

LECTIO XIII ANNUAL CONFERENCE – CALL FOR PAPERS

KU Leuven, December 11-13, 2024



The Art of Reading and Human Performance

Investigations into the Act of Reading, from Antiquity to the Threshold of Modernity

The LECTIO international conference of 2024 aims to study and dissect “the human performance of reading” in its salient aspects, tensions, successes and failures. The focus is by no means limited to literary texts and their reading, but rather to the notion of the “act of reading” in the broadest sense, such as to include Law (both scholarly interpretation and legal practice), Liturgy, Social Performances, and Political Representations. The testing grounds of the theme we intend to explore are the broad European civilizations in the long run, from Antiquity to the threshold of Modernity, across their languages (e.g., Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Arabic, Germanic, Slavic, Romance languages, etc.) and intricate cultural transfers.

Today the act of reading represents a fundamental element of the so-called Humanities. The Spanish thinker José Ortega y Gasset, while rereading Plato’s Symposium in the dramatic years following the Spanish Civil War, observed that “Reading a book is, like all human occupations, a utopian task”. With the contribution of a selected cohort of international specialists we aim to go to the roots of such a singular “human utopia”, accurately trace traits of its portrait, measure its resilience and follow its transformations across different languages, cultures and eras. Over the past two decades, the digital revolution has posed a number of challenges to the very idea of reading and provoked an important harvest of studies, both historical and theoretical in nature. Maryanne Wolf’s *Reader Come Home* (New York 2018) offers a perspicuous example of the intersection of the research devoted to the neuro-physiology of reading and phenomena as typically human as that of remembering, or as elusive as that of ‘creative thinking’. Among the theoretical proposals worth mentioning is the subtle and provocative study of the philosopher Peter Kivy, *The Performance of Reading* (Oxford 2005). According to the late Kivy, the act of reading would represent a specifically human operation inextricably linked to the interpretation and reenactment of a text. Any text, outside of performance, does not yet exist as truly ‘read’, even when it is

processed and analyzed ‘mechanically’. In this sense, music, with the clear divarication between the moment of score reading and actual musical performance, would not be an exception, but would rather illustrate the rule of the very concept of reading.

One might think of the investigations, though mostly devoted to literature, of the “Poetik und Hermeneutik” movement, which had appropriately called out the irrepressible polarity between reader and author, production and reception of a text. At closer examination, however, it is precisely the perspective of Performance – with the manifold corollary of notions it entails: embodiment, vocalization, ‘pleasure (or pain) of the text’, qualitative perception of time, etc. – that may provide a fresh angle of inquiry.

Possible topics include (but are not limited to):

- The study of the specific contexts of the act of reading from Antiquity to Early Modernity;
- The implied materiality (i.e., the importance of the matter on which the text is written, like papyrus scroll, stone, codex, print, etc.) and its influence on the ways of reading;
- The interplay between oral culture and literacy (e.g., reading aloud, announcing, proclaiming, confessing);
- The contexts of the act of reading (monastic cell or studiolo; festivals, schools, churches, courts, political assemblies, persecuted intellectual groups, esoteric societies);
- Paratexts, images, frames and their connection to distinct performative dimensions;
- Strategies of reading (e.g., the interplay between secrecy and dissemination of a text by reading it);
- The relation between the notion of ‘voice’ (or the lack of) and the act of reading.



We invite submissions for paper proposals in English. Proposals should consist of a (provisional) title, an abstract of 300-400 words, and a short CV of the presenter.

Accepted papers will be awarded a 30-minute slot (20 min. presentation + 10 min. for discussion). Afterwards, the papers can be submitted for a peer-reviewed publication which shall follow in the year 2025.

Please submit your proposal via email (lectio@kuleuven.be) by January 31, 2024. Applicants will be notified within about four weeks from this date.

For further inquiries and information, please contact Daria Kondakova (daria.kondakova@kuleuven.be) or Andrea Aldo Robiglio (andrea.robiglio@kuleuven.be)



Organizing Committee: Daria Kondakova, Randall Lesaffer, Brigitte Meijns, Andrea Aldo Robiglio, Geert Roskam, Joseph Verheyden.

Scientific Committee: Orazio Condorelli, Veerle Fraeters, Daria Kondakova, Randall Lesaffer, Brigitte Meijns, Rachele Ricceri, Geert Roskam, Mark Somos, Joseph Verheyden.