

## **INTRODUCTION: E- READING IN POSTMODERN WORLD**

**Miha Kovac\*; Dobrinka Peicheva\*,Lilia Raycheva\***

### **Why Talk About Paper and Screen Reading?**

**Miha Kovac**

Indeed: what is the difference between paper and screen reading? Ten years ago, when ebook readers started a revolution in the US and British book industries, the common answer was that there is no difference: it doesn't matter whether you read on paper or screens, what matters is how the story is written—that was the mantra of the day. However, one day, somebody involved in reading research conducted a study and found the matter wasn't so simple. Between 2007 and today, a couple of hundred of research projects followed suit, and most found—contrary to the mantra of the day in 2008—there are indeed differences between paper and screen reading. For example, Singer and Alexander looked at 36 studies on paper and screen reading using similar methodologies and found that in 91% of studies with texts of more than 500 words (i.e. taking up more than a page or a screen), comprehension scores were significantly better for print than digital reading. Additionally, when participants read for depth of understanding and not solely for the gist, print appeared to be the more effective processing medium (Singer and Alexander 2016; Mangen et al. 2013). This finding is even more compelling as 88.89% of the studies involved school-age children—so-called digital natives—indicating that the advantages of paper reading are here to stay. These findings very likely will be confirmed later this year, when another meta-study on this issue by COST Eread Action participants is published.

Why does such research matter? Undoubtedly, the findings have practical implications as their message is clear cut: if we want to better understand longer texts, it makes sense to read them on paper. Intuitively, scholars—who moved all their communication into the digital realm almost two decades ago—confirm this finding in their daily behaviour: although scientific journals exist predominantly online, researchers print out papers when they intend to read them in depth (Tenopir et al. 2015). As long as a better substrate is not invented,

therefore, paper likely will remain the main medium of communication for reading longer, more complex texts.

Yet the implications of paper/screen research are not only practical. Indirectly, these studies tackle a fundamental research question that goes way back in media history, namely how do media technologies shape the ways we think and feel. For example, how did the technical and economic requirements of printing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century shape the length and format of Romantic novels? How did the materiality of 19<sup>th</sup>-century books impact how readers understood them? In other words, to what extent were the Romantic feelings that took off in the 19<sup>th</sup> century shaped by the invention of the steam-press printing machine that made possible wide dissemination of Romantic novels and poetry collections? Two hundred years later, similar questions arise: Has the Internet indeed encouraged intolerant communication and an explosion of anti-scientific prejudices (or, simply put, assholedom, as stated in Jason Lanier's (2018) most recent book)? Might the rise of populism in the USA and Eastern and Western Europe, to some extent, be the result of the affordances of screen technologies and the ways we communicate online?

The honest answer is we do not know. The importance of understanding human and technology interaction—and books and screens are information technologies—is a new research question. By researching arcane matters such as the differences between print and screen reading, therefore, we are laying a foundation to enable us to deal with broader communication issues and to better understand who we are, where are we coming from and where we are going.

Of course, COST Eread Action is not there to answer such complex questions. Moreover, its members don't share the same views on many research issues related to paper and screen reading, so Action doesn't produce research results the same way as other research projects. What the Action is about is networking among diverse researchers working on the print and screen dichotomy. Consequently, its main outcome is a set of new research questions on reading embodied in a variety of project proposals and an astonishingly high number of papers, books and thematic issues of academic journals.

This issue of *Postmodernism Problems*, prepared by some Action members and contributors, marks another opportunity to look at these issues with fresh eyes.

### **Sources**

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### **E-Reading in postmodern society**

**Dobrinka Peicheva & Lilia Raycheva**

The current thematic issue of the e-journal "Postmodernism Problems" is in line with one of the main objectives of the COST Action IS 1404 E READ", which is highlighted by Miha Kovac - Dissemination manager of the Action: networking among diverse researchers working on the print and screen dichotomy... its main outcome is a set of new research questions on reading embodied..... thematic issues of academic journals". Among the scientific results of the Action is the realization of this thematic academic issue.

The aim of this thematic issue is to contribute to the scientific understanding of the effects of digitization on books and reading by presenting a series of empirical studies, data and analysis.

The aim of this thematic issue is to complement the scientific understanding of the effects of digitization on books and reading by presenting a series of empirical studies, data and analyzes of expert assessments, in-depth interviews and focus groups conducted within the

research projects 01/13 and 01/10 - 04.08.2017 of the National Scientific Fund of Bulgaria and developed in the framework of COST Action IS 1404 (E READ)".

Combining experimental and quality sociological approaches to revealing reading processes is an important aspect that complements the scientific understanding of the consequences of these processes and the search for relevant opportunities to deal with them.

This thematic issue includes the works ten authors, most of which are directly or indirectly linked to the Action: prof Miha Covach, Prof. Theresa Schilhab , prof. Dobrinka Peicheva; prof. Lilia Raicheva, assoc. prof. Antoaneta Totomanova, assoc. prof. Lubomira Parizhkova, assoc. prof. Milena Tsvetkova, assoc. prof. Svetla Tsankova, ass. prof. Georgi Aleksandrov, ass. prof. Dilyana Keranova. The authors of the articles are among the most serious scientists in the subject area. Some of them are also managers, publishers, lecturers in the field.

The contributors to the issue are also directly related to the research problems. In the conducted and analyzed in-depth interviews, focus groups, and expert assessments, the results of which are presented in several articles, the opinions of editors, publishers, bookstore managers, librarians, representatives of NGOs, university lecturers and active readers are taken into account.

Contributors of the study on attitudes to traditional and e-reading, as well as on the future of the book, are 14 experts, active participants in the COST Action IS 1404 E-READ and experts on the matter from various European countries: Dr. Cengiz Acarturk, Turkey; Prof. Daiva Janaviciene, Lithuania; Prof. Elena Maceviciute, Latvia; Dr. Gitte Balling, Denmark; Prof. Jiri Travnicek, Czech Republic; Dr. Johanna Kaakinen, Finland; Dr. Katrin Tiidenberg, Estonia; Dr. Lefkios Neophytou, Cyprus; Dr. Luminita Frentiu, Romania; Dr. Marina Kotrla; Croatia; Prof. Miha Kovač, Slovenia; Dr. Orsolya Papp-Zipernovszky, Hungary; Prof. Boguslawa Dobek-Ostrowska, Poland; Prof. Lilia Raycheva and Prof. Dobrinka Peicheva, Bulgaria.

Besides as authors, on the Bulgarian side, the following experts (outside the Action) have contributed to the issue: Assoc. Prof. Antoaneta Totomanova – The "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" National Library; Dr. Bistra Shokarova, Director of Bookstore "Bulgarian Books"; Vesselina Valkanova, Head of Department "Press and Book Publishing", Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication – The St. Kliment Ohridsky Sofia University, Valia

Minkova, University of Veliko Tarnovo “St. St. Cyril and Mehodius”; Gergina Shipochka, publisher and postgraduate student at South-West University (SWU); Assoc. Prof. Ivan Evtimov – New Bulgarian University; Assoc. Prof. Milena Tsvetkova, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication – The St. Kliment Ohridsky Sofia University, Ass. Prof. Georgi Aleksandrov – Press and Book Publishing Department of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication – The St. St Kliment Ohridsky Sofia University, J; Nikolina Yaneva - Senior Librarian, SWU; Ria Naidenova, senior editor in "Ciela" Publishing House; Assoc. Prof. Yana Arabadzhieva - Publisher, Dr. Petranka Evtimova; Dr. Polina Stoyanova and Valia Minkova.

In-depth interviews were conducted with: Georgi Alexandrov, Petya Kancheva, and Kristina Petrova – book publishers, Silyana Genova, Bistra Doncheva, Sevdalina Malinova, Angelina Todorova, Juliana Stanimirova, Velina Pesheva and Antoaneta Totomanova - librarians, Adriana Pavlova and Anna Zlatanova - editors, Mario Jordanov – technical editor in publishing house, Maya Mancheva - manager at Biblio.bg, Rumen Ninov - manager in “Orange” bookstore, Tsvetomira Dichevska and Stefania Terzieva - students, Svetlana Dicheva - journalist, Yavora Peeva - translator, Georgi Milev and Elena Zhelyazkova.

This thematic issue is next step towards conceptualizing the consequences of the mediatisation of society, in specifying the activities and relationships involved in the processes of digitization of written communication and the existence of the book.

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