



**The European Graduate School
EST. 1994**

Seminar with Professor Peter Szendy (4.5 ECTS credits)
Division of Philosophy, Art and Critical Thought
August Session/August 8-10 2019

“Dear Reader, Don’t Read!” (Politics and Erotics of Reading from Plato to Calvino)

What do we do when we read? And do we even do something, or, as Maurice Blanchot suggests, do we rather let be?

What is at stake in these questions is what Michel de Certeau called a “politics of reading:” decision, freedom, subjection, responsibility. . . . While being true to de Certeau’s plea for an “autonomy of the reader”, this course will interrogate its binary logic (active vs. passive) by following three main paths (and a number of secondary trails):

1. We will analyze the reading imperative—“Read!”—as it is staged in Plato’s and, above all, in Sade’s erotics.

2. We will look closely at the (de)construction of a “sovereign reader” in Hobbes’ *Leviathan*.

3. We will take seriously Walter Benjamin’s paradoxical intuition that one should “read what was never written” and try to think what a “pure reading,” not subjected to the text, might mean.

Along these paths (and trails) that will lead us towards a questioning of the futures of reading, we will pause to take a closer look at two major novels: Italo Calvino’s *If On a Winter’s Night a Traveler* and László Krasznahorkai’s *War and War*. They will give us a lot to think about in terms of the vocalities and temporalities of reading.

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Thursday, August 8 (morning): Incipits and Addresses (What Is Reading?)

Addresses to the reader (a portable selection): Cervantes, Montaigne, Baudelaire, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche.—Maurice Blanchot, “Reading.”

Thursday, August 8 (afternoon): Plato With Sade (The Reading Imperative)

Plato, *Phaedrus* and prologue of *Theaetetus*.—De Sade, *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (excerpts).

Friday, August 9 (morning): Intermezzo With Calvino

Italo Calvino, *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler*.

Friday, August 9 (afternoon): The Sovereign Reader

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (excerpts).—Michel de Certeau, "Reading as Poaching."

Saturday, August 10 (morning): Intermezzo With Krasznahorkai

László Krasznahorkai, *War and War*.—László Krasznahorkai, "On Velocity."

Saturday, August 10 (afternoon): The Futures of Reading

Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library."—Giorgio Agamben, "From the Book to the Screen: The Before and the After of the Book."