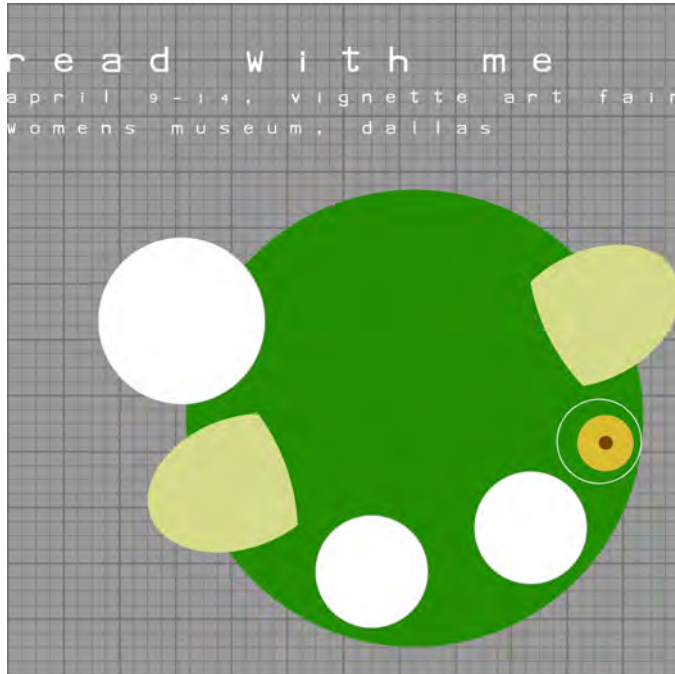


Read with me

(2019), participatory performance/experiment with people, texts, chairs, and a lamp.



Visitors are invited to bring a text they like, in whatever format they prefer (paper, digital, etc.), or to select a text from those I've brought, and then to choose either to read to me or to have me read to them. The reading is to last 3 minutes (or longer if we agree).

This is an experiment exploring one-on-one reading – but in public, kinds of intimacy/distance and ways of being in a “bubble” together, or not; levels of internal and external “performance”; and kinds of reading; among other things.

Over the course of the fair, we'll have constructed an “exquisite” reading, with many different readers reading many parts of different texts.

The experiment may evolve during the course of the fair.

I expect to be present during the following hours:

Tues., April 9, 6-9pm (VIP & Press Preview)
Thurs., 11-5
Fri., 11am-5pm and 7-10pm (Public Reception)
Sat., 11-5pm
Sun., 11-3

If you've arrived when I'm not here, please look for a drawing pad with a note about when I'll return, or feel free to perform the experiment without me.

Background

Read with me follows on a previous performance piece, *Necronetworking*, in which I also read in public, but read only dead authors, and only to myself, ignoring the living around me and trying my however futile best not to be performing. That piece explored the effects of doing in

public the kind of focussed reading I usually do privately within my own “bubble,” among other things. How would it feel, how would onlookers react?

In *Read with me*, the “performance” is for two of us to read to each other – to be in a bubble together, or at least have our bubbles touch and maybe partly merge insofar as we’re experiencing the same words in the same moment – but again, to do that in public.

We’ll be combining the intellectual processes involved in reading and possibly talking about what we’ve read, on the one hand, with whatever emotions may be stirred by the texts themselves and/or by the act of sharing them with another person who’s physically close by – rather than, say, hearing the words spoken from a podium or streamed through a device.

Among other things, I hope perhaps to enjoy a little bit of what I felt when being read to as a child. Will any of the intimacy we might experience if we were reading together alone survive doing it on public display? Will we “perform” the text differently than if we were reading together alone?

Other considerations...

Many people seem to be performing their lives for online consumption...

For most of our species’ existence, we interacted with one another almost exclusively in person; now we’re conducting more and more of our interaction with others via our screens...

Reading was invented late in human history, and for several centuries, all reading was done aloud – the first clear record of silent reading appears in St. Augustine’s *Confessions*; and silent reading probably did not predominate until the 1700’s or later.

Some theorists believe that all reading, even to oneself, is essentially performative – we basically “perform” the words in our heads for ourselves – see one of the books I’ve brought, *The Performance of Reading* by Peter Kivy – although the better we get at reading, the less visible, the more implicit this process becomes (or as Michael Polanyi might put it, the more “tacit”; see his book, *The Tacit Dimension*). How will our interior reading “performance” relate to our overt performance as part of *Read with me*?

In earlier eras, especially when books were scarcer, reading aloud was a social activity, a way of entertaining ourselves together. Now that most of us have our own screens, we often don’t even watch tv together...

Consuming text by sight seems very different from consuming text by hearing, and most people seem to prefer to take in their information in one way over the other (I know very smart people with both preferences)...

As societies and as a species, we seem to be transitioning from reliance on paper texts to reliance on the digital, and reading text on paper seems very different from reading it on a screen...

Perhaps we are moving away from text altogether, and toward taking more of our info in via video (although some argue that the percentage of people who actually read very much has always been relatively small; see an article I've brought by Elizabeth Minkel, "Changing Reading Forever, Again," from *The New Yorker*)...

According to author Caleb Crain in another article I've brought, "Twilight of the Books" from *The New Yorker*, some research shows that people who read transcripts of presentations or tv broadcasts remember more information than those who saw the actual programs...

Per Jay Rosen in his 2004 post, "Nobody heard what you said" at *PRESSthink*, in 1984, tv reporter Leslie Stahl produced an extended report trying to document the gap between Reagan's words and his actions. She worried that her sources at the White House would be angry and cut off her access; instead, Dick Darman called to thank her. "You guys in Televisionland haven't figured it out, have you? When the pictures are powerful and emotional, they override if not completely drown out the sound.... Nobody heard you.' Stahl's critical report had been accompanied by generally upbeat visuals...." (presumably Reagan looking grandfatherly, as usual)...

Crain also reports in "Twilight of the Books" that other research suggests that individuals in literate vs. non-literate societies differ significantly in their cognitive functioning, with individuals in non-literate societies tending to preserve knowledge in the form of narratives or memorable tableaux, and focussing on literal functionality; while individuals in literate societies seem more adept with abstract concepts. He also quotes Maryanne Wolf's *Proust and the Squid*: "The act of reading is not natural.... We can do it only because the brain's plasticity enables the repurposing of circuitry that originally evolved for other tasks...." As a child progresses from decoding symbols for phonemes to fluent reading, Wolf speculates, the child is left with more mental time/space to integrate, and question. ...

The green chairs used in this piece have been loaned courtesy of Collage 20th Century Classics; please see flyer for more info.