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Making Sense of Reading*

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Reading researchers and literary theorists alike tend to assume that they know how the general reader will respond to a particular text, but humans are a contrary lot. We were forcefully reminded of this in a recent investigation, when we asked people to read John McPhee's "In Virgin Forest" (1987). Here is a sample of the responses when the interviewer, Jim, asked the readers what they made of the piece (the readers' names are fictitious):

Julie: Oh, I don't know, it was boring.

Jim: Boring?

Julie: Yeah, basically.

Jim: What did you make of "In Virgin Forest"?

Carole: I'm not going to say it was interesting, but it's nice that there is a place like that.

Jim: What did you make of "In Virgin Forest"?

Rita: What *can* you make of it?

Jim: I don't know. Did you want it to go on?

Rita: No. No. I wanted it to end. It was confusing.

Carl: I liked it. It was informative. It's interesting because you catch a touch of—well, [it] presents an image of an untouched virgin forest in the middle of a very developed region. That's kind of an interesting contradiction in some sense.

Jim: What did you make of "In Virgin Forest"?

Don: I loved it.

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How can we account for the range of response to "In Virgin Forest" or, for that matter, to any text? What does the diversity of response imply about "reading"? One might dismiss the question by saying that the different responses are simply due to differences among readers—we all know that people differ—and drop the matter there. The problem with such an approach, of course, is that it leaves texts themselves out of consideration. Differences among texts (which are about as large as differences among people) must play some role in the diversity of response. If readers did no more than "read themselves," we would have no way of accounting for the fact that the same person responds differently to different texts.

The prevailing view, therefore—it has become almost a truism, both in reading research and in literary theory—is that reading must be understood as an *interaction* between reader and text. That view is an improvement on reader-based or text-based accounts, but even it is too simple. The interactive approach ignores or underestimates the degree to which a person can respond to the same text differently on different occasions, in different situations. Louise Rosenblatt (1985) therefore insists that the most appropriate way to understand the reading event is not as interaction but as transaction, "a unique coming-together of a particular personality and a particular text *at a particular time and place under particular circumstances*" (p. 104, emphasis added). For example, it makes a difference whether you are reading a short story for enjoyment, in the comfort of your own living room, or if you're reading it in a classroom or laboratory, expecting to be tested on its details.

Readers, texts, and situations—in ways that seem to be so fluid and dynamic as to defy explanation—somehow mesh, and result in the activities we call "reading" and "responding." Is it possible to make sense out of all this? Can a "transactional" approach help us account for the diversity of response to texts? And, perhaps most important, what are the implications of such a view of reading for educators who are concerned to help people grow and develop as readers?

We don't pretend to have definitive answers to these difficult questions. Over the past several years, though, we have developed a conceptual approach to reading that may at least allow them to be asked within a specific framework (Hunt & Vipond, 1985, 1986, 1987; Vipond & Hunt, 1984, 1987, 1989). In brief, we claim that there are identifiable types or "modes" of reading and response, and that which mode is dominant depends on the complex transaction between reader and text, shaped by the situation in which the reading occurs. In this chapter we outline the model and then use it to account for responses—such as those of Julie, Carole, and so on, above—obtained in a recent investigation of reading and response. Finally, we discuss some educational implications of this work.

Modes of Reading

We claim that reading is not a unitary activity. Instead, there are different types, stances, or "modes." For any given reading event one of three modes will be dominant: information-driven, story-driven, or point-driven. *Information-driven* reading dominates when the reader's central goal is to learn from the text, to acquire information from it. We read in an information-driven mode when we are, for example, studying for an exam, following a recipe, checking a fact in a dictionary or encyclopedia, or reading the label on a medicine bottle. The second mode, *story-driven* reading, dominates when the reader is concerned with the "lived-through experience" of the reading. Story-driven reading operates as though the text were a plain glass window on a storyworld; readers try to immerse themselves in a world of events, characters, and settings. We expect to read in a story-driven way when we read for enjoyment, when we go to the bookstore looking for a "good read," a "page-turner."

In a rough-and-ready way, information- and story-driven modes of reading correspond to Rosenblatt's (1938/1976, 1978) classic distinction between the "efferent" stance (which is concerned with carrying information away from reading) and the "aesthetic" stance (concerned with lived-through experience). We differ from Rosenblatt, however, because we posit a third mode, one which we believe is especially appropriate for texts often deemed "literary." We call this *point-driven* reading (Vipond & Hunt, 1984) or, equivalently, *dialogic* reading (see below). That is, we divide Rosenblatt's aesthetic stance into two modes: story-driven and point-driven.

The term *point* comes from sociolinguistic analyses of conversational storytelling. William Labov (1972) and Livia Polanyi (1979, 1985) have shown that participants in a conversation expect narrators to be "getting at" something. Listeners expect a story to be point-ed, to have some purpose that makes it tellable in the situational or thematic context. Labov and Polanyi have also shown that points are constructed on the basis of what they call the evaluation structure of text. Anything that is incongruous with respect to social, cultural, or textual norms is potentially evaluative; incongruities (figures of speech, for example) serve as *invitations* to share the narrator's beliefs, ideas, attitudes, perceptions, or values (Hunt & Vipond, 1986). Points, therefore, are not "in" the story but have to be constructed on the basis of evaluations that are recognized and accepted. In some cases they are literally "negotiated" by listener and narrator (Polanyi, 1979). It follows that there is no such thing as *the* point.

By analogy, point-driven reading entails the effort to understand the text as a purposeful act of communication. This is not to say point-driven

reading is a more advanced type developmentally; nor is it to say that what the author intended is what the text "really" means (to say that would be to adopt the intentional fallacy; Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1949). Rather, readers in point-driven mode are trying to construct for themselves plausible meanings, a process invoked and shaped by their expectation that the author has created the text out of what Linda Flower (1988) calls a "web of purpose." Thus, as Flower notes in connection with a related concept, the rhetorical reading strategy, "readers use their inferences about the author's plans, goals, and context to help construct a meaningful text" (p. 540). It may be worth underlining that point-driven reading does not entail the intentional fallacy: Readers may impute intentionality to the text and have a sense of authorial purpose without knowing anything at all, even the name, of the actual historical author.

Particularly important for point-driven reading is that when readers see incongruities as *intentional* (i.e., they see them as potential evaluations rather than as inexplicable anomalies), they may consider themselves invited to construct and reconstruct possible points.

It is crucial to keep in mind in this context that "point" should not be reductively equated with "gist," "theme," "message," or "moral." In the sociolinguistic literature, and as we are using it here, point is what renders a specific story tellable by a particular narrator to a particular audience in a particular situation. As Labov has noted, when stories lack point it is obvious: The listener responds "So what?" Dialogue is interrupted. Using the analogy of Anne Freedman (1987), a story is like a shot in a tennis match—it acquires its meaning, its point, from its position and role in the game between the players. To catch the tennis ball and throw it back, to tell a pointless story, ends the game, abrogates the dialogue.

Thus, an alternative and in some ways more useful term than point-driven reading is "dialogic" reading. The term *dialogic* emphasizes that in this type of transaction, readers imagine themselves to be in conversation with authors and texts. Meaning-making is a collaborative process (Phelps, 1985)—a dialogue—between authors and readers, even though, again, there is no requirement that what the actual, historical author intended and what the reader constructs must be congruent. The term *dialogic* is helpful, then, because it foregrounds the analogy between reading and conversational story listening.

The collaborative/communicative features we have attributed to point-driven or dialogic reading are true to some degree of *all* reading. To read—to understand language at all—is to use a symbol system that one shares with other people and whose very origin lies in social interaction (Vygotsky, 1934/1986). Furthermore, any type of reading would probably be impossible if one did not make the fundamental assumption that the text was the product of an intentional being. Even so, we believe it is still useful to

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make a distinction between reading events in which the text is treated primarily as an opportunity to "make contact" with an intentional author (as in dialogic reading), and events in which readers' attention is focused elsewhere—on what they can learn from the text (information-driven reading) or on their experiential immersion in a storyworld (story-driven reading).

The Reader, the Text, the Situation

Which of the three modes will predominate in any given reading event depends on the configuration of reader, text, and situation. A reading event is a transaction between reader and text, conditioned by the physical, social, and cultural situation in which it occurs. *Readers* differ in personality, intelligence, and motivation; they bring characteristic preferences, styles, needs, and histories of success and failure with different modes to the transaction. *Texts* differ because they invite, reward, repay, or—in James J. Gibson's (1979) useful term—"afford" being read in certain modes, but constrain or "block" being read in other ways. One text (a romance, for example) might afford story-driven reading, a second (a traditional novel) might afford both story-driven and dialogic reading, whereas a third (a medicine bottle label) might afford information-driven reading. Other combinations, of course, are possible: The point is that although it may be *possible* to read any text in any way—one can read *Hamlet* for information regarding Elizabethan assumptions about Denmark, or a telephone book as an expression of the purposes and character of the phone company—certain modes tend to work better (and, by convention, tend to be used) with certain texts.

We use the term *situation* to represent task demands, the physical and social setting, and the historical, cultural, and ideological contexts that shape reading events in silent but profound ways (Eagleton, 1983). Like texts, situations can be seen as affording certain modes and constraining others. Task demands, for example, promote different types of reading and response (see Chapter 7): Readers who expect to be asked "What happens in this story?" are likely to engage in story-driven reading, whereas readers who expect to be tested on details are likely to read in an information-driven way.

Sociocultural context can also influence reading mode. Consider two different groups of people, students and faculty members, who participate in the same research project. The students, participating in the social role of "subjects," may be more likely for that reason to read in an information-driven way, whereas faculty members, participating as "collaborators," may be more likely to read dialogically (see Danziger, 1985; and Wood &

Kroger, 1985, for more on the distinction between subjects and collaborators).

Now we can begin to see why it is so difficult to account for a given reader's response to a certain text in a particular situation. Even if one makes the simplifying assumption, as we do, that mode of response directly reflects mode of reading, it is difficult to know which mode of reading will predominate on any given occasion: It depends on the interplay between what the text affords and what the reader is prepared and motivated to do, a transaction shaped by task demands and other aspects of the situational matrix in which the reading is embedded.

Another problem is that even though the modes are distinct conceptually, in practice it is difficult to identify a single reading as belonging to a specific mode. One reason for the difficulty is that a reader may engage in different modes during reading. For example, someone who begins reading a work of literary fiction in story-driven mode may, perhaps because of accumulating incongruities (evaluations), shift to a more dialogic stance. A second reason for difficulty is that, in practice, the modes seldom exist in pure form. More likely, they overlap, each instance of reading incorporating some elements of all three. It is highly unlikely that a reading that was primarily story-driven, for example, could avoid entirely some attempt to construct authorial purpose; at the same time, there would almost certainly be some attempt to learn or remember specific textual information. And who can read *Othello*, no matter how "dialogically," without wanting to know what happens next? It is a question of precedence.

Previous Experiments on Reading and Response

Support for this model comes from a number of experiments we have conducted. In one (Hunt & Vipond, 1985, Experiment 3), 70 first-year undergraduates read three short stories. After every page of reading the students received one of three tasks: a plot task (designed to encourage story-driven reading), a detail task (to encourage information-driven reading), or a frame task (to encourage dialogic reading). Reading speeds, which were presumed to reflect the influence of mode, differed as a function of task, with the detail task resulting in the slowest reading times overall and the plot task the fastest. The most interesting result, however, concerned the frame task. Unlike the students who were reading for plot or for details, the students reading for "point" tended to slow down over the last few pages of each story. We suspect that this slowing occurred because they were trying to construct a meaning for the text that was consistent with a framing letter they had seen just before reading, a task that became more urgent as the end of the story drew closer.

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In another experiment (Vipond & Hunt, 1989), people read "The Day We Got Our Own Back," a literary short story by Maeve Brennan. This experiment was designed as a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial, in which text (evaluated vs. nonevaluated versions of the story), task (plot vs. frame task), and modality (silent vs. oral reading) were manipulated. Ninety-six first-year undergraduates and, for comparison purposes, twelve faculty members, took part. During and after their reading of "The Day We Got Our Own Back," the participants were given a variety of tasks, all of which were quantified and subjected to statistical tests. Results indicated, among other things, that readers were sensitive to the evaluative structure of the story; that the faculty members tended to be more "dialogic" than the undergraduates; and that, among undergraduates, the frame task was associated with more dialogic responses than the plot task.

In broad outline, these two experiments support the three modes/reader-text-situation model outlined above. First, they suggest that task demands can drive readers to use specific modes, as indicated by in-process and post-reading measures. Second, they suggest that the different modes tend to be used differentially by different groups of readers. Third, they suggest that variations in the evaluation structure of text affect some aspects of reading and response.

Useful as they are in establishing the plausibility of the model, however, experiments such as these do not (nor are they intended to) allow us to understand the complexities of the reading-response process. The controlled, experimental approach of these studies gives us the broad outlines; what is required now is a more descriptive, qualitative approach to fill in some of the details. That is the purpose of the present study.

A different way of saying this is to say that in the present investigation we are willing to trade "control" for "regularity" (Rubin, 1989). The data of this study consist of what readers say; our purpose is to identify and account for regularities in these verbal responses. More specifically, we will try to classify the protocols (or parts of them) as predominantly information-driven, story-driven, or dialogic, giving examples of each. Next, we will attempt to make sense of the different types of response by considering how modes of reading are either afforded or constrained by different configurations of reader-text-situation.

METHOD

Readers

Readers were recruited from St. Thomas University, a small, liberal arts, undergraduate institution. Because we wanted to study a broad range of

readers we selected five people from each of three groups: (a) first-year university students; (b) fourth-year university students; and (c) faculty members. The first-year students, who were approximately 18 years old, were fulfilling a participation requirement for their introductory psychology course. The first five students to sign up (Carole, Joan, Karen, Larry, Martha) were included in the study; that is, we had no control over who participated from this group. That was not the case for the other two groups, however. We invited five fourth-year students whom we considered to be "good" students. Three were honors students in psychology (Becky, Julie, Rita), one was an honors student in English (Eric), and the other was majoring in history (Kevin). The fourth-year students were each approximately 21 years old with the exception of Eric, a 32-year-old. Similarly, we invited five faculty members whom we thought would be interested, and willing to participate, in a lengthy study. With one exception (Don), the faculty members could be considered "junior," having less than four years' teaching experience. They were in their early- to mid-30s. It is worth noting that the faculty participants were members of various university departments: social sciences (Ben), humanities (Will), education (Don), and social work (Carl, Ellen).

Members of the English department were specifically excluded, however, because we found in earlier work (Vipond & Hunt, 1989) that the detached, analytic kind of reading often practiced by "professional" readers, although clearly of interest, poses a set of problems different from the ones we wished to study here. (But see below, p. 129.)

In summary, the 15 readers in this study represent about as wide a range of interests and abilities as was possible within this university community.

Texts

The participants read and talked about four texts. We chose texts that represented a range of difficulty, genre, and authorial visibility. All, for practical reasons, were fairly short. All, in our view, afforded "literary" reading, although not all were fictional. Two of the texts ("Metaphors" and "The Sun on Mount Royal") were very short "postcard" stories by the New Brunswick author Kent Thompson, published in the collection *Leaping Up Sliding Away* (1986). Despite their brevity (one page or less), postcard stories are readily identifiable as conventional short stories, featuring plots, settings, and characters.

"In Virgin Forest," published anonymously in "The Talk of the Town" section of *The New Yorker* (July 6, 1987), was written by John McPhee (personal communication, February 1988). "In Virgin Forest" is an evoca-

tive description of the Hutcheson Memorial Forest near New Brunswick, New Jersey, written in McPhee's "aesthetic nonfictional prose" style (Schuster, 1985).

"Some Approaches to the Problem of the Shortage of Time" (henceforth, "Time"), by Ursula K. Le Guin, could be described as a satirical post-modern fiction; it was published in the collection *The Compass Rose* (1982). Although fictional, "Time" is anything but a conventional story. Le Guin delivers a pseudoscientific, parodic treatise on how the problem of the shortage of time might be solved; she presents cosmological, chemical, and political solutions. Although we did not try to ascertain the "reading level" of the texts, intuitively it seems that the two Thompson stories would be fairly accessible for most readers, the McPhee piece difficult, and the Le Guin text very difficult.

The study proper was preceded by a discussion of two fragmentary warmup texts. The first was a paragraph from the St. Thomas University calendar. The second was a paragraph from Maeve Brennan's short story, "The Day We Got Our Own Back."

Procedure

Each reader was interviewed by one of the authors (JJ) for two sessions, each lasting up to two hours, and separated by an interval ranging from two to seven days. The sessions were semistructured interviews: While the interviewer had a list of questions and topics, he also tried to create a "client-centered" atmosphere, following up interesting leads and allowing the reader to establish closure. In short, topics were explored exhaustively. Considerable effort was made to ensure that readers were comfortable, and in general they reported that they experienced little tension or constraint.

To establish rapport, and to learn something about the reader's background, the first session began with a leisurely discussion of the reader's like and dislikes. The readers were asked to name specific titles and authors they enjoyed or had read recently. The two warmup texts were then read and discussed, followed by the four texts described above. The order of texts was varied unsystematically across readers, except that the two Thompson stories, being in the same book, were always read consecutively. The instructions emphasized that the participants should try to read as "normally" as possible, take as much time as desired, and that no tests of memory would be given.

What happened next is unusual in reading research: In an attempt to change the way readers saw the texts as "framed" (Reid, 1988)—and thus to make the situation one that less strongly invited information-driven

reading—the readers were handed an actual published copy of the text they were to read. For "In Virgin Forest," they were handed a July 6, 1987 copy of *The New Yorker*. For the two Thompson pieces, they were handed *Leaping Up Sliding Away*. For the Le Guin story, they were handed *The Compass Rose*. While the reader was reading, the interviewer busied himself with other work in a far corner of the room.

Immediately following reading the readers were asked what they made of the piece, which usually turned into a freewheeling discussion of what they liked and disliked about it. This was followed by a "discourse-based interview" (see below), and then a discussion of "probes" about each text (see below). After all four texts had been discussed in this manner, there was a final wrapup in which the readers were invited to reconsider each text in turn, making any final comments they wished.

Discourse-based interview. Lee Odell and Dixie Goswami (1982; Odell, Goswami, & Herrington, 1983) devised the discourse-based interview as a means of studying the tacit knowledge of writers in nonacademic settings. For example, the writer of a letter was shown his original expression, "Dear Ron," along with one or more alternatives prepared by the researchers: for example, "Dear Mr. Bunch." The writer was asked whether he would be willing to substitute the alternative for the original, and if not, why not. Often, in discussing reasons for their preference, writers reveal a knowledge of purpose and context that might otherwise go unnoticed (Paré, 1988).

For the present study we adapted the discourse-based interview in order to study the tacit knowledge of *readers*. For each text, we prepared several sets of alternatives or "branches." The first branch was the original sentence, exactly as it appeared in the text. The other two branches were either paraphrases of the original or semantically-altered versions (see p. 125 for an example).

The reader was shown these branches only after reading the entire text and discussing the "what do you make of it?" question. To get the reader talking about the different branches, the interviewer would say something like this: "Suppose alternative B were in the text instead of A. Would that make a difference to your reading?" (Note that the reader was *not* asked, Which one is best? Pilot work indicated that that question tends to stifle discussion.) If the reader agreed it would make a difference, the interviewer then asked, "What sort of difference would it make?" Readers who thought it would not make a difference were asked if they saw any difference at all between the branches. After discussion (often extensive), the procedure was repeated for alternative C.

The reason for using this task is that we wanted to see whether readers have a tacit concept of "authorial purpose." (We have found that it is something that any of them do not mention spontaneously.) Because the

task focuses attention on the differences between the original sentence and our alternatives, it invites—although it does not require—the reader to consider and to comment on authorial or textual purpose. This task, in other words, helps create a situation in which dialogic responses are afforded.

Two sets of branches were prepared for each of the Thompson stories, four for "In Virgin Forest," and three for "Time." To help the participants get used to the procedure, the warmup texts each had one set of branches.

Probes. Following the discourse-based interview, the readers were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements about the text that "other people" had allegedly made. Most of the probes had a rather critical, negative tone. For instance, one probe for "In Virgin Forest" was, "There are too many facts, all mixed up, which makes it very hard to remember things." In the present study, as in previous research, we found that such statements elicit a range of response from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." More to the point—and as we will see in the next section—probes are effective in stimulating discussion concerning the readers' own responses, the text, the writer's purposes and abilities, and so on. In this discussion readers often reveal frustration or even hostility towards a text, which would be unacceptable in more traditional "English class" modes of response. Possibly readers are willing to reveal these feelings because the probe format lessens their responsibility: They are merely agreeing with what someone else has already said.

In any case, the probes must be understood as tasks that afford (but do not determine) different modes of response. For example, "There are too many facts, all mixed up, which makes it very hard to remember things," invites an information-driven response, whereas "The story doesn't feel complete—you want to know what happens next" (said about a postcard story), affords a story-driven response.

To summarize: Fifteen readers (five each of first-year students, fourth-year students, and faculty members) read and discussed four texts presented in their original formats—two very short stories, a *New Yorker* article, and a satirical postmodern fiction. Each reader participated in up to four hours of reading and talking. The sessions were tape-recorded and later transcribed in their entirety, yielding 40-50 pages of transcript for each reader.

Now, how to make sense of all this talk?

FINDINGS AND ACCOUNTINGS

In this section we present excerpts from the transcripts to illustrate different modes of reading and response. For each text, we will try to make

sense of "all this talk" by considering differences in the reader-text-situation configuration.

"Metaphors" and "The Sun on Mount Royal"

The two fictional postcard stories by Kent Thompson strongly afford story-driven reading. Organized as narratives, they allow readers to immerse themselves in an accessible and familiar (to our readers) story-world of settings, characters, and events. They also afford dialogic reading, however, because a reader who asked, "What is this about? What is Thompson getting at here?" would be able to construct a satisfactory response. In particular, the title of "Metaphors," and the unresolved plot structure of "The Sun on Mount Royal," invite consideration of authorial purpose. The stories do not invite information-driven reading (although of course they could be so read under appropriate circumstances).

Probably because they can be read just for the story line, these two texts evoked many clearly story-driven responses. For example, immediately after reading "Metaphors," Carole gives a plot summary—a classic story-driven response.

Jim: What did you make of that piece?

Carole: That there is a problem in the family and that Gary, the father, was not being fair to his son and his wife could not accept that and she wanted things to change. He said that he would try and then practically turned it around and said that he couldn't in a matter of seconds, and she decided she was going to do something about it and leave for a short period of time.

In general, people reading in story-driven mode expect the plot to be resolved and therefore they tend to be disappointed with "modern" unresolved stories such as "The Sun on Mount Royal." (Thompson actually alludes to this convention when he ends the story with a question: "Was this to be the end of her story?") Here Rita is agreeing with the statement, "The story doesn't feel complete—you want to know that happens next":

Rita: It's like she doesn't want to love somebody right away after her marriage is broken up so you're sort of wondering, Is she going to or is she not?—just going to walk on by—so you don't feel it's complete. Like I said, you do want to know what happens next—what's going to happen. Will she marry this guy or will he move in or—? Anything's possible, so I would strongly agree with that one.

Carole's objection, also reflecting a story-driven response, has to do with incompleteness of character rather than plot. This is in response to the

probe, "You certainly do come to understand a lot about this woman in five paragraphs, don't you?"

Carole: I don't know if it's a lot. (...) I consider to be a lot knowing exactly what the problem was with her marriage and why it was such a problem, whatever this problem was and how many kids she had, how long did she have to wait, what her career is and what kind of relationship is she actually having with this new man. I think there's more. I would like to know more.

Although Rita and Carole objected to the story, it was precisely because of the story that Martha liked "The Sun on Mount Royal."

Jim: What did you make of that little piece?

Martha: Interesting.

Jim: Did you like it?

Martha: Yeah. I did.

Jim: O.K. Maybe if you talked about what you liked about it. Maybe what you thought interesting would come through.

Martha: Oh, just the story line—nice story line, that she left her husband and thought she met someone else that would fulfill the fantasy she had or the image—her next lover—and to discover that he probably had just as many faults as her husband and that she'd probably fall into the same situation she did with him.

Earlier we mentioned that it is difficult, in practice, to identify a single reading as belonging to a specific mode. For example, despite her comments above, it would be inaccurate to classify Martha as a "story-driven reader," because later in the interview she invokes authorial intention to support her disagreement with the statement, "The story doesn't feel complete—you want to know what happens next." (This supports, incidentally, the view that different post-reading tasks invite different modes of response.)

Jim: Is that a strong disagreement again or just a disagreement? Just going to try to get a degree of your disagreement.

Martha: O.K. I don't know if I'd say it's strong or not, because that's the end of the story and so I think it's the way the author wanted to leave it end and let you decide. (. . .) It would be nice to know what happens next but I think it would take a few more pages, you know, it could go on and on—tell about her husband and the kids. It's just—the story—its purpose is to present that little scenario and end with that question.

Jim: And what?

Martha: You know, leaving you to wonder what will she do—to let you investigate the situation further and maybe place yourself in her situation.

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We might say that readers who want to "investigate the situation further" are taking a dialogic stance: They seem to consider reading to be an ongoing conversation or dialogue between themselves and the text (or the author responsible for it). That is, whereas the story-driven reader expects to become immersed in an interesting story-world for as long as the actual, physical reading lasts, the dialogic reader expects to be able to think about and "converse" with the text after the physical reading is finished. (Perhaps for this reason, people in our investigation who read dialogically sometimes wanted to take a copy of the text home with them.) The clearest example of this dialogic type of response in our corpus was Don's comment, during the wrapup, about "Metaphors":

Jim: Is there anything about "Metaphors"? (. . .)

Don: Well, I think the idea of thinking of down the line of the metaphors that people use to—to think about their own development is interesting—I haven't tended to use that way of thinking and so that's an idea that I will explore and probably see it both in my own thought and other people's thought.

Jim: When people use metaphors?

Don: Specifically using metaphors to think about their own development and problem-solving. (...) I'll think on that for quite awhile now and see how far I can extend that idea and see what use it has to me and then, somewhere down the line, I make a judgment on it.

In summary, "Metaphors" affords both story-driven and dialogic reading, and it was so read by our readers. In one respect (its open-endedness), "The Sun on Mount Royal" resists conventional story-driven reading; some readers disliked it for that reason. The extreme brevity of the stories may also have constrained story-driven reading to some extent. In general, however, what the texts afforded, what the readers were prepared to do, and what the situation required, were in reasonable harmony for these two stories.

"In Virgin Forest"

In contrast to the postcard stories, "In Virgin Forest" does not readily afford story-driven reading because it is not organized as a narrative. It does, however, invite a dialogic stance: There are many places where McPhee may be taken as inviting his readers to share a perception, a belief, or an attitude; typically, these are conveyed by metaphors, similes, and other "discourse evaluations" (Hunt & Vipond, 1986). To some extent, the text also affords information-driven reading. There is, indeed, a great deal of factual information about forests (one in particular) in this piece; a person

can learn a great deal from it. However, the text is not particularly conducive to "pure" information-driven reading: the facts are there, but they are not arranged in conventional "textbook" fashion, and there are no information-acquisition aids such as headings or diagrams. In brief, "In Virgin Forest" can be said to invite a mixture of dialogic and information-driven reading. Someone reading "In Virgin Forest" in a pure information-driven mode, at least in this setting, would likely feel frustrated by its abundant detail and lack of textbook structure. .

We found instances of both information-driven and dialogic types of response. Becky is an example of a reader who—perhaps somewhat reluctantly—takes an information-driven stance:

Jim: What did you make of that piece? (...)

Becky: Well, it's about forests. I don't know, it was very descriptive, a lot of information in it and history, some geography because it talks about different places. I'm sure if you were interested in botany you'd find it very interesting. (...) I didn't like it but that's just my opinion because I'm not into plants and trees and that stuff, I guess. It was kind of—it was a very instructional reading. I wouldn't read it for enjoyment, I don't think. That's it.

An information-driven approach was not invariably associated with disliking the text. Although his reading was largely dialogic, Don reported enjoying the piece in part because of what he learned from it:

Don: Well, I come from [a place] where there aren't very many trees and so I love any kind of forested area because it's something that intrigues me. (...) There's a lot of tidbits of information in there that are kind of intriguing as well. The whole idea of the developmental process of the forest is something I know very little about. I enjoyed that opportunity to get a few more insights in that whole area.

Probably because they were trying to read the text factually, as straight information, some readers agreed that "There are too many facts, all mixed up, which makes it very hard to remember things."

Rita: It jumps around and goes—it's mumbo-jumbo, actually. It talks about one thing and then talks about another and then it might go back to that, and then you just get confused of what's going on, and yeah, it would be hard to remember things.

Note that Rita does not question the presupposition that one ought to be able to remember things from "In Virgin Forest."

If people reading in an information-driven way are primarily interested

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in getting the facts from the text, people reading dialogically are concerned with constructing points or engaging in conversation. The different stances became apparent during the discourse-based interview, when readers were asked if it would make a difference to them if the original sentence (A) were replaced by either of our alternatives (B or C); for example:

- (A) In 1981, gypsy moths tore off the canopy, and sunlight sprayed the floor.
- (B) In 1981, an invasion of gypsy moths ate much of the leaf cover and allowed sunlight to spray the floor.
- (C) An infestation of gypsy moths tore off the canopy in 1981, allowing sunlight onto the forest floor.

Becky: No, B wouldn't make a difference because they're saying the same thing—the gypsy moths ate the top and so the sunlight just came through C...). So it's the same thing. A and B are the same. I think C would mean the same as well.

If one is concerned only with getting the information, Becky is right; there is no difference between A, B, and C. If anything, a case could be made for preferring the more explicit, less "literary" alternatives, B and C. On the other hand, if one is reading dialogically, attempting to see what the author might be getting at, "tore off" and "sprayed" stand out as evaluations that afford the opportunity to share a perception with McPhee, as Ellen does:

Ellen: There's no difference in terms of the actual factual information, you know, [A and B are] both basically saying the same thing, but the image that comes to me when I read "gypsy moths tore off the canopy"—I get a sense of the voraciousness with which they would eat the leaves, you know.' Where "ate much of the leaf cover" just doesn't capture that, how fast that can happen.

In other parts of the interview, too, some readers made responses indicative of a dialogic mode. This is Martha, disagreeing with the probe, "The language is too fancy. All of that playing around with description makes it harder to understand."

Martha: The language—it's a little bit fancy but it lets you know that the author—sees—the forest as worthy of description and wants to have you that same impression of the forest when you read, you know. It's not ugly or sterile. He describes it so you'll have a better understanding of how he feels about it.

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Thus, people who read "In Virgin Forest" dialogically tended to attribute to McPhee or the text some purpose beyond that of conveying a lot of facts about forests. In response to the statement, "It's a description of a forest—you'd only be interested in it if you were interested in forests," Ben said:

Ben: Well, I would disagree with that. There is no point in writing something and distributing it to such a wide audience if it is simply about some very specific aspect of the world. But I think they're making a comment about the relationship between man and his environment and using another example of an area of virgin forest which is on the verge of extinction. (...) So I don't think that it is just about trees—it's about our relationship to the environment.

In summary, we infer that people like Becky, Rita, and Julie read the text in a more or less "pure" information-driven fashion and therefore saw no important difference between McPhee's literary language and our more prosaic alternatives. However—and despite its wealth of factual information—"In Virgin Forest" does not readily afford a pure information-driven approach in the way that a textbook, for instance, does. People who tried to read it in an information-driven way were therefore understandably frustrated. In contrast, people reading dialogically assumed that the purpose of the article was something other than teaching the reader about forests. Ellen, Ben, and Martha, among others, were not distressed that they couldn't remember all the facts. They believed they had a sense of what the article was getting at, and this was more important than being able to remember it.

But where do these assumptions—the stances that people adopt towards texts—come from? Different configurations of reader-text-situation go part way toward accounting for why the people in our investigation read "In Virgin Forest" differently. Consider first the reader. One possibility is that some readers have learned that factual texts afford only information-driven reading: It is as if the presence of facts and details, in the absence of narrative structure, "drive" such readers towards this stance (Mitchell, 1982). Related to this is the question of familiarity with the conventions of a particular genre. For instance, readers who know *The New Yorker* (Don, Ben, Eric were familiar with the magazine, and Ellen is a regular reader) have experienced "aesthetic nonfictional prose" before, whereas people unfamiliar with the magazine (Becky, Rita, Larry) tended to find McPhee's style alien and alienating. This is not a simple matter of reading ability, either. Becky, Julie, and Rita are highly capable students and they have no problem with articles in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology*—yet they were flummoxed by McPhee.

Granted that readers bring different knowledge and expectations to their reading, it would be a mistake to attribute all the important effects to differences in "cultural literacy" (Hirsch, 1987). It is also important, for instance, to consider how the situation was different for different readers, and may thereby have predisposed them to different modes. Recall that for the first-year students, the investigation was an "experiment" carried out in an academic setting, sponsored by the "Psychology Department," for which they received course credit. For first- and fourth-year students (except Eric), the interviewer, Jim, was a person older and with higher academic status than themselves, and this person, moreover, was representing two even older, higher-ranking "professors." All of these factors may have conspired to create a situation in which information-driven reading was the appropriate, "academic" mode to use. The social situation was different for the faculty members, however. Obviously they were not receiving course credit; presumably they were participating as a way of collaborating with two of their colleagues. And, from the faculty members' perspective, the interviewer was a person younger and with lower academic status than themselves. In short, the students in this investigation may have played the role of "subjects," whereas the professors took the role of "collaborators."

Whatever social roles they adopted in this study, we cannot overlook the primary sociocultural roles of our participants—"students" and "professors"—which may also have influenced the modes of reading and response that we encountered. In fact, as a very rough and only partly accurate summary of the responses to "In Virgin Forest," we might say that the students "studied" and the professors "professed."

"Some Approaches to the Problem of the Shortage of Time"

Le Guin's "Time" is the most difficult text we used. Although part of the difficulty is due to its vocabulary, which features such interesting neologisms as *chronocrystallization* and *petropsychotoxin*, it is mainly due to the fact that "Time" doesn't just afford but virtually requires the reader to adopt a dialogic stance—to ask: What in the world is she getting at? In this respect it differs from "In Virgin Forest." Both texts resist story-driven reading; however, whereas "In Virgin Forest" can be successfully read, at least in part, as a factual account, to read "Time" as a factual account is surely to misinterpret Le Guin's satirical intent. (It would be like taking Swift's "A Modest Proposal" as a reasonable plan for population control.) In fact, it could be argued that one of the purposes of "Time" is to satirize those who would read it as nonfiction!

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Nevertheless, our readers were divided. Some found it a "spoof," "put-on," or "joke," whereas others considered it "incomprehensible" or "boring." This division corresponds, roughly, to a division between those who read "Time" dialogically and those who did not. Readers who classified the piece as a satire tended to have ideas about what its point or purpose might be.

Ellen: I liked the way whoever's writing this pokes fun at this whole notion of trying to save time and have more time to do things and all that. (. . .) One of the things I liked or something that I enjoyed is the spoof on our whole preoccupation with time and the use of time and making it such a lofty sort of topic to be studied by these international groups and this sort of thing.

Readers who considered the text to be satirical were not put off by the vocabulary. Reading dialogically, they considered the neologisms to be part of the joke Le Guin is playing, part of her point. Ben is asked whether he agrees with the statement, "All that technical vocabulary makes it impossible to remember things."

Ben: But it is not "technical," it is technical gobbledegook. If you take it seriously I am sure that it would be hard to understand. It's not intended to be expressed in that way.

Other readers were distressed by the "technical" language, however. They did not connect the difficult terminology with the text's possible rhetorical aims, but instead tried to make sense of it, literally. However, *chronocrystallization* and the like are not easily interpreted, and therefore it is understandable that these readers found "Time" "over my head" (Rita) or "above my reading level" (Martha). This suggests that one's stance towards texts may well be more important for reading than knowledge per se. Presumably none of our readers knew what *petropsychotoxin* means; the difference is that only some of them assumed they *should* know.

Similarly, some believed they were acquiring legitimate scientific information from the piece. For instance, asked whether he agreed with the statement, "I think it's funny," Larry said:

Larry: No. I totally disagree. (...) I felt the approach of it was serious—to me, anyway—because it is all scientific.

Jim: I guess I should start off by saying, "What did you make of the whole piece?"

Carole: That everyone is trying to find a way to stop time from decreasing. It seems to me that something is going to shorten time.

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But much later in the interview, during the wrapup, Carole finds out that "Time" is fiction.

Carole: I don't like it any more.

Jim: You don't like it any more. O.K., you want to tell me why you don't like it any more?

Carole: Because I thought it was real. I just thought that this was a problem that I didn't know about and that's why I'm interested. I thought, "God, I didn't know that we're losing time! How do you lose time?" and stuff. Now I realize that it's not true so now I don't like it anymore.

Jim: O.K., kind of neat.

Carole: It just seems fake now.

In summary, "Time" appears to be almost incomprehensible unless one assumes that it is intended to be read as satire. It affords dialogic reading but only *appears* to afford an information-driven stance. Its language is, as Ben said, "technical gobbledegook," but it is just scientific-sounding enough that a reader could be fooled by it. Why were some of the readers fooled? We assume some people read "Time" in an information-driven mode for the same reasons that "In Virgin Forest" was sometimes read that way (see that discussion): Either these readers do not have the dialogic mode available, or else they have it available but for a variety of situational reasons, they considered the information-driven mode to be the appropriate one to use.

Professional and Associative Responses: More Modes?

Most of our readers' responses can be accounted for by positing three reading modes, but there were some comments that seem to fall outside this scheme. The first of these is the detached, analytical type of response that critics and English professors tend to make (and which we tried to exclude by not inviting English professors to participate). Eric is particularly adept at this kind of "professional reading." Here, for instance, he wonders whether Thompson doesn't attempt too much in "Metaphors" in too short a space:

Eric: In the end it works, but in the body of it (...) it jumps back and forth a little too much, from Gary, to her, to the kid: bing, bing, bing, bing. I mean, it's clear what he's trying to do—he's trying to give you a little bit of everybody—but I don't know that you can give that much of everybody and still have any continuity. The story line follows through, but it's just too choppy.

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At present the status of professional reading is unclear to us. Perhaps it is a mixed mode (dialogic, information-driven) that has been learned and conventionalized. What is clear is that professional reading is a relatively "noncooperative" type: It is not a matter of engaging in a conversation but of stepping back to observe (and, often, to pass judgment on) how authors accomplish what they do.

At the opposite extreme, readers sometimes stay within themselves, attending to their own images, memories, and associations. It is important to distinguish this "reader-based" type of response (MacLean, 1986) from the other modes. No matter which mode they are using, people could never make sense of text if they did not use their knowledge and experience (Kintsch, 1988); similarly, the act of reading would be nonsensical if it did not affect their knowledge and experience. In dialogic reading, this back-and-forth interplay between text and experience is, of course, especially important; it is in focal attention. When the text is used not as a conversational partner, however, but as a pretext for exploring one's own memories and images, one has drifted into what may be called an "associative" mode; the dialogue has become a monologue. Both dialogic and associative reading, then, feature what Steen Larsen and Uffe Seilman (1987) call *personal reminders*; the difference is that in dialogic reading the reminders illuminate and are relevant to the text (they contribute to the ongoing conversation), whereas in associative mode reminders tend to be an end in themselves.

For example, Ellen, whose reading of "In Virgin Forest" was mainly dialogic, seems to have read the text at least partly in associative mode:

Jim: What did you make of "In Virgin Forest"?

Ellen: Well, it's kind of a nice story about a virgin forest. I was having images of when I was—I lived in Manitoba for a year and I went to Riding Mountain National Park and there are some areas in the park that are, I guess, virgin prairie and they have never been done unto by people, and it's fascinating to see what—I have images of what that area, that ground was like, you know, with these very fragile-looking, sort of reedy kind of grass and feathery sort of stuff that looks like wheat but was very short.

At least momentarily, it seems that Ellen has dropped out of her dialogue with the text in order to explore her own associations. An even more extreme example comes from Larry. "In Virgin Forest" contains a reference to a group of Germans who once visited Hutcheson Forest, and Larry said that reminded him of Nazis and what they did to the Jews: "I don't know why I was thinking that but I was," he said. "I was like in another imaginary world."

As in the case of professional reading, it is not clear whether associative

reading is best considered a separate mode or whether it represents some combination of the others. For now, though, these problems will have to be left unresolved.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

We have argued that much of the variability in what people say about texts can be understood by assuming that there are three main modes of reading and response—information-driven, story-driven, and dialogic (point-driven)—and that which mode is predominant on a given occasion depends on the configuration of reader, text, and situation. Most (although not all) of the responses made by the 15 readers in this investigation could be accounted for by this scheme.

Note that we do not claim that anyone of the three modes is "the best" or the most advanced developmentally. "Best" begs too many questions: Best for whom? For which texts? Under what circumstances?

Asking these questions helps us come to grips with some otherwise puzzling findings. For example, although all the texts used afforded dialogic reading, not all our readers responded to them dialogically. It is not irrelevant, however, that the texts were still *our* texts and the participants were reading for *our* purposes, not their own. In this situation, story- and information-driven reading may indeed have been the most appropriate modes to use. It is at least possible that in other circumstances—specifically, when reading their chosen texts for their own purposes—these readers read dialogically.

No one mode is best, but we do suggest that full reading capacity requires that the reader be able to use, flexibly, whichever mode or modes is most appropriate to the specific conjunction of text, purpose, and situation. Given that texts and situations vary, readers who are able to move freely in and out of any of the modes, or any combination of them, would be more likely to be satisfied with their engagement in the reading process, would be likely to read a greater variety of texts, and would, by most external criteria, be judged more "successful" than those readers restricted to one or two modes. Conversely, readers who are comfortable with, say, just one mode would be frustrated by texts or situations that didn't afford that stance.

These concerns lead directly to a discussion of how educational systems and teachers can support development of full reading capacity. If our goal is to enable students to read in all of the modes identified here, there are, according to this model, two obvious places where leverage may be exerted.

The first is the *text*. To help readers develop proficiency with particular modes, teachers should select texts that afford those modes. As Robert Calfee (1982) has argued in a slightly different context, schools sometimes defeat their own purposes by neglecting to consider the text-task configuration. Calfee points out that in many reading series, information (e.g., about different cultures) is presented by means of a story, a practice that may lead to difficulties in retrieval. His reasoning is that a narratively-organized memory representation may make it more difficult for the student to remember factual information. From our vantage point, there may also be an acquisition problem: Information-driven reading may be constrained by the use of texts that strongly afford story-driven reading.

Similarly, dialogic reading is unlikely to occur if texts are used that afford only story- or information-driven stances. For instance, basal readers—which are carefully monitored for "readability"—are not, we think, monitored for the degree to which they invite young readers to construct the narrative as a purposeful, pointed communicative act (Bruce, 1981). Therefore, it is unlikely that such texts will be read dialogically, or, consequently, that children will learn to use this mode.

The *situation* is the second place leverage may be applied to help students develop a range of reading modes. A reader's stance towards text depends in part on the task he or she expects to perform. For instance, a student who anticipates questions of the type, "What color was the heroine's coat?" is likely to read in an information-driven way. Questions about texts that imply there is one right answer or that require students to identify "the" theme, also invite information-driven reading—not to mention the more disturbing fact that they tend to alienate students from reading itself (Hynds, 1989). Simplistic, *ex cathedra* statements about "what the author meant" often function in classrooms to end discussion rather to promote dialogue, and are therefore effectively information-driven. On the other hand, many of the questions found in literature anthologies that are far less efferent in their assumptions (especially questions regarding the motivations of characters and the plausibility of plot) invite students to stay within the story-world of characters and events—that is, to engage predominantly in story-driven reading.

Of course there are many occasions when it is appropriate to read texts to acquire information or to experience the story. However, if texts are treated *only* as repositories of facts (or alternatively as enjoyable stories), a student will not be encouraged to see reading as dialogue, and will thus fail to develop full reading capacity. The prevalence of the authoritative textbook (Luke, de Castell, & Luke, 1983), the compulsive testing for comprehension and obsession with accountability (Smith, 1986), the widespread adoption of the "banking" system of education (Freire, 1970)—all

suggest that in our schools today it is the information-driven mode that prevails.

How can the situation be altered to encourage a more balanced picture; specifically, to give greater attention to dialogic reading? Although a full discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this chapter, some helpful models are provided by Language Experience and Whole Language approaches (e.g., Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Newman, 1985). Reading and writing in such classrooms are relatively dialogic because the texts tend not to be anthologies, textbooks, or basal readers but occasioned pieces, written, often collaboratively, by classmates you know and work and play with. Similarly, at the postsecondary level there are pedagogical approaches in which dialogic reading is made the situationally appropriate mode. A number of us at St. Thomas University, for instance, design our courses as "collaborative investigations" (Hunt, Parkhill, Reither, & Vipond, 1988; Reither & Vipond, 1989). In brief, the instructor sets a research question for the class, casting the students as members of an investigative team or "task force"; the critical point here is that reading and writing in these classrooms become the chief means by which the collective project is defined and advanced.

We believe that which mode of reading is dominant on a given occasion depends on the interplay among the reader's purposes and abilities, the text's affordances, and the situation's constraints. Our intention is that this model will afford a way of thinking that helps account for what happens—and what doesn't happen—in classrooms and living rooms as well as in reading laboratories.

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