcover vs softcover; print vs screen) and reading practices;
- The history and present use of books and digital learning tools in education and their relative effectiveness;
- The changing status and social position of reading for various purposes, such as learning and leisure;
- The changing definition of literacy;
- The changing historiography of reading and development of research instruments.

Conference is organized by

- European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) Action “Evolution of Reading in the Age of Digitisation (E-READ)” Network
- Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP)
- Vilnius University Faculty of Communication

Conference place: Vilnius University (Lithuania)

Conference dates: 27-29 September 2017

Conference language: English

Conference website with more information: <http://www.eread.kf.vu.lt>

Submissions: <https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=bsrb2016>

Final deadline for proposals for individual papers and/or sessions: 1 March 2017

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