

# Reading (r)evolutions

## changing practices and technologies

Call for stories and contributions - *Bibliodiversité* review, issue 12,  
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According to the Centre national du livre's 2024 study entitled *Les jeunes français et la lecture*<sup>1</sup>, one in three young people between the ages of 16 and 19 no longer reads at all. Between the ages of 7 and 19, they spend ten times more time in front of a screen than in front of a book. It's worth noting that almost one in two young readers does something else while reading (sending messages, watching videos, browsing social media). Nearly half have already read an e-book and 42% have already listened to an audio book. Young people's favourite genres are comics (55%), manga (47%) and novels (43%). Finally, 39% prefer to do activities other than reading.

What can we learn from this picture? Firstly, that reading among young French people is clearly declining, to the benefit of screens. Reading e-books is steadily increasing, as is listening to audiobooks (up 16% since 2016) - a practice that is moving away from the realm of reading and entering the realm of listening. The genres most popular with young people (comics and manga) show a clear preference for books in which the image takes precedence over the text. Finally, the conditions under which reading is practiced are changing, revealing a fragmentation of reading and an association with other cultural activities: young people are doing something else while reading (or reading while doing something else), and this "multitasking practice" involves the use of connected screens.

Studies in other countries and other similar cultural contexts seem to point in the same direction. It would seem, then, that reading practices and technologies are changing at an accelerating pace, and that we may be facing a complete revolution in reading.

### Three types of change

And yet it could be said that we have never read as much or written as much now. The massive use of online messaging implies a practice of writing (admittedly adapted to the medium and enhanced by orality) and reading (admittedly short and conversational). While writing is becoming increasingly conversational (with the advent of artificial intelligence), reading is not disappearing per se.

However, its nature is changing considerably - **first and foremost because of changes in content**. Lengthy texts with technical content, based on authoritative and sourced references, in printed book format, seem to be gradually giving way to texts

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://centrenationaldulivre.fr/donnees-cles/les-jeunes-francais-et-la-lecture-en-2024>

with short, simple content, giving way to impulsive, emotional and entertaining content, increasingly expressed digitally.

As for the eruption of images everywhere - including in printed books at a time when manga and comics are young people's favourite, at least in the Western world - this too implies changes in the spaces, times and technologies of reading.

Reading and screens now overlap, **leading to changes in reading technologies**. Paper books remain a powerful symbol but have lost their authority. Reading books is also becoming a marker of identity, socialisation and even communalisation, particularly among young people - the *geek* or *book worm* in the United States is a category as marked as that of the *popular girl*. Books are losing their universal, transversal character. We are reading more and more on tablets, smartphones and even headphones: audio books are the fastest-growing form of reading in the West, although they are still clearly in the minority. On the other hand, we are entitled to doubt whether listening to a soundtrack still falls within the sphere of reading.

Finally, we are seeing **changes in the time and quality of reading**. Book-reading moments are being reduced in favour of screen time. Above all, they are merging with other cultural practices, involving the use of a connected screen. This is certainly one of the most striking developments, given that 'zapping' and 'cherry-picking' do not seem to go well with close, attentive reading, which requires immersion.

## Why read?

Attentive, close reading is undeniably losing ground. Why bother? After all, why is reading important - apart from any cultural or even traditional considerations? Maryanne Wolf, in *Reader, Come Home: The reading Brain in a Digital World*<sup>2</sup> explains that it is essential to encourage reading on paper, particularly among the very young, as it is thought to have a positive impact on neurological development.

A 2023 study published in *Psychological Medicine*<sup>3</sup> shows that there is a close link between early reading pleasure and better cognitive performance (verbal learning, memory, oral skills and academic success) and greater mental well-being in adolescence.

When it comes to education, most educators are convinced that reading is beneficial. After 15 years of using tablets and computers, haven't Swedish schools just decided to turn back the clock and go back to paper textbooks?

We could even go so far as to say that close reading is linked to human progress and democracy. Books - particularly in the humanities and social sciences - are often a factor in the acquisition of knowledge, argumentation and rationalisation, at a perfectly reasonable price, putting them within the reach of as many people as possible. This sharing of knowledge (for all) is extremely useful when it comes to responding to

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<sup>2</sup> Rosie & Wolfe, 2023. Maryanne Wolf is currently a professor at the University of California, where she directs the dyslexia centre. A neuroscience specialist, she is best known for her extensive research into reading and its impact on the brain.

<sup>3</sup> On this topic, see the article in *Les Echos*: <https://www.lesechos.fr/weekend/perso/lire-tres-jeune-est-bon-pour-le-cerveau-1974346>

complex situations in a non-authoritarian democratic context. The ultra-short, positioning text quickly runs the risk of turning into a slogan, which is often identity-based and exclusionary - as social media publications reveal.

Whatever the indicators or studies considered, it's safe to say that **variety and diversity in reading** - the practice of texts of different types, sizes and complexity - are beneficial for cognitive, educational and civic development. However, close reading is gradually disappearing from the spectrum of reading practices in favour of skimming, a reading practice involving short texts and done with little attention, for entertainment or dialogue purposes.

How widespread is this phenomenon? What is it leading to? Is there a generational shift in reading habits? Are images and sound the future of reading? How should our public policies to support reading evolve? How can we encourage young people to read texts? Using an intersectional approach, how do gender, socio-professional categories and ethnic origins interact with reading practices? These are just some of the questions that the contributors to this issue of *Bibliodiversité* will be invited to reflect on in their analyses and testimonials.

## Methodological framework

### Article

Articles should be between 25- and 40,000-characters including spaces (+/- 20%). Testimonials from professionals may be shorter. Authors are invited to use a title and subtitles to identify the different sections, and to provide a summary, a short biography and a photo.

### References

As far as the presentation of bibliographical references is concerned, *Bibliodiversité* essentially complies with the international standard ISO 690 ([http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISO\\_690](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISO_690)). Only bibliographical references cited and referred to in the text (including tables and graphs) are presented at the end of the article; the editor will crosscheck these citations. In-text references include the name of the author and the year of publication. At the end of the article, the references are listed in alphabetical order, without numbering.

For articles published in periodicals:

AUTHOR, First name, date. Title of article. Title of host periodical in italics, issue concerned, pagination of article.

For monographs:

AUTHOR, First name, date. Title in italics. Publication number. Place: publishing house.

For contributions to monographs:

AUTHOR, First name, date. Title of contribution. In AUTHOR, First name of the editor of the host publication. Title in italics of the host document. Place: publishing house, location in host document.

## **Timeframe**

The final contributions are expected to be submitted at the end of October/ beginning of November 2024.

The publication date is set for March-April 2025.

**Would you like to contribute? Simply contact the editorial team with a summary of your approach to the topic: [contact@double-ponctuation.com](mailto:contact@double-ponctuation.com)**