Reading After the Dialogue: What Conversational AI Does to the Document and Its Reader

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Abstract

Reading a text or talking about it with an AI: this article argues that these are two distinct regimes of reading, and that the second depends far more than the first on the reader's stance. Drawing on document theory (Pédauque, Bachimont and Crozat, Zacklad), it describes dialogue as a dissociation: meaning circulates without form or signature. One reader's self-observation, first on philosophical texts and then on scientific ones, yields three findings: ideas arrive before the author, merged authors lose their disagreements, and dialogue leads to the text while defusing the desire to read it. The text's resistance appears here as an instrument by which the reader gauged the limits of their own understanding. The article draws consequences for the scientific article, whose value shifts from the narrative to the dated, signed act, and puts forward three hypotheses to be tested.

Keywords. reading · conversational AI · document · documentarization · scientific article · illusion of understanding · reader's stance

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English translation of the French version, which prevails.

Introduction

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates reproaches writing for not answering. You question it, it repeats the same thing, and it does not choose its readers. Twenty-four centuries later, texts answer. A reader can ask a conversational AI what an article demonstrates or what a philosopher meant, and receive a reply fitted to their question.

One can see a cycle here: oral dialogue, then its fixation in writing, then the return to dialogue. Pédauque (2003) already noted, about documentary languages, that every change of medium forces old questions to be asked again. I prefer to speak of a spiral. To the "graphic reason" of writing described by Goody, Bachimont and Crozat (2004) add a "computational reason" of the digital. Dialogue with an AI returns to the starting point, one floor higher: the interlocutor has the whole library behind them.

This article asks a simple question. What becomes of the document, and of its reader, when reading goes through this dialogue?

Two regimes of reading

We first need to distinguish two ways of reading, because AI does not do the same thing to each.

- **Extraction reading.** You read to take away a piece of information: a result, a method, a figure. This is the dominant regime of the scientific article, which people were skimming long before AI.
- **Transformation reading.** You read to be moved: the text changes the way you ask questions. This is the regime expected of a philosophical text.

These are regimes of reading, not types of text. One can extract theses from Simone Weil, and a foundational article can transform whoever reads it. The distinction concerns what the reader comes looking for.

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Thesis

Dialogue with an AI is a regime of reading in its own right. Its value depends on the reader's stance far more than in classical reading. And it deprives that reader of the instrument by which the text used to signal the limits of their understanding. This last point extends an analysis by Bachimont and Crozat (2004), recalled in part 1. The contribution concerns the reader: part 4 discusses, in this light, the formats proposed to replace the scientific article, without proposing another.

Method and limits

This text is a position paper. Its material is the self-observation of a single reader over a year of practice: philosophical readings conducted through dialogue, and several scientific projects (state of the art, study protocol, writing) conducted the same way.

This reader has a specific profile: trained in research, an engineer by trade, curious by temperament. The findings that follow hold for that profile. They are hypotheses for others to test, on other readers.

The empirical results cited date from 2024 to 2026 and concern the models of those years. They should be taken as a snapshot at a given moment. Throughout, I will therefore distinguish what depends on the quality of the models from what depends on the setup itself.

1. The dissociated document

The information and communication sciences have a theory of the document, and it had described the essence of the problem twenty years before conversational AI. The current debate on the future of the scientific article, carried by engineers and publishers, almost entirely does without it.

1.1 A three-sided reading contract

The Pédauque collective (2003) approaches the document through three entry points.

- **Form.** The document is an object whose structure and layout obey rules. They ensure its legibility.
- **Sign.** The document carries a meaning and an intention, which the reader reconstructs in context. This is the plane of comprehension.
- **Medium.** The document is the trace of a communication that has freed itself from space and time. It gives a status to a piece of information, and its signature ties it to an author. This is the plane of sociability.

Pédauque sums up these three planes in one notion: the reading contract. A document would be a contract between people, at once perceptual, intellectual and social. The text insists on one point: none of the three entry points is independent, and the notion is clarified only in their superposition.

Dialogue with an AI undoes this superposition.

- **Form disappears.** The reader no longer sees the article's structure, the order of its arguments, its notes. They see an answer.
- **The sign circulates alone.** The meaning is rendered in other words, at another level of detail.
- **The medium changes nature.** The relationship no longer links a reader to an author. It links a reader to an interlocutor, who speaks on behalf of texts they do not show.

The 2003 text had glimpsed this outcome. It describes the move from a stable object to a process built on demand, which sometimes shakes trust. It wonders whether the document will become a "magic slate" on which elements arranged according to the reader's needs are displayed on demand. It even notes that this reader could be a machine.

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Two of its questions remain open, and part 4 returns to them. Can one isolate a meaningful element from a whole that has a unity of meaning? Can one validate a piece of information other than by the authenticity of the document that contains it?

1.2 Objectivation and appropriation

Bachimont and Crozat (2004) give the most direct argument. The digital separates a recorded resource from views computed at the time of consultation. What the reader has before their eyes is always a reconstruction, which can be adapted to their profile.

Now reading involves two linked operations. Objectivation makes the content a stable object, one that persists across readings and to which one can always refer. Appropriation consists in making it one's own, to the point of thinking with it. The second depends on the first: one appropriates a content only because it is not oneself and because it stands against the reader.

The consequence is stated without detour. Individualizing the content makes it a reflection of the reader and cancels the object. The reader can no longer tell what belongs to the content and what belongs to its presentation. They can no longer recognize themselves in the community of those who access the same content. Individualization, designed to ease appropriation, prevents it.

The authors propose a way out: a canonical, conventional form that serves as a reference. The multiple views then form a file, read in relation to it.

Conversational AI pushes this mechanism one notch further. In 2004, the adaptation concerned the presentation of a content. It now concerns the utterance: each answer is a new sentence, fitted to the question. And the canonical form, which was meant to orient the reader, is no longer before their eyes.

1.3 A reverse documentarization

Zacklad (2005) defines the document by an operation. A semiotic production is born from a transaction between people, in a situation. For it to circulate across space, time and communities of interpretation, it is fixed on a durable medium and given attributes: a date, a place, identified authors, internal landmarks. This is documentarization.

Dialogue with an AI travels the opposite path. It starts from a document and reopens a situation of exchange, in which the production is built by two parties and misunderstandings are corrected turn by turn, as Zacklad describes for copresence. But the interlocutor is not the author. Zacklad anticipates this case: a remote producer can stand in for the person who initiated the transaction, playing their role. Here the substitute is a machine, and the author has delegated nothing.

What is produced remains written, but it is not a document in Zacklad's sense. A transcription without attributes cannot be reused: the answer has no identified author, no version, no landmark to return to. The term reverse documentarization is mine, not his.

The whole can be described as a three-step chain.

1. **Dissolution.** Texts enter the model. They lose their form and their attributes there.
2. **Restitution.** The dialogue returns ideas, most often without an author's name, merged into a continuous line of reasoning.
3. **Referral.** Sometimes, the dialogue names a source and points to it. The document reappears after the fact.

Zacklad notes that the author's name is necessary for the correct interpretation of a content as soon as the situation is not standardized. The second step of the chain removes precisely this attribute. Ideas keep circulating and transforming, but the transformation is no longer visible and no one signs it.

This chain can loop, when the restituted text becomes a document that another model will condense. I come back to this in part 4.

2. Three findings of a reader

Each finding is presented twice. First on a philosophical case, where it is most visible. Then on a scientific case, where it has the most consequences.

2.1 The inverted order: ideas arrive before the author

Philosophical case. One evening with nothing in particular to do, I started a dialogue with an AI out of curiosity, wanting to understand humankind better. Over the evening, it led me to *The Myth of Sisyphus* and to Simone Weil. Yet the AI's reasoning already rested on these authors before it named them. I had received a part of their thought without knowing whose it was.

It is the usual order of reading, turned around. Ordinarily you read an author, then their ideas melt into our way of thinking and we forget where they came from. Here the ideas arrive already merged, and the author appears only afterwards, as an attribution after the fact.

Scientific case. A state of the art produced through dialogue works the same way. In about ten queries, the reader receives a field's positions, its terms, its gaps. The names come along, but as labels stuck on a synthesis already made. They know the field's ideas before having opened a single one of its texts.

The writing of this article provides an example. A first draft of part 1 was written without the AI having been able to open the texts of Pédauque, Bachimont and Crozat, and Zacklad, based on what the model knew of them. I then supplied them, and rereading changed two things.

- **An inaccurate attribution.** The draft tied the "reading contract" to the sign alone. In Pédauque, it runs through all three entry points.
- **Two theses without an author.** The draft presented as its own the text's resistance and the loss of the common text. They were found, for the most part, in Bachimont and Crozat. They had arrived in the dialogue without a name, and nothing makes it possible to say where the model got them.

2.2 The composite voice: merged authors lose their tensions

Philosophical case. Camus and Weil do not say the same thing. He starts from a world without transcendence; she is turned toward it. In the dialogue, the two fed one and the same line of reasoning, coherent and calm. Their disagreement, which is part of what they have to say, no longer appeared in it.

Scientific case. A literature synthesis merges in the same way articles that do not agree. The results on AI-assisted reading are a good example: they diverge (part 3), and a fluent summary would happily turn them into a consensus.

The loss has been measured for a specific case. Peters and Chin-Yee (2025) compared 4,900 summaries, produced by ten models, with 300 original scientific texts. Article summaries produced by the models were nearly five times more likely to contain generalized conclusions than summaries written by experts. The restrictions that bound a result are what falls first.

Two details of this study matter here.

- **Progress is not automatic.** The 2025 models generalized more than those of 2024, with one exception.
- **Asking for precision is not enough.** The instruction not to introduce inaccuracies roughly doubled the risk of generalization.

The study also ranks the models against each other, and places those of the Claude family among the most faithful. This is mentioned for completeness, with a caveat: a model of that family assisted the writing of the present text.

2.3 The saturation of the desire to read

Philosophical case. Led toward Simone Weil, I began to read her. The reading was harder to sustain than expected, for a specific reason: I had the impression of having already gone through

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what I was reading. An evening of dialogue had brought me to the book and had taken away part of the desire to open it.

This is not laziness. You engage with a difficult text because you sense a gap between what you know and what you would like to know. The dialogue fills that gap in appearance, and the effort loses its engine.

Scientific case. Once the article has been summarized, you no longer open it. In an earlier project conducted through dialogue, the bibliography was built faster than it was read. An explicit rule was needed to correct this: no reference cited without having been read. This rule is a counter-device, and the need for it says how steep the slope is.

The literature names the phenomenon. Messeri and Crockett (2024) speak of illusions of understanding: simple, broad summaries give a feeling of understanding that does not match real understanding. Kreijkes et al. (2026) give an indication of it in 14–15-year-old students. Faced with a text to study, they judged the exchange with a model more useful than note-taking, even though they understood and retained less with it. Out of 4,929 queries, only six questioned the model's reliability.

The opposite caveat must be kept. Sometimes the impression is right: for many texts, the dialogue really does give the essentials, and reading would be redundant. The difficulty is that you cannot tell the two cases apart from the inside.

3. The reader variable

The three preceding findings describe losses. They do not say that dialogue is a bad reading. They say that its value depends on who is conducting the dialogue, far more than in the reading of a text.

3.1 What dialogue brings

Dialogue can give rise to questions the reader would not have asked. This is Socrates' reproach to writing, lifted. And being transformed by a dialogue rather than by a reading is the oldest form of philosophy.

The empirical results point in this direction when dialogue accompanies reading. Fang et al. (2026) had 46 students read six articles over two weeks. The two groups that exchanged with one or more agents improved in critical thinking on the overall score. The group without an agent improved on only one dimension.

Two details of the setup matter. The text stayed before the reader's eyes, and the reader had to answer a question on their own before receiving the agent's opinion. And with several agents, twelve participants out of fifteen stopped annotating the text: their attention had shifted to the answers.

When dialogue takes the place of personal work on the text, the results diverge. Yang et al. (2024), on 92 students, find better immediate comprehension with a chatbot than when searching in a textbook. The advantage is limited to the simplest level, understanding, with no effect on applying or analyzing, and it had disappeared two weeks later. Kreijkes et al. (2026) compare, on the same text, exchange with a model against note-taking, in 344 students tested three days later. Notes win: $d = 0.44$ for retention and 0.38 for comprehension.

Three caveats come from the authors themselves. Their tests measured only the text studied, whereas the students mostly used the model to go beyond it. There was no reading-alone condition. And the model was GPT-3.5. The question is not settled.

Dialogue therefore resembles reading less than a seminar with a good teacher. Most people have always come to philosophy that way, and not through texts. AI widens that access. It does not replace what the seminar has never replaced.

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3.2 Stance as the main factor

A text imposes its path on all its readers. It is indifferent to whoever reads it, and it is up to the reader to move. A dialogue starts from the question asked, from the frame and the level of the person asking. Even when the AI contradicts, it contradicts from within that frame.

The result then depends on what the reader asks for. Someone who seeks to be shaken does not get the same thing as someone who seeks confirmation. Kreijkes et al. distinguish four ways of questioning the model: seeking more information, having the text condensed, having it explained, getting help memorizing. They could not link these uses to the results, and flag this as the question to address next.

My hypothesis is that this variable is underestimated. The quality of the models is much discussed, the personality of whoever questions them little. Yet two readers facing the same model and the same text have not done the same reading. A probable effect of inequality follows: those who already know how to read and question draw the most from dialogue.

3.3 The text's resistance as a measuring instrument

You cannot grade your own knowledge of a field, because you do not see its edges. The deeper you dig, the more you measure what you did not know. This experience is common, and it has a consequence for reading.

A difficult text shows these edges. Every passage that resists signals to the reader what they have not understood. The dialogue, for its part, always answers, fluently and at the level of the question. It signals nothing.

Bachimont and Crozat had put it in general terms: without a content that holds its ground against the reader, appropriation loses its object. I add a specific function to this. The text's resistance serves as a measuring instrument, and reading by dialogue deprives the reader of it just when they would need it. This is the link between finding 2.3 and the thesis: the saturation of the desire to read comes from an understanding that nothing calibrates any more.

3.4 The contingent and the structural

Models are progressing, and part of what precedes will age. Two things must therefore be separated.

	What depends on the 2024–2026 models	**What depends on the setup**
Nature	Fidelity of restitutions, generalization bias	Fit to the reader, absence of a common text, absence of a signature
Expected evolution	Should improve, with no guarantee: recent models did worse in Peters and Chin-Yee	Strengthens with personalization
Status in this article	Dated, revisable	Lasting hypothesis

A more capable model will do better at finding the specificities of a text and those of its reader. The restitution will be at once more faithful and more personal. But the more it is fitted to each person, the less two readers of the same article have read the same thing. The progress of models solves one part of the problem and aggravates another.

4. What becomes of the scientific article

The scientific article is the document where these findings weigh most, because extraction reading already dominated there. AI does not introduce this regime. It completes it. This part proposes no new format: it discusses those being prepared, from the reader's point of view.

4.1 A debate without document theory

Three recent proposals give the measure of the debate.

- **Replace the article with an executable package.** Liu et al. (2026) propose an "agent-native research artifact" in four layers: the scientific logic, the code, the graph of explored and abandoned paths, and the raw results to which each claim traces back. The article is then only a compiled view. The object is designed to be executed by agents, not to be read.
- **Split the article into claims.** Vines (2025) argues that the unit of science is the claim, with its conditions, its data and its conclusion. Machine readers would need this, and not the prose of a PDF.
- **Evaluate by verifiable units.** Spinak (2026) describes tools that extract each claim from an article and judge its evidence one by one. He himself flags the limit: this approach risks missing the work of synthesis and interpretation, especially in the humanities.

These texts share a presupposition. Liu et al. call "narrative tax" what the telling of a story makes one lose: failures, rejected hypotheses, bifurcations. The narrative is a loss there, and the form of the article a cost.

Document theory had answered in advance. Pédauque asked whether one can isolate a meaningful element from a document that has a unity of meaning, and whether this unity does not weigh on the meaning of its parts. Zacklad gives the means to be more precise. A document holds together through two kinds of links between its fragments. Explicit links are titles, cross-references, indexes. Implicit links are the sequence of the text, the plan followed by the author, and what each passage presupposes of the preceding ones.

Splitting the article into verifiable claims keeps the first and undoes the second. The article slides toward what Zacklad calls a form, whose fields are fixed in advance. That suits what, in an article, is already information. It leaves aside what makes it a commitment: choosing what one asserts, in what order and with what reservations.

One point must be conceded to Liu et al. Zacklad notes that propositions rejected along the way contribute to the final agreement, and that one never knows what place to give them in an account. Their graph of abandoned paths answers this difficulty.

4.2 The loop

The chain described in 1.3 can close on itself. One model writes, another condenses, a third evaluates. Spinak names this risk: if tools write the manuscripts and review them, human expertise leaves validation. Messeri and Crockett already report the vision of a research read mostly by machines, and associate it with the risk of scientific monocultures.

The loop has a property that the preceding parts shed light on. At each turn, findings 2.1 and 2.2 apply: the origin fades a little more, and disagreements are smoothed out. What is lost at one turn does not come back at the next.

4.3 Writing by dialogue

My material also includes cases of production. A recent empirical study was designed and carried out largely by an AI, under my direction: protocol, execution runs, analysis, first draft. The published text says so, in a statement that lists each party's tasks.

Two observations come out of it.

- **Thinking moves toward the dialogue.** If writing is no longer the place where you discover that an argument does not hold, that place must exist elsewhere. In my practice, it is in the exchange that precedes: the objections, the choices, the refusals. The cost of writing has collapsed, not that of this conversation. Spinak (2026) recalls the adage: to write is to think.
- **The usage statement becomes a part of the document.** It says who did what and who answers for the whole. It plays the role that the signature used to play alone. Liu et

al. go the same way: their protocol labels each element according to whether it comes from the researcher or from the AI, and an AI suggestion is retained only once confirmed.

4.4 What resists

Two functions of the article do not pass into dialogue.

The act. An article is a dated, signed, stable assertion, which someone endorses and which can be cited or refuted. Pédauque recalls that a text made public enters a common heritage and can no longer be modified without difficulty. Zacklad describes the passage from speech to document as an act of officialization, by which committed persons settle what they agree on. A generated answer officializes nothing: it commits no one and will not be the same tomorrow.

The common text. A scientific community argues because its members have read the same text. If each receives a version fitted to their own questions, disagreement loses its object. Bachimont and Crozat saw in this the condition of a community of meaning. Personalization, which is a gain for each reader, is a loss for the collective.

A proposition can be drawn from this. The likely future is a stable core, endorsed by humans (claims, data, methods), surrounded by presentations generated on demand. Liu et al. describe this architecture: a canonical artifact, from which an agent draws on demand an article, slides or a dialogue, depending on the reader.

The disagreement is about the core. In their case, it is not made to be read, and its text is stripped of the reservations and connectives of the narrative. Bachimont and Crozat's canonical form is, on the contrary, a view that the reader can consult, and in relation to which they read all the others. The documentary question then becomes: how to guarantee that the core remains readable by humans, and that each generated view points back to it?

Conclusion

Dialogue with an AI is a reading, and it can transform whoever engages in it. It has a cost, which falls on the reading that might have followed: ideas arrive without their author, authors without their disagreements, and the feeling of understanding without what made it possible to check it.

This cost is not the same for everyone. It depends on the reader's stance, which classical reading neutralized in part and which dialogue amplifies. This is the variable I propose to put at the center of future work.

For the scientific article, the consequence is practical. Its value shifts from the narrative to the act: what is asserted, by whom, on what date, on what evidence. The formats now being prepared will have to keep this act readable by humans, and not merely exploitable by machines.

Three hypotheses are left to be tested.

1. Reading by dialogue reduces the probability of subsequently reading the source text, at equal interest in the subject.
2. The gap between felt understanding and measured understanding is larger after a dialogue than after a reading.
3. The reader's questioning stance explains more variance in what they retain than the model used.

Opening

This article was produced through dialogue with an AI, and it illustrates what it describes. Its thesis was not that of either interlocutor at the start: one held dialogue to be a possible equivalent of reading, the other an impoverished substitute. The third finding, which settles between them, comes from a reading experience recounted in the course of the exchange.

What remains is to see what a reader will make of this text. If they ask an AI to summarize it, they will receive its theses. They will lack the path.

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Use of AI

This text was written with the help of Claude (Anthropic), from exchanges with the author, who reread and validated its content and answers for it.

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