

# **A Compendium of Responses to Our (Logan & Powe) Probe: “Reflections on B.W. Powe’s Notion, the Locale Where We Read a Text Changes How We Interpret the Text and How It Affects Us: A Probe and a Dialogue.”**

Robert K. Logan and B. W. Powe

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**A Compendium of Responses to Our (Logan & Powe) Probe:  
"Reflections on B.W. Powe's Notion, the Locale Where We Read a Text Changes How We  
Interpret the Text and How It Affects Us: A Probe and a Dialogue."**

Robert K. Logan and B. W. Powe

At the end of our probe "Reflections" we invited readers to comment on our probe. We distributed our probe and an invitation for comments to the 144 members of the NExJ Editorial Board through our listserv before the publication of this our latest issue Vol 4 No 2. The Editorial Board consisting mostly of past contributors to the journal and serves as a pool from which we draw reviewers of submissions to NExJ. Here are the preliminary results of our experiment to see if a probe can generate a dialogue with responses from John Fraim, Marshall Soules, Yuriy Myelkov and John Porter.

**1. On Oct 30, 2024, at 7:04 PM, JOHN FRAIM <[johnfraim@mac.com](mailto:johnfraim@mac.com)> wrote:**

Bob & BW,

Just read your notice below and read briefly through the paper. One of the most significant ideas in the area of media ecology I have ever seen. Still taking in the uniqueness of these perceptions. And of course the entire culture here in America is in a full-blown neurotic mode right now so it's hard escaping the medium of culture now. It is like one of those nights when wolves seem to be howling into the night. (Like the logo of my Midnight Oil site). Today, just a few days before the presidential election here in America, It reminds me of the opening of the famous Raymond Chandler tort Red Wind. As Chandler writes:

"There was a desert wind blowing that night. It was one of those hot dry Santa Anas that come down through the maintain passes and curls your hair and makes your nerves jump and your skin itch. On nights like that every booze party ends in a fight. Meek little wives feel the edge of a carving knife and study their husband's necks. Anything can happen. You can even get a full glass of beer at a cocktail lounge."

I might even label it as offering a different perspective or thinking about a particular area of knowledge. Approaching as probes first before anything else. It does that thing that McLuhan quoting Bacon as saying as it makes the reader more participative with the media. It is cool, interactive, media.

One area in your research might be whether place of consumption of reading. How is this consumed? Via a book, a Kindle, iPhones. This reading could be anywhere or in transit to a number of places so no particular place. So, perhaps static consumption at one place or consumption while moving from place to place.

The idea proposed in this is thinking outside the medium! Or at least the bounds of the current discipline. But does it? An important question it seems to me.

But we are supposed to be thinking outside the medium because it is a medium we have not created but one that has been more and more created for us. This has relevance it seems to me and to MM's famous saying "The medium is the message" needs modification in current time when modern use of propaganda is becoming increasingly refined administrations of government. So, I think it important to take account this modern electronic environment of a growing AI intelligence in the world. Whether we like it or not. The use of Medium and Message sets up a duality that much of the MM media theory system is based on. It sets up a duality but is a duality the best paradigm for media today?

Your ideas about place was also the subject of my first major manuscript on symbolism: The Symbolism of Place: The Hidden Context of Communication. (1990). Never published except on the Midnight Oil Studios site. More than anything, it was a blending of my interests in Jungian psychology and Marshall McLuhan's media theory mixed with my interests in writing that's been behind all the "sets" I place in front of it. Add to this, as I demonstrated in Symbolism of Place, the cyclic moment of symbols and media. In effect, place is really the "hidden context of communication." It is the one big area - I feel - that media ecology is lacking. And, if I might add - though being an outsider to your country - an area that media ecology is going to have to deal with in truly moving forward.

Sending the MS to Symbolism of Place to you in PDF form from my Midnight Oil website. It was really my first introduction to a number of the media ecology group.

<https://greathousestories.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/symbolism-of-place-pdf.pdf>

I need to go back and reread everything in the intro letter and the material itself. (Not surprising that BW would have this type of - really - vision of a different way of interpreting something in a different place. This is one of the key ideas of my Symbolism of Place. There are many probes involved in your ideas. It is such a "probe worthy" or "target rich" environment. This makes it a powerful idea because it forces participation by the reader and thinking outside the box or perspective of the media ecology discipline. Yet, so many fascinating questions raised by the materials.

Please don't feel obligated to go through the link above. It is just that the idea is so close to a basic idea I have about symbols and symbolism.

Warmly, John

### **Bob Logan's Response**

I have read the introduction of your book Symbolism of Place: The Hidden Context of Stories. Excellent material. What are your plans for the book. Would you consider publishing it as a special issue of NExJ?

We have published a book before as a special issue of NExJ. It was an unfinished book by Robert Kasher who passed away before finishing his book, entitled The New World Disorder. We published it as NExJ Vol 2 No 4 2022 (<https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/nexj/issue/view/2635>). We published his unfinished manuscript both as a tribute to him and a memorial of him.

Would you consider a publication of your book as a special issue of NExJ? Let me know what you think of my suggestion.

**From: JOHN FRAIM <[johnfraim@mac.com](mailto:johnfraim@mac.com)>**  
**Subject: Re: Looking for Volunteers**  
**Date: October 30, 2024 at 9:55:54 PM EDT**  
**To: Bob Logan <[logan@physics.utoronto.ca](mailto:logan@physics.utoronto.ca)>**

Bob,

Certainly you can publish it Bob. Or reformat it. Whatever. The book was written in 1990 and I was working full time as marketing manager for a company. I sent it to just two of the best-known publishing

houses in the nation and got back two great letters but ultimately no, not the right place but does have a future for sure. I didn't follow up on marketing it after that as I had another book coming out at the time - my biography of the musician John Coltrane titled Spirit Catcher.

I haven't taken the time yet to read over again all the materials. They certainly deserve a close reading.

The ideas of being published in the great journal NExJ always of interest.

One additional comment I have right now. Not sure what academic discipline this type of "probe" will be classified by the powers that be of the world. As you might know Bob, there is a whole discipline of place. Not sure what major academic area it is under but I feel that BW and your ideas ultimately move in the direction of place studies. As I said, the study of place is lacking in media studies it seems to me. (Except for the brilliant book Context Blindness by Eva Berger, I think my longest review and one of the truly important books to so many things today.) Yet, context is really not a place that does not go anywhere. The context goes with the audience or the consumer of written content. Here in the form of a book. Yet isn't all consumption of content done within a place or context? So broad extension into other areas. This is not to say that MM was not interested in the idea of perspective, or, viewing places from a particular place. How perspective changed in various historic periods. This type of probe got me following MM more and more and then becoming good friends with Eric McLuhan and a wonderful media ecologist I met at his home just north of Toronto one delightful afternoon: Donald Thealle and his wonderful wife. Donald really liked my writing and we had developed a correspondence. You might know him.

Our classifiers of knowledge continue to classify the world into classes or genres that get smaller and smaller. I know this and I'm coming from the marketing and business world rather than the academic world like you. But it's true for both the business and academic area as well as for all areas of knowledge today. Segmented and broken up into smaller and smaller pieces. Isn't this a fairly good metaphor for modern society? The media has developed these segments. Has does one "read" over these segments? Read over the propaganda of our time delivered by modern media. With tracking internet customer actions - which means all of us - billions each hour, never stopping, 24/7.

I worry that if the medium is the message, the medium is getting more difficult to see in the production of smaller and smaller messages in smaller and smaller story genres and areas of knowledge. No one seems interested at connecting the areas of knowledge and finding commonality. One reason is that one's defining politics rises in importance above one's desire to find commonality.

In times like this it is important to focus on the larger, contextual issues. Yet, events (messages/content) of the world pull us back like we're all somehow magnetized to them. It's difficult to escape their influence on us today. This is why it is important to try to understand what medium is away from the politics of the media. One question is whether media influences one's perception or the effect of the medium of the time.

Anyway Bob, want to help out and be a sounding board for you and BW.

A final comment. Symbolically, the idea of place has much relationship to places within a story. In other words, place has dramatic value in becoming the hidden context of communication. I lay this out in The Symbolism of Place. In other words, BW was in a different psychological space when he reread Munro in Spain than Canada. This needs to be taken into account. In fact, it might be argued that humans are constantly living out the story of their lives. The question then is: what scenes and settings do we choose for this? What book in the first place do we chose to read? (This is interesting because BW's experience was unique in that reading the same material in different places). I certainly do not doubt the experience he had. Were they part of an emotional story that BW was one at the time? One question perhaps.

John

**2. From: Marshall Soules <marshall.soules@gmail.com>**

Subject: Alice Monroe amd Locale

Date: October 30, 2024 at 9:04:35 PM EDT

To: Bob Logan <logan@physics.utoronto.ca>, BW Powe <bpowe@yorku.ca>

Dear Bob and BW,

This is a terrific probe to include locale as an important addition to the dynamics of the medium is the message and the reversal of figure and ground. Hopefully it will open up channels of discourse for the community. I especially appreciate the idea that we should not isolate the act of reading, where brain plus body intersects with our presence in the physical world, which currently needs some TLC and awareness of place

As always, with deep respect and admiration for your work.

(the other) Marshall

**3. From: Yuriy Myelkov <uka7777@gmail.com>**

Subject: Re: An NExJ Experiment - Looking for Volunteers

Date: October 31, 2024 at 7:57:05 AM EDT

To: Bob Logan <logan@physics.utoronto.ca>

Dear Bob,

Thanks for the proposition - it is a very interesting experiment!

Best wishes,  
Yuri.

Yuri wrote the following in his attachment:

A comment on

*Reflections on B.W. Powe's Notion, the Locale Where We Read a Text Changes How We Interpret the Text and How It Affects Us: A Probe and a Dialogue*

by Yurii Mielkov,

philosopher, research fellow at the Institute of Higher Education in Kyiv, Ukraine

That's some very interesting idea, indeed. However, I'd say that "locale" is not actually a third factor that determines the effect of the content of a medium, as it does not deal with the medium in a direct way. It is rather a factor that takes part in determining "the opinions, attitudes and past experiences of the user" – a factor that at least partly shapes the interpretation of the content of a medium by "the user". Amongst other factors, of course. As it is "the user", and not the locale, who serves as the subject of interpretation, accessing (assessing, evaluating, understanding etc.) the message.

That actually reminded me of the concept of "estrangement" (or "defamiliarization") by Viktor

Shklovsky. Shklovsky talks about the artistic technique here, i.e. about the author of a text and not about its recipient, – but he still means that in order to provide new perspectives and to see the world in a different way, the author has to present common things as unfamiliar ones. And, on the other hand, an unfamiliar locale is thus a factor that could well help a reader to achieve the effect of “defamiliarization” regardless of the author’s actual intention.

However, I would probably also add that the dialectics of comprehension would be incomplete without augmenting defamiliarization with familiarization. New ways and new perspectives are nice for the pure art in itself and for aesthetics, but in order to achieve more ethical and practical effects, we’d better familiarize ourselves with other views, different practices, and alien things in general that can and do happen in the world. Humans are different, as well as their locales, contexts and interpretations, but this world is still our common home and our common value.

### **Bob Logan’ Response**

Thank you, Yuri. I take your point which echoes McLuhan’s “the user is the content.” But I would suggest that B.W. Powe’s notion that *The Locale Where We Read a Text Changes How We Interpret the Text and How It Affects Us* compliments McLuhan’s “the medium is the message” and “the user is the content.” McLuhan’s “the user is the content” focuses on the user’s past experiences and not on the locale where one reads a text, which is Powe’s unique contribution, which I have championed.

#### **4. From: JS PORTER <porterjs@rogers.com>**

Re: "The Locale Colours the Interpretation"

November 1, 2024

Dear BW and Bob,

What a delight to read your exchanges!

Bob, I fully concur that "the locale colours the interpretation." Environments, internal and external, colour one's reading. Time and place and mood and company all play a part in one's reading. BW, you eloquently put the emphasis on place.

These words are thrilling:

"Alone on a train, going from Barcelona to a town outside the city, reading *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, not comprehending the Castilian and Catalan spoken by other passengers, her words and sentences, her voice and characters became uncannily vivid, somehow lucidly enigmatic. What did this mean? When I read her in Canada, she seemed a realist writer, reporting on lives in small town Ontario. When I read her in Spain, the hermetic side of her work struck me in my rootless state. I saw and felt the strangeness, how intensive her observational stances were— her narrators standing by, always outside (alone in their thoughts and contemplations) yet recording without blinkers or screens, illuminating how people and their worlds don't and can't abide or comprehend realities. She was one of *The Watchers*—one who sees, hovers close."

You were able to de-familiarize the familiar, or the locale de-familiarized the familiar for you, and read Munro as if for the first time. The locale coloured your experience.

One sees this phenomenon at play in Anne Carson's prose poem "Merry Christmas from Hegel" in *Float*. In the prose poem, she speculates on Christmas, Hegel, the death of her brother, being alone,

and the nature of reading and writing, while standing in the snow--speculation "being the effort to grasp reality in its interactive entirety." All the elements of her speculative meditation "tenderly mingle". (I've written on Carson in more detail in [https://samizdatpress.typepad.com/hal\\_magazine\\_issue\\_17-2-2/note-poem-on-anne-carson-by-js-porter.html](https://samizdatpress.typepad.com/hal_magazine_issue_17-2-2/note-poem-on-anne-carson-by-js-porter.html).)

In my own reading experience, I recall reading *Moby Dick* in the backseat of my uncle's car on route to Montreal from Oshawa in the late sixties. I was in a car and Ismael was in a ship and somehow the incongruity of different modes of transportation and the nature of our voyages contributed to my finding the novel hilarious. I was also tired and bored. The extravagant Shakespearean language of the narrative struck me as funny. I'm not sure if I would regard *Moby Dick* as funny now but it certainly struck me as being so then.

Coleridge was born by a river and Wordsworth lived near a lake. Did the flow of water contribute to the flow of their respective poetries? Likely. Most of my reading has been in the company of a dog, with retrievers and labs and one remarkable Flatcoat who would lie on top of my feet as I read. Did the dogs contribute to the reading? I don't know but I think it likely that I was often put in a dreaming mood by their gracious company.

BW, I much enjoyed your constructed dialogue between Don Quixote (Cervantes) and the Watcher (Munro). *Don Quixote* is such a central text in modern literature and modern life that it seems as if it could be put in dialogue with almost any other great book, or great writer. One thinks of Vladimir Nabokov in his lectures on Cervantes and in his novel *Invitation to a Beheading*. Azar Nafisi, author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, notes in *That Other World: Nabokov and the Puzzle of Exile* that "the naive knight created by Cervantes and Nabokov's idealistic professor belong to the same family of protagonists, a relationship that transcends time and space. As Boyd notes, *Invitation to a Beheading* is Nabokov's reply to *Don Quixote*."

To conclude my little ramble, it strikes that for speakers, conveyors of content, and for readers, receivers of content, where one is, and with whom, matters a great deal in determining content. The Japanese novelist Shusaku Endo in *A Life of Jesus*, for instance, made the claim that Jesus' sayings and stories differed somewhat depending on whether he was on a mountain, in a valley or near a river or sea. Geography, to some extent, determined content.

I know from my own experience of reading Endo how much I was influenced by my father's notes (underlinings and stars) on the text. He had read the biography before me and I found myself drawn into what he considered important to the point that I would make notes in the margins of the book on his notes. Reading is such a holistic experience. Even the dead are made living at times.

Thank you, Bob and BW, for this opportunity to yack about something I love -- reading.

John

### **Bob Logan's Response**

Thank you, John for your kind remarks re our probe. Also thanks for citing your experience of reading *Moby Dick* in the back seat of your uncle's car while traveling to Montreal. You have added another factor in addition to locale that might influence one's reading a text, not just the geographic locale but also the environment within the locale where the reading takes place. Was the reader reading in their home, or while travelling, or were they in a park or at the beach. And if they were at home in which part of the house and were they in a chair, or in bed.

## 5. From Annemarie MacLoughlin <amacloughlin@yahoo.ca>

Re: Reflections on B.W. Powe's Notion, the Locale Where We Read a Text Changes How We Interpret the Text and How It Affects Us: A Probe and a Dialogue  
Oct 31, 2024

I was excited to receive the above dialogue as I had recently been discussing British comedy shows with a Canadian friend and how my perceptions of them when viewed in Toronto versus my hometown of London, England, differed. I was trying to understand why television shows like "Little Britain" were funnier when seen in the UK and less so when watched here - at least for me; my friends with similar tastes in comedy and who had only watched this show in Canada were greatly amused by the irreverent humour. Having lived an almost equal amount of time in both the UK and Canada I wondered if my English sensibilities had been modified thanks to long term exposure to a different culture/comedic style and that living here had somehow altered how information was processed.

As observed by BWP "Where we read changes how we read," the figure and ground clearly impact our interpretations of a text or other media product. The example of their reading Alice Munro in Spain as opposed to Canada and the difference in perception and interpretation of the text suggests that proximity to the book's setting can influence how we receive information as well. I would add that it enhances our ability to participate in the narrative by helping us visualize the environment the story takes place in and maybe in a metaphysical sense, feel more connected somehow. This also made me wonder if "Where we write changes how we write."

- i. the medium itself ("the medium is the message" by McLuhan);
- ii. the opinions, attitudes and past experiences of the user ("the user is content" by McLuhan) and
- iii. where the content is accessed ("the locale colours the interpretation" as described by BWP).

RKL and BWP further expand on McLuhan's famous quotes (i & ii) and add (iii) – "Where the content is accessed." The medium of a book, say, is more than mere words, the delivery system itself part of the narrative. The reader/viewer (user) is an ever-changing landscape of percept, opinion and bias which creates a subjective interpretation of a product which affects the content for that particular user. And the WHERE becomes an equally profound influence on the product and how it's received. To give another example of experiencing a product away from home, I remember reading a spooky novel on a sunny beach in Mandraki, the port of Rhodes. A lifelong consumer of horror and the supernatural, it had nowhere near the effect I had been accustomed to when hunkered down in a chilly Toronto apartment in the middle of a Canadian winter or remote trailer on the English coast (insert horror cliché). Under a hot Grecian sun, the smell of grilled calamari assailing my nostrils and an Ouzo in hand, I was disappointed in the lack of chills my favorite author was providing me with. Brain in vacation mode wasn't complying with the message, the locale most definitely "coloring the interpretation," to quote BWP.

Speaking of locations, as an arts worker who on occasion works in the film industry, Toronto is often used by American companies to stand in for New York or other cities. With the odd exception ("Law and Order Toronto: Criminal Intent") the city mostly masquerades as anything but itself. If one were unfamiliar with the city and its landmarks one would be none the wiser.

However, taking Toronto as the medium, those familiar with the city would interpret a television show set in Chicago but filmed in Toronto as unsatisfying or less convincing a fictional narrative as we'd be in on the scam, the message an attempt by producers to pull the wool over our eyes. Another viewer would have a different experience based on their knowledge and experience of Toronto or Chicago or north America in general and be quite happy with the product, their enjoyment unimpaired by inside knowledge.

As a closing thought, to return to BWP's experience of reading a Canadian author in a Spanish locale, I feel that with this addition to McLuhan's media theory of medium and message we can enhance our participation with a product knowing that the where of the experience is impactful. Watching British comedy in Canada isn't always impaired by my relocation; the wonderful Ricky Gervais and his "Armageddon" tour in Canada 2023 was even more enjoyable for its irreverence and boundary pushing knowing that we were watching it in the woke wasteland that is Toronto/Canada. I met many fellow Brits at the concert who agreed that watching a controversial comedian performing out of the context of his native culture was even more entertaining. And maybe "Little Britain" just doesn't do it for me anymore.

### **Bob Logan's Response**

I enjoyed your response and thank you for expanding BW Powe's idea that locale affects how we interpret what we read with these two additional and parallel variations:

1. The impact of watching television fare is affected by the locale where it is viewed.
2. Your surmise "Where we write changes how we write."

With regard to how TV fare is affected by locale I agree with you. I have found that watching CNN on TV in Canada and in Romania where I spend the part of the late spring and the early summer that it is not the same. Of course this is somewhat ironic as CNN is American fare and I have never watched CNN in the USA. But I guess the reason for this is the cultural gap between Romania and the USA is much greater than the gap between Canada and the USA. So, I concur with your first observation.

With regard to locale changing my writing style I have not noticed a difference. One reason is that I do my writing on my MacBook Pro and when I use my computer, I am totally oblivious to my surroundings. Even as I write these words, I am oblivious to where I am. There is only my computer, my thoughts and the text I am composing. Another factor is my writing is strictly academic and analytic and for the most part devoid of any thing that is poetic or the writing of a literati.

I have noticed my social interactions are quite different in Canada and Romania with those in Romania are more vibrant despite my broken Romanian.

I hope the readers of your observations of the effect of locale on TV viewing and how or what we write will share their thoughts with us.

### **Conclusion to This Compendium of Responses**

We are delighted that the preprint of our probe "Reflections on B.W. Powe's Notion, the Locale Where We Read a Text Changes How We Interpret the Text and How It Affects Us: A Probe and a Dialogue"

has already garnered five interesting responses. Hoping we receive more once our probe is published in NExJ Vol 4 No 2.

BWP and RKL – Nov. 4, 2024