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Writing: Monologue, Dialogue, and Ecological Narrative

Klaus Krippendorff

University of Pennsylvania, kkrippendorff@asc.upenn.edu

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Abstract

Writing mostly is a solitary activity. Right now, I sit in front of a computer screen. On my desk are piles of paper; notes for what I want to say; unfinished projects waiting to be attended to; books on shelves nearby to be consulted. I need to be alone when I write. Whether writing on a computer, on a typewriter or by hand, most writers I know prefer a secluded place without distractions from telephones and other people who demand attention.

Writing requires a concentration that is absent in ordinary conversations. This affects how we communicate in writing. Writing flows differently from the way a conversation flows. It flows from word and from comments to comments on comments. Writing has a beginning, an end and headlines that introduce the whole and its parts. These are units of thought, not of interaction. Writing is composed of small building blocks. Composition is deliberate, more or less controlled, moving through a topic without losing track of the overall purpose, the whole. We may go back to assure that our composition is coherent, eliminating redundancy, improving the wording and inserting thoughts that showed up later.

When we have to write under non-solitary conditions, for example, in a newsroom with pressing deadlines, interrupting telephone calls, other reporters conversing in the neighboring cubical, an editor calling us with new assignments, the product is different. It reads more like an assembly of observational reports, a collage of images, lacking an overall structure. Textbooks on writing rarely speak of the conditions of writing but celebrate the qualities of its preferred product: style, grace, grammar, logical structure and coherence.

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Writing: Monologue, Dialogue, and Ecological Narrative

By Klaus Krippendorff
The Annenberg School for Communication
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
kkrippendorff@asc.upenn.edu

Monologue

Writing mostly is a solitary activity. Right now, I sit in front of a computer screen. On my desk are piles of paper; notes for what I want to say; unfinished projects waiting to be attended to; books on shelves nearby to be consulted. I need to be alone when I write. Whether writing on a computer, on a typewriter or by hand, most writers I know prefer a secluded place without distractions from telephones and other people who demand attention.

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Undoubtedly, other people do enter one's writing but only through the writer's imagination. The papers and books that populate the environment of our writing are written by people, some of whom we may know. John Shotter calls them his textual friends (1999). These authors enter a text in the form of quotes, citations, paraphrases and even quite unconsciously in the form of an acquired vocabulary or thought style. The individualist ideal of the author as the composer of original work tends to relegate our textual ancestors to the background – except where they are used as authorities to support a writer's arguments.

There is a difference between writing to a friend, who we know and can imagine as a person, and writing for publication. Textbooks on writing, whether for popular or scientific publications, generally advise writers to “keep the reader in mind.” But in fact, we can hardly imagine THE reader. The reader is a verbal fiction, a stereotypical abstraction from what others tell us of people we never met. Readers may be characterized:

- Statistically (by how many there are of each kind);

- Linguistically (by the vocabulary and syntax they are presumed to be familiar with);
- Textually (by the body of literature to which our writing needs to add in order to be read); or
- Institutionally (by the policies of publishers, funding agencies, professional organizations and academic departments, that reward conformity and fight deviance).

These characterizations are supposed to represent an otherwise unknown diversity of people, robbed of their human qualities, clearly not visualizable, and I wonder how writers can keep these “readers in mind” besides claiming a concern for them.

It is important to note that the writers that preceded us and the addressees we are asked to keep in mind, including the friends we might write to, are virtual people to us. Their voices are imagined and made up from what we know of them, largely through various texts, and they are orchestrated for the convenience of our composition. Our “textual friends,” no matter how often we read their work, can not talk back to us. Although their texts may “tell” us something new each time we reread them, they cannot object to our reading of their work. They cannot take exception to how we use them. They cannot ask questions we have not anticipated. They have no voice without ours.

Of actual readers, we tend to know even less. Most of them never speak or write to us, and if they do, it is only after such a long delay that this feedback cannot influence our writing. Those who do read a draft, are friends, editors or institutional reviewers who are far from being representative of the diversity that our writing faces after publication. “The reader” seems to be a generalization and standardization of our own reading experiences. We assume they would understand what we say, more or less, and that they are not radically different from whom we have in mind writing for.

The point of the above is that *writing leads us into a monological mode* of communication. As a solitary activity, the presence of actual others tends to interfere with achieving coherence. The virtual voices of previous writers are selectively appropriated, recontextualized, revoiced, or rewritten, based on how we have read them. The logic of a text always is the logic as comprehended by its writer, not of those written with, of, for, or to. In a coherent text, one overarching logic governs. All other logics are subsumed by that of the author’s, edited out, dismissed, or silenced. Thus, writing is fundamentally univocal and mono-logical.

Discourse

The equation of writing and monologue is troubling, especially when it is confounded with another constraint on being and understanding: discourse. When we write fiction, journalistic reports, legal briefs, memoirs or scientific theory, we write in different discourses. Discourses differ in the way they create their objects, their subject matter, the kind of vocabulary they rely on, the circumstances under which they may be written, the kind of authority attributed to their writers and their texts. Although many writers on discourse limit the concept to a body of *text*, I consider text only as the visible surface of a discourse. It must be written and read, so it requires the *bodies of writers and readers*. But this is not all that counts. To be alive, a discourse needs a *community* of practitioners or experts that rearticulate its texts; *institutions* that regulate or discipline the linguistic practices within these communities; procedures that actively maintain a *boundary* within which these institutions operate and the coherence of its texts is preserved; and justifications of the *virtues* of a discourse’s distinct ways (Krippendorff, 1995). Physics is a discourse. It differs from journalism. Literature is a discourse, and so is legal science.

I cannot get into what distinguishes these discourses but want to make two general points before coming back to writing.

First, it is not easy to be in more than one discourse at any one time. For example, historians organize historical documents using methods that are customary and legitimate within that academic discipline. When writers come along and make a compelling story out of historical data, they have to go beyond the concern for

historical accuracy, add plots, characters and scenes and thus deviate from the cannon of academic history. Such writers may be seen as writing not history but, say, historical fiction. This exemplifies the reality of the boundaries that discourses draw around themselves, protectively.

All discourses seek to maintain such a boundary. A physicist may write poetry but not as a physicist. Fiction would not get published in a peer-reviewed journal of physics. Once we have decided to write history, fiction, physics, poetry or legalese, we are locked into one or another way of writing, into one or another way of constructing and experiencing a world, into one or another discourse. Discourse disciplines our languaging. In discourse, we are not free to say anything we please. In discourse, we do not use language, language uses us.

Second, the fundamental incommensurability of discourses -- and I grant the possibility of fuzzy boundaries, asymmetries, and shades of incompatibility -- is the most important challenge to writing across the curriculum. Two responses to this challenge are common but unsatisfactory:

- *Writing from the perspective of one about the subject matter of another.* This way of writing across the curriculum essentially undermines or delegitimizes the discourse being written about. For example, physicists who seek to tackle problems in biology also physicalize biology. This invalidates the biology-defining metaphor: the organism and functional explanations of its organs. And it amounts to colonizing biological discourse. Similarly, when psychologists develop theories that reduce social phenomena to individual/cognitive ones, they implicitly claim access to a psychological foundation of the discourse of sociology. Using psychoanalysis as a way to understand literature renders psychoanalysis as an appropriate meta-language. Or when economists pride themselves on having the mathematically most sophisticated theories among all the social scientists, they also imply that their construction of social reality is superior, notwithstanding that the objects of economics may be very different from what other social scientists study.
- *Writing that seeks a common ground among two or more discourses.* This approach to writing across the curriculum has often been called interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary. We see it at its best when one problem, say crime, is explored from the perspective of a psychologist, a political scientist, an economist and a sociologist, all working together towards a solution. This often amounts to the collaborative creation of a new discourse, one that focuses on a very specific issue or problem and subsumes the discourses of the disciplinary participants, but only in regard to the problem in view. (The fact that we have not been able to solve THE crime problem suggests that we have not come to an interdisciplinary consensus on what constitutes a reasonable solution). Finding a suitable an appropriate meta-discourse is always a struggle between disciplines. Criminology, an academic inter-discipline that seeks to embrace different discourses, is now often located in sociology. Fifty years ago, semiotics was seen as the favored candidate for an inter-discursive language. However, it failed. Today and in universities, writing across disciplinary cultures is dominated by English teachers and rhetoricians and so, it is natural to see English as the common ground that different disciplines share. Indeed, in English speaking countries, physicists, medical professionals, psychologists, literary scholars all have learned English before they became competent in their discourse. But English is not sufficient for scholars to understand each other's practices and subject matter, precisely because discourse embraces so much more than linguistic competency. If "writing across the curriculum" is equated with teaching better English composition, or finding a common vocabulary, this could not possibly aid collaborations across discourses or understand the politics between two discourses for it ignores what makes entering an unfamiliar discourse difficult and translating one into another impossible. Insisting on what we share blinds us to the very differences we wish to bridge.

It is an alternative to both that I hope to develop here. But let me first say why this is important.

Writing Otherness

As Charles Bazerman has pointed out repeatedly, "knowledge produced by the academy is cast primarily in written language" (1988:18). I, for example, am a social scientist. This associates my writing with a particular discourse. As a human being, I am living in dialogue with lots of different people. My language comes from talking with others. My most important insights are triggered in conversation with others. I

coordinate my practices of living with others. Without others I would not know how to distinguish who I am. Yet, because writing is so solitary and removed from other people, even when I write of social phenomena, I am unable *to be with* those I write of, I cannot communicate *with* them about my observations and so, I have to write *about* them instead.

Social science discourse imposes additional constraints. Social scientists *theorize* social phenomena and since social phenomena involve people as their constituents, social scientists always theorize other people, even in the abstract. Writing across the curriculum is also writing about people in different disciplines and of the work they do on account of their being in different disciplinary cultures. It too is writing about diverse others.

The medium of writing distances writers not only from other authors or sources, and their readers, but also from those who constitute the subject matter. It renders the very others who occur in one's writing as third persons, as he, she or they. Scientific discourse goes further by discouraging the use of "I," which would give currency to a scientist's subjectivity and assert a writer's accountability. It also discourages the use of third person singulars, of "he" and "she," for fear of appearing to be biased because third person singulars could reveal a writer's closeness to their subjects. This could distract scientists from staying above their subject matter and being able to generalize beyond single individuals. Scientific discourse leaves social scientists with a reduced or "disciplined" vocabulary in which others appear as third person plural, "they," and in convenient categories that make "them" into anonymous members of homogeneous classes.

Although, having grown up in this discourse, social science writing comes quite natural to me, I have increasingly felt uncomfortable referring to other people as "they" and putting "them" into categories that are not theirs. One reason for my discomfort is that I can rarely see myself in the terms that social science discourses deem applicable to others. I have yet to see a theory that could account for why I live the way I do, how I read the *New York Times* or what I am trying to do in this paper. Also, I do not like to grant third person others the authority of telling my story as long as I can tell it myself -- unless it resonates with my own experiences. Why should I do to others what I do not want done to me? The split between what social theory is about and what social scientists do manifests itself in a discourse that inhibits an understanding of its own social nature. Conveniently, it also protects the writers of science from being held accountable for their work and for its social consequences.

Social theory is the celebrated outcome of established social science writing. Let me examine the writing of social theory, social theorizing, more closely before moving on to my modest proposal. I shall discuss six propositions on this kind of writing, which, I suggest, writing across discourses needs to address as well:

(a) *Social theory is written, yet must survive in human communication.*

Clearly, theory is a disciplined form of writing. Theories presumably serve representational purposes, but far more important and typically neglected is the fact that they must also be languaged into being. They must be read, interpreted, compared with other theories, debated, justified and applied, and thus play social roles in various stakeholders' interconnected lives. Moreover, scientists tend to struggle with available language to explain their observations. They also know of the difficulties of finding suitable publications that fit in specialization and the kind of readers they can reach. Theories encounter much competition, not only from alternative hypotheses for explaining the same phenomenon, but also from different kinds of communications that compete for the attention of theorists, readers, and users. Thus, to survive, theories must remain viable in complex networks of human communication. Theories that fail to compel people to reproduce them simply fade away, regardless of good intentions or truths.

The failure to recognize the communicative nature of writing may well be due to the conception of language as a medium of representation that is to mirror a nature outside of it, and as a medium of expression that is to correlate meanings and authors' intentions (Rorty, 1979; 1989). Writing social theory has resolved the potential incompatibility of these two notions of language by assigning theorists the role of finding, discovering, and describing preexisting but often hidden facts and by dissolving individual intentions into a collective

responsibility for universal truths. The former depicts language as arbitrary and easily flawed, the latter is manifest in putting scientific methodology in charge of theorizing. The theorist's job then becomes that of a disciplined accountant of an existing nature. In view of the almost exclusive focus on the validity of scientific writing, the communicability of theories, the role that authors, readers and subjects play in their construction, and their social consequences have become of no or at best of secondary importance. In scientific discourse, how language shapes theorizing remains largely unreflected. This contrasts sharply with other kinds of writing that more readily responds to issues of power, popularity, practical value, or organizational/cultural/moral consequences.

Empirical truth remains the overriding criterion for accepting theories as valid. It would follow that communicational criteria: transmissibility, readability, persuasiveness, manifest and latent effects, practical value, and social consequences become secondary if not irrelevant to theorizing.

(b) *Writing social theory puts writers into the position of detached observers.*

Etymologically, theory comes from the Greek *theoria*, whose meaning comprises not only the process of "looking at," "viewing," "contemplating," or "speculating," but also the very object perceived, "a sight," "a tableau," or "a spectacle." These meanings imply a particular attitude vis-à-vis what is theorized. Spectacles are created to be seen and discussed, not to be altered. Spectacles unfold in front of the viewer's eyes. The use of this ocular metaphor entails a tacit *preference for sight* over sound, touch and feelings, and it assigns secondary importance to voices, stories, oral traditions and practical knowledge. It surely is no accident that we speak of scientific "observers," not of scientific listeners, much less of scientific narrators. There is no auditory or tactile analogue to the word "observation" and, although reading and writing would be difficult without sight, we easily forget that we do have bodies that cannot be detached from our speaking, writing and observing.

As spectators, theorists observe but do not allow themselves to enter the domain of their observations. The ocular metaphor guides theorists to conceptualize the objects they observe -- the facts -- as residing outside of themselves. And having done so, it furthermore leads them to endow these facts the power to determine which theories are valid. It is the linguistic construction of this ontology, and only that, an ontology that asserts its visibility while denying its constructedness, which directs us to believe that our observational accounts could be distorted by our conceptions, values and intentions; biased by the structure of the language we are using; and contaminated when our actions disturb the natural states of what we are theorizing. I would say that writers can hardly be separated from their subject matter. It is their invention and their choice. However, social science discourse radically detaches theorists from what they write about and provides numerous precautionary methodologies to assure this detachment. Thus, the objective reality that theorists think they write about is based on the illusion that we could observe reality without observation.

Since the 17th century, scientific discourse has increasingly used ocular metaphors and succeeded in disciplining its practitioners to not think otherwise. These metaphors make it inconceivable that the reality that scientists observe could have something to do with how they describe it and that it is not as solid as it is viewed. This ontology is stubbornly maintained -- notwithstanding that etymology links "fact" to manufacture, that "every fact has a factor, a maker," as the biologist Ruth Hubbard (1990:22) reminds us. To understand facts, one has to "see the reasons behind facts" (Freire, 1985:2) and inquire into their history (Fleck, 1979). Yet, perhaps with the exception of hermeneutics and constructivism, texts on scientific methods overwhelm students with prescriptions for deriving theories from observational data, uni-directionally. Aside the acknowledgement that sampling (of data) is allowed to depend on the hypotheses being tested, I know of no formalization of the inverse of the prescribed causality, showing how the generation of data themselves follows from the scientific theories that are pursued (for a discussion of this inversion, see Woolgar, 1993:36, 53-66).

Ethnomethodological analyses of scientific practices have revealed this cherished uni-directionality to be a myth (see Garfinkle, 1967; Garfinkle, et al., 1982). But overcoming the ocular conception of theorizing would seem impossible as long as theories are written in terms of an extensional logic, such as the logic of propositions, or modeled by computers, which are sequential machines that embody the very same logic in its operational form. To preserve this uni-directionality in scientific discourse against the threat of vicious

paradoxes, Bertrand Russell invented his famous Theory of Logical Types, which has the effect of outlawing self-reference (circular dependencies between propositions and what they refer to). It is this restricted logic that leads us to treat logical hierarchies as natural, conceptualizes facts at their bottom and encourages scientific observers to take a God's eye view of the world (Putnam, 1981) and to believe they could *observe their world without being observed by the objects of their observation* (Krippendorff, 1996).

Michael Foucault's (1977) metaphorical use of the panopticon in accounts of how knowledge works in society is another example of the power of ocular metaphors. The panopticon is an ideal prison design that enables centrally located guards to monitor the behavior of all inmates who in turn can see only the guards observing them, but not each other. Here discipline is assured by the efficiency of observation. In taking this design as a metaphor to explore power relations in society, Foucault equates knowledge and writing, and extends the ocularity of scientific discourse to its ultimate socio-logical conclusion: the government of one view at the expense of all others.

(c) *Writing social theory gives rise to distant otherness. It creates strangers.*

As generalizations, theories classify observations and theorize people in terms of third person plurals. "They" are the subjects of experiments, the interviewees of surveys and the respondents to mail questionnaires. "They" also are the conservatives, the unemployed, the Catholics, and the terrorists. All of "them" are labeled and assigned to particular classes on account of characteristics that all members of such classes are presumed to share. "They" are the others, the faceless strangers -- notwithstanding that it is these categories that make them so.

Classification already begins at the data generating stage of social research. In interviewing, for example, neither the identity of the interviewee nor that of the interviewer become data although both are responsible for them. Empirical data are supposed to represent something -- but not the dialogical process that generates them. For fear of appearing biased, experimenters hide personal knowledge of their subjects behind the injunction against using personal names. The only identity that counts is that which conforms to the categories of the theory under consideration. In the theater, spectators have no problems distinguishing between the actors, the characters they are playing on stage, and what they themselves think of them. But in writing social theory, the observed others *are* the very categories that theorists provide for them. They have no voice in the matter. When individuals do assert their identity, perhaps by associating themselves with a group, belief, or trait, theorists are not compelled to trust self-identifications and always assume the right to dismiss these as subjective, lacking abstraction, or as being irrelevant to their theory. When individuals are quoted, their voices are taken to exemplify the voice of their class. Social science writing channels a polyphony of voices into a single artificially constructed voice -- one for each class or category of the theorist's choosing. Classes never speak, however; only individuals do. In the reality of everyday life, collective monologues, choruses for example, are extremely rare. To take such exceptions as the ideal object of social theorizing attests to the abstract poverty of this discourse.

Politically, the simpler the categories of a theory, the more stereotypical others appear therein, the larger the territory it covers, and the more efficient is its application. Theorizing seems to encourage a *conceptual imperialism*; the urge to oversee, predict, control, and govern ever growing territories -- an inkling that science shares with other forms of government in national, spiritual, or commercial spheres of life. True, theories by themselves neither reign nor rule. Once institutionalized, however, they do enable their users to "survey," "capture," "represent," "monitor," and ultimately "manage" if not "discipline" what they claim to describe.

It is no accident that psychologists theorize "subjects" or "Ss" for short. Theorizing indeed does subject people to a theory. It renders them *serviceable* (Sampson, 1993) *to research efforts that end up demonstrating little more than how well theorists have managed to disable the social nature of their subjects, interviewees and observers* (Krippendorff, 1993). True, submitting to authorities and following instructions is part of what people *can* do. But creating these less-than-desirable human conditions at the expense of human agency, for the sake of theorizing them, make writing social theory suspect.

Aligned with the creation of human subjects is the inclination of the logic of propositions to construct logical hierarchies of ever-increasing levels of abstractions, from objects to language, to meta-language, to meta-meta-language, and so forth. It is not surprising that theorists see themselves comfortably operating at the top while placing their subjects always on the bottom. Although I am concerned with how theories make humans into their objects, this is not limited to theorizing in the social sciences. The biologists Lynda Birke and Ruth Hubbard (1995) noted the same disregard of the lives of humans and animals who are being used for laboratory research.

Consistent with these observations is how theories deal with the voices of others. Theories are expected to be simple, rational, consistent and general. Mathematical expressions, systems of equations, for example, embody such ideals. They possess the aesthetic qualities of being economical, elegant and abstract. And they have the added advantage of being computable in principle and usable without the complications of context and meaning. Mathematical writing is at home in the natural sciences but has made inroads also in efforts to explain social phenomena, in economics, linguistics, psychology, and systems science, for instance. Interestingly, rationality, consistency and generality codify different ways of dealing with the voices of others. Being “rational” is tantamount to speaking in the voice of one’s community, a voice that is assumed common to all of its members, legitimized as such, and expected to be uniformly comprehensible. Appealing to rationality hides an author’s voice behind the fictional voice of a privileged community. Appealing to consistency, on the other hand, is tantamount to avoiding contradictions among the propositions of a theory, silencing voices that do not fit. Favoring generalizations goes along with dismissing the importance of particular voices, the unique circumstances of individual beings, deviations from norms and surprises. All four serve as prescriptions for eliminating the diversity from other voices. The others become voiceless and can no longer recognize themselves in social theories concerning them.

In ordinary languaging, third person pronouns usually refer to those temporarily absent and potentially ready to be drawn back into a conversation. Theorizing institutionalizes their voiceless absence. Writing social theories estranges others from their own world.

(d) *Writing social theory trivializes others and reduces them to obedient mechanisms.*

Writing social theory describes human behavior, including verbal interactions, from outside the spectacle, as disinterested observers. From this outsider’s perspective, humans appear in the form of linear sequences of actions, temporally ordered chains of events, or trajectories in predefined coordinates. To understand trajectories, natural scientists seek to discover their regularities, their laws. However, talk of “regularities” or “laws” assumes that they are followed without choice. And talk of having “discovered” them assumes that they existed prior to observation or measurement. Such assumptions are not only built into mathematical theories of human behavior and inscribed into computational techniques for analyzing empirical data, they also enter less formalized talk of social causation. For example, plays are usually scripted and scripts explain much of what theater audiences end up seeing. But for the strict determinacy of machines, scripts are to performances much as computer programs are to computations. Scripts are in control of the plot. Describing human behavior in terms of scripts, rules, laws and grammars, even in reaction to messages, conjures the determinism of obedient mechanisms. It means describing others in what Buber called I-it relationships (Buber, 1970; Krippendorff, 1996). Since spectators can never be sure of whether observed behavior is minutely scripted, responsive to an unobserved condition or completely spontaneous, the preferred deterministic accounts of human behavior remain on shaky grounds -- unless theorists would dare to step out of their received observer role and ask pertinent questions. However, even the Turing Test, which is based on asking those questions with the aim of distinguishing machine intelligence from human intelligence, is never quite conclusive. Its use has taught us that the ability to ask and answer questions is a necessary, but not sufficient condition to determine the presence of intelligence, which can be equated here with human agency. However, as long as theorists remain in their detached observer role, a test for whether deterministic explanations are valid is unavailable. In dialogue, one would be able to ascertain such questions. However, dialogue would also shift at least some of the scientist’s authority for theorizing to the subjects, and this clearly erodes the theorists’ ability to write objectively. Thus, writing social theory remains stuck in causal explanations of social phenomena and reduces

their human constituents to trivial mechanisms.

This result stands in sharp contrast with recent efforts of acknowledging individual voices in fiction. Although the medium of writing is constrained, as I have suggested, there is a sense in which we can give voice to those we write of, for example by exploring their mental spaces and better still, by letting them speak for themselves -- even through the voice of a writer. Bakhtin, for instance, allows us to analyze a certain usage of language where a narrator seemingly is in dialogical contact with his or her character and the voices of both can be heard. Consider this short passage:

Edward sat down heavily. Where should he go? What should he do? He had no idea which session to attend.

(Schuster, 1998).

Superficially, the writer describes Edward's physical condition and explores his mental space in the form of a third person account. Bakhtin, however, would ask who the speaker of the second and third interrogatives could be -- and answer that they represent questions within the mind of Edward. They are not offered as interior monologue, nor do they seem to be spoken entirely by the narrator. Bakhtin would call such utterances double-voiced for they simultaneously belong to both the narrator and his or her character. Such double-voiced utterances are common to narrative but not appreciated in writing social theory, I suspect because mental spaces and internal dialogues cannot be observed without participation and dialogue is irreconcilable with the monologue of a theory.

Without engaging theorized others in conversations on what is said about them, social theorists are remarkably free to explore any theory that would be of interest to their community. Although novel conceptualizations may not come easily, from the convenient position of an outside observer, it is all right for sociologists like Erving Goffman (1959, 1963) to describe social interactions in dramaturgical categories; for psychologists like Roger Schank and Robert Abelson (1977) to interpret the same behavior in terms of individuals following rules and scripts; for literary scholars like E. D. Hirsch (1967) to extract intentions from an author's writings; for cognitive scientists to develop algorithms that are presumed to govern individuals' processing and exchange of information; or for economists and political scientists to measure the efficacy with which actors apply available resources. In the absence of dialogue with the constituents of the social phenomenon of interest, almost anything seems to go.

(e) Writing social theory inscribes its monologism even into its observational data and thus resists dialogical accounts of social phenomena.

At moments of contact between the theorist and the theorized, social research invariably depends on collaboration and dialogue. It starts with recruiting subjects for experiments or interviewees. Use of human subjects in research requires informed consent, which acknowledges these recruits' dialogical abilities, their ability to understand the nature of their involvement and to decline participation. However, once consent is obtained, experimenters expect their instructions to be followed and feel free to put their subjects into the most contrived experimental conditions and to ask questions that may have no relevance to their life experiences. The point of psychological experiments rarely concerns a subject's practices of living but how they respond to conditions defined by the experimenter. There is also the common practice of deceiving subjects as to the nature of the hypothesis under consideration. The cooperation with the experimenter, the dialogue that ensues until the task is understood, even the subject's interest in the experiment to succeed, becomes the unacknowledged context of data into which an unequal power relationship between experimenter and subjects is inextricably inscribed. One must question what theorizing of such data could possibly tell us about the social world.

Structured interviewing provides a further example of how monologue is imposed on an essentially dialogical situation. Interviewing is a constrained form of verbal interaction. Once the interviewee agrees to be interviewed, the asymmetry of the process is no longer in dispute: the interviewer asks the questions and the interviewee is expected to provide appropriate answer. Appropriateness depends on the research questions. In

the spirit of cooperation, interviewees are known to ask clarifying questions. However, these questions, the answer they receive, and that there was a need for it tend to be off the record and do not qualify as data proper. Interviewees who object to a question have no legitimate place in the data either. In fact, they may be dismissed for being uncooperative (meaning indomitable), or noted as having given “no answer.” The dialogue that laces through a scientific interview is systematically prevented from entering social research.

Outside the controlled way of generating social science data, most scientific practices, it must be noted, involve oral arguments, meetings among collaborators, presentations of findings to professional bodies, debates over the validity of particular research methods, and considerations of competing explanations or alternative paradigms. Yet, these oral forms of communication too remain hidden behind written reports of findings and tend not to become scientific knowledge (Czubaroff, 1993). Written knowledge remains the privileged mode of knowing in science (Bazerman, 1988) and dialogical modes are resisted.

(f) *Writing social theory encourages the very un-social conditions in which theories can survive.*

The social sciences are fundamentally concerned with how human beings live together: Sociology, for how people organize themselves into larger organizational wholes and coordinate their actions in ways that sustain these wholes; Political Science, for how people create publics, arrive at consensus on agendas, mandate their leaders to form governments; International Relations, for how peoples perceive each other across national boundaries, resolve international conflicts, and regulate the myriad of interactions between diverse constituencies of nation states; Communication Research, for how people construct, sustain and transform their social realities by communicating with each other.

This is a big project. Its many disciplinary strands are dominated, however, by the celebration of theory: the use of ocular metaphors for relating to a world outside, the reliance on writing with an extensional logic and its attendant constructions of hierarchies, the willingness to sacrifice the unruly voices of the constituents of the social phenomena for the convenience of theorizing from a distance and from above such hierarchies, and an unawareness, if not intentional disregard, for the communicative and political nature of social science discourse. This indicates a remarkable contradiction. While the social sciences are assertedly concerned with all kinds of social problems and phenomena, their discourse seems limited to address the theorizable, unvarying, predictable or non-social features of these phenomena, leaving their human constituents either out of the picture or painting them in unrecognizably terms, as strangers to scientific knowledge. Social theories make the social world appear inherently un-social.

How real is this theory-driven knowledge? What does it do in the social world? And how widespread is its use? Surely, it is real for scientists whose principal effort is directed to generate empirical data in support for their theories. Scientific knowledge is written and validated and nobody knows better whether it is than their creators, the practitioners of scientific discourse. But what does this discourse-specific knowledge mean outside the discourse and how does it get there?

If theories would stay entirely with the community of the theorists that created them, there would be no reason for concern. All discourses have a way of drawing boundaries around themselves and pursuing their own future. This is so for social science discourse as well. But written scientific theory is also public, and the boundary that this discourse maintains applies only to its claim to be the sole arbiter of truth, representational truth I might add, not to the objects it leaves behind, social theories. Today, laypersons have almost as easy access to scientific publications as scientists have and so it is appealing to explain the dissemination of scientific information as communication.

The traditional and most widely accepted theory of communication equates communication with the transmission of information from a source to a receiver, from a writer to a reader, from someone who has access to the very information that the other is lacking, is traditional and widely accepted. This transmission model entails assigning authority to the message source, to the author of a communication, and in the case in point, to the scientific community that generates scientific knowledge. This theory of communication has been cast in mathematical terms and fond applications to an enormous array of human practices from advertising to teaching

to infectious diseases. Interestingly, transmission is one-way communication and thus theorizes communication as monologue. In the case in point, it should therefore not be surprising that it supports the textual authority of scientific writing. Nor should it come as a surprise that it encourages the expectation that scientific theories admit but one correct reading for everyone. While this transmission model of communication could explain why the very publication of scientific writing exerts a compelling force on the reading public, it is hard, nevertheless to imagine that communication is that simple, especially across discourses.

If discourses encourage their own readings of texts, then one must grant those outside the scientific discourse, say within public discourse, the ability to read texts in their own way. Indeed, and unlike what scientific writing and the theory of communication as transmission presume, the reading of written communication is not entirely determined by its source. Authors can read their text quite differently than its readers. And in principle, laypersons can dismiss validity claims by scientists just as easily as scientists can. Communication across discourses is not explainable in terms of transmission. It is not a monologue. But, in view of the extraordinary role that science plays in our culture, contesting the textual authority of scientific writing is difficult. It amounts to questioning a whole complex of deep-rooted cultural assumptions on which we rely in many spheres of life, including the idea that communication could preserve the truth of statements as they travel from the scientific enterprise to the public.

When social theories enter the lives of those who have a stake in the phenomena that scientists have observed and theorized, several things can happen. Those who recognize themselves in the larger picture that a theory might be painting, and those who hope to benefit from using it, might accept that theory as intended,-- not realizing, however, that the very act of accepting it, for whatever reason, also means accepting the latent ontological assumptions that come with it. When this happens, theories work much as self-fulfilling prophecies do. Generalizations, for example, always go beyond summarizing past observations. And they become real when they are adopted, acted upon or enacted, and thereby create realities that may not have been there at the time of their formulation.

As Anthony Giddens (1984) observed, the mere metaphorical use of the term “market” in 19th century academic writings to characterize certain economic activities ended up creating what no economist or CEO would dare to question today. Similarly, our conception of “the public” shifted radically from what, in the 19th century was discussed in salons and side street cafes to what scholars theorized as public opinion and then encouraged polls to measure. The use of hydraulic and archeological metaphors in Freud’s writing of the human psyche produced a whole industry of psychotherapists and patients for whom mental disorders became as real as they can be. The theories of consumer behavior and of mass media effects, so avidly embraced by the advertising industry, foreshadowed the very consumerism and media culture that these theories hypothesized. Could the theories of mass communication have encouraged the passive television audiences they are so good at describing? Could their effect have been to create the conditions of their validity? Correlations reported between intelligence, ethnicity and crime, together with the popularization of genetic explanations, have informed educational policies and hiring practices that in turn keep such correlations real -- well beyond the original data. The publication of statistics on cultural, racial, sexual, and national population characteristics undoubtedly inform a population, but it also reifies the very distinctions that statisticians built into their survey instruments and then naively think to have “discovered.” This is the reality of a society that publishes about itself!

Moreover, scientific accounts concerning specific populations other than us -- be they homeless, women, homosexuals, Afro-Americans, liberals, CEOs, consumers or Muslims -- can do two things. In the immediate, they encourage “us” to treat “them” in the categories in which these accounts are cast. In the long run, our repeated actions on such accounts can transform “them” into the homogenous groups we claimed “they are.” We know how this works regarding attributed intelligence in the classroom where students who were believed to be of superior intelligence ended up testing that way (Rosenthal, 1968). Considering the authority that science writing enjoys, would it not be expected that its writing virtually creates the very categories of people that social theorists naively claim to have observed? Could not the continuing publication of theories of message effects and their inscription in technologies of influence account for the increase in these causalities? Would it not make sense to assume that institutions that thrive on particular theories would promote conceptions

favorable to them and inscribe them in everything they do and thus assure the reality they describe is preserved, for example in terms of technologies)? And is it therefore not conceivable that the un-social nature of written social theories favors a culture in which social phenomena become increasingly incomprehensible and strange?

Of course it is possible to resist adopting theories that do not seem to fit one's life, that seem to lead to immoral consequences, or that undermine institutions deemed virtuous. But I submit, this can become a Herculean undertaking. Not only is it difficult to recognize these implications in a culture where dialogical conceptions of communication are conspicuously absent and theories are judged solely for their ability to represent past and predict future facts, but also because it requires far more effort to swim against a stream than drift with it. Yet, there are many examples of groups of people who did not feel at home in the prejudices or scientific theories about them and have shown remarkable courage to challenge them for their political implications. The Black-is-Beautiful movement gave Afro-Americans a pride that prevailing theories of racial inferiority had denied them. This movement opened opportunities that could not be realized before. Feminism not only managed to identify scientific prejudices against women as part of an overarching patriarchy, but also introduced a whole new vocabulary, reconceptualizing gender differences. The Gay movement also, has fought hard against conceptions of abnormality applied to them and encouraged laws, among other things, that allowed homosexuals men and women to "come out" and define their own lives, rather than having to live into the definitions that a heterosexual-dominated biology created for them. These are no mean accomplishments. There are of course also less visible efforts that oppose dominant paradigms, particularly in an epistemologically aware biology, alternative medicine, and new therapies. All challenge the authority of writing theory and the authority of a science that claims to speak for others without their consent. But also, most of the examples of resistance involve the development of alternative discourses.

I should like to clarify the above by suggesting that writing in the natural sciences may not have these consequences. The objects they theorize do not read and cannot understand what is being said about them. Technology, a consequence of natural science writing, does not observe how it is being used. But the consequence that I described is particularly worrisome when they concern historical events whose human constituents can no longer speak for themselves. It is altogether unclear how we can justify speaking about them and retelling their stories. Accounts of history are confounded by the freedom that writers have. The absence of voices of the past has been misused, for example, by rewriting history to suit national purposes, by denying the Holocaust, and even by using historical figures in advertising. In the present, we have at least living beings to talk to and consult. However, from the foregoing, it seems that writing social theory has unwittingly created a culture that legitimates this kind of theorizing in the practices it encourages. In this culture, theorizing the voices of others without their participation or consent is the norm. Causal-deterministic forms of explaining social phenomena are favored, not only for the ability to develop technologies but also for institutionalizing or regularizing human behavior, making it predictable and trivial. Widespread theorizing has essentially blinded us to the dialogical nature of human existence and to our own participation in bringing forth our social world. The world that seems to be emerging is populated by voiceless disciplinary others and looks increasingly unfriendly, disrespectful of diversity and un-human. Theorizing encourages what is theorizable and discourages what is not. Writing social theory thus creates the very un-social culture in which its theories can survive.

The kind of writing across the curriculum that is about the object of one discourse from the perspective of another, subjects the former much as theories subject theorized others to their categories. If writing across the curriculum seeks a common ground among two or more discourses, it may serve neither discourse and subject both to a more general discourse. I contend neither present satisfactory alternatives.

Dialogue

What is dialogue that writing seems to miss and theorizing fails recognize? Let me sketch my experience and reading without much references to the voluminous literature that is now being generated in various areas of human inquiry. Let me say, though, that I am influenced by the works of Mikhail Bakhtin, Martin Buber and Paulo Freire (Buber, 1970; Morrison & Emerson, 1989,1990; Freire, 1990; Holquist, 1990; Cissna & Anderson, 1998) as well as various writings on second-order cybernetics and constructivism.

- (1) Dialogue involves real people, alternating as speakers and listeners. Dialogue is not a mere exchange of words, however. Voices are what bodies make and speaking and listening require the bodily co-presence of human beings with everything they do besides talking.
- (2) Dialogue takes place in an interlacing of expectations: Everything said is said in the expectation of being understood by someone else. Everything heard as being said is taken as having been said by someone to someone else. Understandings need not be mutual and shared, but complementary in responses.
- (3) Dialogue jointly creates newness and explores it in turn. The understanding that participants gain of each other is continuously disturbed, revised and reconstructed. There is no preordained path a dialogue must be taking. There is no necessary outcome, such as agreement or consensus.
- (4) Dialogue has also no clear beginning and no necessary end. Not even the death of a participant necessarily terminates a dialogue. The second person pronouns “she” and “he” refer to past acquaintances, whether or not they are in waiting to be included. Dialogue may be interrupted and continue internally before reemerging again.
- (5) The meanings of what is being said, the meanings of utterances, reside in the process of responding to each other, neither in words or speech acts, nor in the participants’ minds, especially not in reference to outside events. Meanings are double-faced, responsively linking speakers and listeners.
- (6) Dialogue is self-organizing. It interactively constructs its past and generates its own future. Its meanings are unique to that process and perfectly clear for its participants, but often uncertain from its outside, to non-participants or detached observers. Dialogues cannot be managed by one participant nor governed by an overarching principle (ideology or hegemony).
- (7) At moments of dialogue, participants are open to each other’s presences. Buber characterized this tension as “letting the other happen to me while holding my own ground” (Steward & Zediker, 1999). Buber also saw dialogue happening in I-Thou relationships, in which the emergence of differences (conflicts and incompatibilities) between an I and others is cherished as a fundamentally human condition, neither despised nor merely tolerated.
- (8) Dialogue takes monologue or univocality only as a temporal condition, one that has its history in dialogue and cannot go on without eventually facing dialogical challenges. Dialogue thus undermines external authorities and invokes the possibilities of liberation.

Efforts to Escape Monologue.

In a seminar on qualitative analysis (semantics) that I teach, my students and I have tried ways of doing research that moves closer to acknowledging dialogue. Given the institutional constraints and the properties of writing as a medium of academic communication this proved difficult but not impossible. I want to give three examples from these efforts and then make a more general proposal.

The first example is the use of research methods, largely from cultural anthropology, that acknowledges involving informants and researchers in a dialogue: componential analysis. This method explores the organization of meanings of a finite vocabulary that can be elicited under a unifying concept or cover term; for example, colors, beverages, flowing water, occupations or forms of government. Ward Goodenough (1965), who pioneered the method, explored different systems of kinship terms with it. The researcher has no preconception concerning the organization of meanings to be worked out except for two assumptions, first that informants have a concept that enables them to list instances of a chosen kind, and second, that informants can explain the circumstances under which they would use one of these rather than another. The vocabulary can be elicited by the researcher asking informants “what kinds of X’s do you know?” -- where X is the cover term. The organization of meanings may become clear by asking, systematically and for each pair of such instances “what distinguishes between A and B?” In the U.S., the ability to explain the difference between two terms is common. It underlies consultations of a dictionary, arguments concerning the appropriateness of a certain word

(as opposed to another), and critiques of English usage, for instance, in English instruction. So, for kinship terms, the researcher may be told that a pair of terms, A and B, differ regarding gender, distinguish between relatives by blood as opposed to by marriage, contrast relatives that are older with those younger than the informant, etc. From these responses, the researcher can, often not without difficulties, construct a scheme that summarizes these explanations of differences. For example, English kin terminology can be represented in three dimension: gender, generation level and degree of nearness. What we added to this method is a way of validating its result. Just as a competent user of, say, kinship terms must come to know certain things about a potential relative before being able to choose the appropriate term, so can the researcher ask the informant questions concerning the entailments of the system that the researcher has constructed, using several operations that were not part of the initial questioning; for example, analogies: “is it true that A is to B as C is to D?” Or shifts in one semantic dimension: “is it true that A is a male B?” If the results of a componential analysis are valid, then their logical entailments would have to be acceptable by the informants.

The method sketched in broad strokes starts with a dialogue in the sense of (1) and (2) of the points listed above. There is ample space for newness to emerge, in the sense of (3) though under the constraints of the researcher’s purposeful questioning. The method continues the kind of dialogues that the informant will have had prior to collaborating in the research, in the sense of (4), although unlike (4), the dialogue with the researcher terminates with a written report. The meanings explored here say as much about the researcher’s questions as about the informant’s explanations in the sense of (5). The product is co-constructed, especially when validated in the manner suggested above. (6) is clearly violated and (7) and (8) is beyond the reach of this method.

My second example is a research project by one of my students. Eleanor Novek wanted to study empowerment in regularly meeting women’s groups (Novek, 1991). Naturally, with this expressed intent, she was not admitted by any. She had to resort to working with women who took part in such groups. She avoided the usual protocol of survey research, proceeding linearly from the recorded answers to interview questions to testing statistical hypotheses and to writing up findings. Instead, she sought to enroll her interviewees in her academic project of collaboratively understanding what happens in these groups. Each interviewee/collaborator was appreciated as an expert in her own group experiences, and was promised to be informed about what Eleanor learned about other groups. This was the motivation of collaboration.

After analyzing what she had heard, she sent her preliminary findings to each interviewee for comments. As it turned out, many did not take the time to read them and respond. Some merely checked out how they were mentioned in the findings. This was disappointing, but reflects, perhaps, the low currency that writing social theory has for those practically involved in the subject matter. Reading a monologue tends not be as rewarding as being in a dialogue. It cannot reproduce the feeling of rapport between interviewer and interviewee and the pleasure of collaboratively exploring an issue of mutual interest. That some women merely checked out quotations attributed to them has two additional explanations. One derives from the dominant representational notion of language. The idea of language as having to accurately represent facts encourages playing the language game of finding inaccuracies and faults. The other explanation stems from the obvious concern for “one’s face,” wanting to look good in print and to potential readers.

Several of the interviewees made themselves available for a second interview/discussion of the preliminary report and this went far beyond accuracy and face concerns. In fact, the most rewarding experience in this second encounter was that it triggered further elaborations and responded to the broader picture now available through this research about groups they did not belong to. Seeing one’s experiences through that of others generated a feeling of confirmation, a realization that one was not unique, that there are diverse paths to empowerment. Ideally, there would emerge “aha-experiences,” the sudden gaining of new insights. Thus, the second encounter, ostensibly about the analysis of the first, went far beyond validation by demonstrating that dialogue can develop unforeseeably in the sense of (3). Inasmuch as collaboration always means learning something new and contributing something unexpected, dialogue has no clear termination point in the sense of (4).

Interestingly, Eleanor’s 1991 paper did not mention how she made use of the second encounter. But in

a subsequent study (1999), reentry of the preliminary report, a monologue, into a collaborative dialogue about the research findings, in the sense of (8), had become an explicit part of her methodology. Her writing had changed, making it appear natural for her to acknowledge her own intervention and granting her interviewees/collaborators the authority to judge her own work. The reentry of her analytical effort into the very process that informed it made Eleanor's project into joint one and the comments on her analysis, some quite negative, became part of the published paper. The interviewees turned collaborators literally had the last word on the subject.

My third example is more macro, cultural, political, or institutional. In her dissertation, still in progress, Nicole Keating (1999), another student of mine, analyses documentary film production in the U.S. As a first step, she identified the major stakeholders in documentary film production – documentary film makers, academic historians, funding institutions, government agencies, and audiences. These were presumed to have different stakes in documentary films, claim different concerns, are committed to different discourses, vocabularies, communities, and institutions, and thus preserve different aspects of the reality of documentary film production. Although these stakeholders do not speak as individuals, as would be expected in (1), but for groups or institutions, they nevertheless talk to each other, know of each other's roles, agendas and powers, and interact accordingly. This mutual knowledge creates the interlacing network of expectations outlined in (2). Nicole interviewed representatives of each group (except for audiences that turned out to be too diverse but were considered well represented, albeit differently, in the minds of the stakeholders) to bring forth how they succeed in what they do, what considerations they gave to other stakeholders' interests, and in which terms they saw the whole network function. Incidentally, one of the unexpected insights, in the sense of (3), that surfaced in these interviews was the importance of a sixth stakeholder: film distributors, who have their own interest in the popularity of documentaries. What these stakeholders do, say and write to each other -- their proposals for funding, the authorities they cite to compel other stakeholders to act in their favor, the overt agendas they claim to pursue (and what everyone knows they actually do), how the national policies on support for the arts informs budget decisions, the credits each hopes to claim for supporting successful projects – all of these have meanings that are unique to the stakeholder network in the sense of (5) and many of these surfaced in her interviews. They would have not been understood from the outside.

Instead of analyzing these interview data as expressions of individual opinions, Nicole grouped them into themes and reassembled them into a script for a roundtable discussion of the stakeholders she had interviewed, pitching arguments against counter arguments and offering explanations for why things happen the way they do. Writing the script for a dialogue that did not take place as such an analyzing it may have violated the self-organizing nature of dialogue in the sense of (6). However, within the domain of documentary film production, scripts are very familiar to all those who participate in the process, surely more so than a content analysis. More importantly, and recognizing that she herself, by the very act of interviewing these stakeholders, had become part of the system she was studying, her methodology demanded that she reenter her analysis into a second round of conversations with stakeholders. This step is designed not only to test whether this script is in line with what these interviewees feel comfortable with, find to be a fair dialogization of what they said, but also to enable rearticulations of their positions and elicit comments and suggestions of an analytical nature. In effect, it invites a continuation of Nicole's script whose authors are the stakeholders themselves, transforming (8) into a virtue, not an unwanted challenge. In effect, her research not only studied the role of documentary film production in the politics of shaping historical reality, she was also cognizant that her entering that process intervenes in its course and may well continue without her, in the sense of (4).

Studying a network of stakeholders in this manner is studying discourses in interaction. It exemplifies writing across disciplinary boundaries. Each stakeholder in the network that, as a whole produces documentary films, pursues its own objectives, draws its own boundaries, cannot be pushed beyond a point, but cooperates by negotiating the history that the public will eventually see and remember in the future.

Surely, these examples are far removed from dialogue with real people in face to face interactions. The use of writing remains a constraining factor. But they show that the added constraints of social theorizing, of traditional social science discourse, can be circumvented by a form of writing that acknowledges social phenomena as always constituted in communication among their often diverse constituents. Listening to their

stories, consulting them with our conceptualizations, even inviting their co-authorship, is of considerable benefit for understanding if not personally rewarding. Writing across discourses is no exception. Discourses, it must be recognized, reside not in texts but in their use by real people who language their own disciplinary perspectives. We do not need to theorize social phenomena as spectators and deny their constituents a voice in our understanding of these phenomena as well as theirs. Instead, we can deliberately and responsibly involve ourselves in the very politics that inquiries across different worlds set in motion and acknowledge a dialogical form of knowing. This brings us to a third possibility of writing across the curriculum.

Proposal for an Ecological Narrative

To begin, I must admit that, even in writing this critical essay, I do feel the pull of monologism. Writing of theorists and theorized in their absence is easy. I too stand accused of theorizing *about* theorizing, *about* discourse and *about* dialogue – as if there were no need to consult those who engage in these phenomena, as if my own abstractions were sufficient. It shows that dialogue, the way I have characterized it, is not translatable into the medium of writing. The above examples demonstrate this difficulty. They are no more than approximations, first attempts to find a way that would give those who occur in our accounts the voice they have in dialogue but writing tends to deny them. Let me go beyond these approximations and state what I think underlies these efforts.

I like to call what we have tried to do an *ecological narrative*, and define it as *a way of writing of social phenomena that embraces the stories of its human constituents and can be reembodyed in their lives*. I am proposing this as a way of writing across the curriculum or across discourses that is more attractive than the two I described in the foregoing.

Why ecological narrative? Let me start with ecology.

An ecology of diverse plants and animals, the human population explicitly included, is not a hegemonic system. Its government, if one can call it that way, is radically distributed. The organisms of each species live in their own worlds, yet are responsive to each other in their given ways. To me,

- (i) an *ecology* arises in the interactions among its many constituents, who,
- (ii) by distinguishing among kinds of interactions,
- (iii) organize themselves into families, cultures, species, and
- (iv) enact their own local and positional understandings of themselves and others, their own worlds.
- (v) An ecology is always larger than the world of any of its constituents. Hence, an ecology is neither theorizable (comprehensible) from any one position within that ecology nor fully exploitable (controllable) by any one of its species, possible dominance relations among them notwithstanding.

For example, foxes and rabbits interact. Yet, a fox's world is surely different than a rabbit's, and so is ours. We can observe their interactions but only in our world. We can never know how they occur in each other's. This limitation does not prevent us from participating and shaping a complex ecology of which each species knows only its own version. Humans may theorize an ecology but are not exempt from this epistemological limitation.

Why narrative? To me, narrative creates worlds that narrators can imagine, make present to themselves, to each other and perhaps live within. These worlds need not be the same for everyone. A story told may be understood differently by different listeners. Texts too afford multiple readings. Herein lies the analogy to ecology. Just as species can interact without sharing their worlds, so can people talk with each other and write to and of each other without sharing their understanding of what is being said or written. A narrative brings many different worlds into contact with each other and continues as long as it is being circulated and rearticulated within a community of narrators. So, by one-to-one correspondence to my sketch of ecology, let me suggest:

- (i) A narrative arises in the process of (re)telling or (re)writing stories -- always by someone and in the expectation of being understood by others who,
- (ii) by rearticulating to each other certain stories but not others, especially concerning themselves,
- (iii) form all kinds of narrative communities, whose individual members
- (iv) understand and enact these stories in the context of their living within their own communities while cognizant of other communities.
- (v) Narratives are composed of many stories. However, they are always incomplete. They may not embrace everybody's story, nor carry the whole history of their rearticulations into the future. They may be selectively reproduced, merge various stories into one narrative or separate one into several. They may open spaces for including heretofore unheard voices. Narratives tend to preserve the process of their own rearticulations.

For a start, one could liken an *ecological narrative* to the written record of a conversation, a transcript, whose readers can distinguish between several voices responding to each other, can understand what is going on in the exchanges, and could carry the process onward -- ideally by feeling invited to join that conversation as its participants and continue the process in real time. Like ecologies, conversations are not managed by any one party; nor can the understanding of what is going on be expected to be the same for each participant. Conversations are not completely theorizable from any single position. Consensus cannot be expected or demanded. Conceptual diversity and conflicts, struggles over meanings, holding each other accountable for what was said, are constitutive of multiple and ever-emerging conversational realities, precisely because these conceptions live in processes of communication. Should alien conceptions, theories for example, enter from outside a conversation, their viability would depend on nothing simpler than being rearticulable and meaningful to its constituents. Ecological narratives have to encourage such readings.

An ecological narrative is inherently social -- not because it may concern social phenomena, which it might, but unlike a theory *about* things outside themselves -- because it is written so as to become part of the very phenomena written of. The distinctions that such a narrative draws become an acknowledged part of what the human constituents of the phenomenon understand, enact, and experience. This self-reference prevents ecological narratives from being modeled after or emulating mechanistic, organismic, or mentalistic systems. The notion of language underlying ecological narratives cannot be that of a system of representations, which ends up celebrating monologue, but that of dialogue, languaging, or conversation.

An ecological narrative mitigates the natural tension between social and individual explanations. On the one hand, it acknowledges that social realities are brought forth in language, which is a prototypical social phenomenon. On the other hand, such realities constitutively depend on and are informed by the conceptual, narrative, and conversational abilities of its individual constituents. Writing across the curriculum concerns this very phenomenon as well, but on another level. On the one hand, it has to acknowledge the political nature of the interactions that cross-disciplinary writing can set in motion, and on the other hand it has to respect the commitments of the writers involved in their respective discourses. What then does it mean to write ecologically? Let me state my proposal in six points:

(A) *To narrate ecologically is to acknowledge that observational accounts do not exist without their narrators; that all knowledge is embodied.*

Observations are made by observers. Narratives are made by narrators who are observers as well. Narration always entails a particular standpoint or perspective from which one speaks or writes. Positionless writing, propositions that do not acknowledge their makers, divert attention away from the writer/reader relationship that a text creates to contents outside of the process of written communication. The latent consequences of a positionless rhetoric is that narrators remove themselves from being held accountable for what they say or write. Theorizing exemplifies this practice in its extreme. It is these social consequences of positionless writing that render writing social theory so troubling. To overcome this rhetoric, I am

recommending that we publicly acknowledge our accountability for what we write; for example, by adopting the first-person pronouns “I” or “we” and explicating our (inter)actions in preference to their products; by using verbs that make clear the process nature of our involvement, speaking of knowing instead of knowledge, for example; by assuring our readers that the path we happen to be taking need not be theirs; and by being cognizant of the consequences that our narratives might have for unknowable readers. In ecological accounts, even theories should be attributed to those who propose or promulgate them, as should readings be attributed to particular readers. As I have suggested, anything said can lead to many interpretations, scientific insistence on single readings notwithstanding. Ecological narratives have to explicitly acknowledge their positional and polysemous nature.

(B) *Ecological narratives grant others their voices as well.*

To understand how the social phenomena of our interest are constituted, we need to find ways to let the human constituents of such phenomena speak for themselves, of themselves, from positions of their own choosing, and ideally in situations in which they feel comfortable and at home. Although interviewing is an asymmetrical relationship, this is a start. Our examples relied on them. Listening to what people have to say and taking their narratives seriously opens us up to worlds otherwise unthinkable, potentially surprising, even uncomfortable or troublesome. In granting others the same agency that we claim for ourselves, we come to appreciate the spaces they have created to understand their movements and the standpoints they take. Otherness is the most important challenge of writing of social phenomena as well as across discourses.

In scholarly writing, to be sure, we do quote our sources, often extensively, but mostly in support of the point we are trying to make. In an ecological narrative we must resist such censoring the voices of others. We cannot simply dismiss the stories we hear being told by others when they do not fit ours. Even outright lies serve communicative purposes. We cannot presume to know the motives and intentions of speakers without consulting them. In particular, this calls for renouncing our self-celebratory “hermeneutics of suspicion,” by which we elevate ourselves to a position of knowing what we deny others to have access to, hegemony for one example. Nor can we engage in systematically doubting the sincerity of others, in pursuit of conspiracy theories for instance — unless “hegemony,” “deception” or “devious intent” is revealed through other stories and plays a role in the conversation we are attempting to understand and enter. Eventually lies will come out and be seen as such. Until they do, they are not lies within the dialogue.

Surely, recording the stories of those whose worlds we wish to understand is practiced in several research traditions, especially ethnography. Unfortunately, even ethnography has acquired the flavor of being applicable only to ordinary folks. And the method does not prevent (the often anthropological) ethnographers from floating above their informers much as theorists seek to stay above their facts. The role of the ethnographer should be considered neither uncontestable nor immune to ethnographical research. In a way, ecological narratives could be considered a way of showing ethnographies in interaction, including the ethnographers’ writing.

Ecological narratives do not simply dismiss the theories and abstractions that others cherish. My review of the effects of writing social theory must not be read that way. Since conceptualizing realities in positionless, abstract, theoretical and stereotypical terms, i.e., an objectivist rhetoric, can provide its users power and influence over those who do not recognize what these rhetorical moves do, this is a widely accepted social practice. However, in order to recognize what the use of such language does, ecological narrators cannot fall pray to this rhetoric and have to avoid it in their own writing. For the ecological narrator, those who use such rhetorical devices – scientists, politicians, also journalists who report scientific and political news and analyze the cultural climates, institutional structures, or events about which they speak -- merely add their voice to a narrative.

(C) *The stories that ecological narratives embrace*

- (i) *are understood in the context of their responsive (re)articulations by listeners or readers, and*

(ii) *are approached with as few theoretical presuppositions as possible.*

Part (i) of this recommendation is not entirely new, but it is rarely heeded. It takes seriously Bakhtin's notion (see Todorov, 1988:41-60) that any utterance implies at least two voices, that of the speaker and that of the addressee. The meaning of an utterance -- the speech act it performs, or the sense it makes to those involved -- critically depends on the relation between what we hear a speaker to say and how we observe its listeners to respond (see Holquist, 1990). This amounts to taking what we hear being said, the stories we read and quote, not as "inherently" meaningful, as "containing" meanings or "conveying" its author's "intentions," even when they mean something definite to us. "Containing," "conveying," "intending" invoke metaphors that objectify meanings as entities and seemingly ignore the need for our reading. Semiotics, for example, has largely followed this line of theorizing meanings. In ecological narratives, by contrast, we must refrain from vying to be the sole authority on meanings, on others' readings and on how they "really" understand. We must instead find ways of listening to how others read what we may read quite differently, and of observing how others respond in ways we may not. This calls on us to locate meanings in the various responses an utterance can trigger, in the comments a piece of writing may elicit, in the way a previously heard story is retold, in how speakers are held accountable for what they say, and in changes in the relations between speakers and listeners or between writers and readers that communications trigger.

It follows that ecological narrators cannot take the stories they hear more seriously than they are taken by the other constituents of the phenomenon being described. Lies are not lies until the claim that they are is accepted as such. Hegemony, the construction by a superior outsider to hegemony, means nothing until people talk of it. The voice of social scientists, for example, as important as it may be in the social scientific literature, might mean nothing to those directly engaged in the events being analyzed. Thus, merely reporting on what others say or do, assembling a kaleidoscope of parallel ethnographies, recording a polyphony of voices, is not enough.

Thus, to give the readers of ecological narratives access to these meanings, it is essential to not merely collect the writings of the constituents of a social phenomenon, but to also assemble them sequentially so as to make clear to which each responds. The transcript of a conversation is the prototype of this presentation. Even when quoted, the responsiveness of assertions needs to be preserved for each makes sense only in the dialogical context of an interaction sequence. The script of a conversation among the stakeholders of documentary film production, while constructed by the analyst, nevertheless is an attempt in this direction. The validity of this construction may be confirmed by inquiring with these stakeholders about whether they feel at home in the roles assigned to them. Writing a polyphonic novel -- as Bakhtin would say -- is a start. Whereas ethnographers assemble individual stories, ecological narrators will have to weave them (back) into social fabrics, as my examples have demonstrated.

Concerning part (ii) of this recommendation, in order to minimize the perceptual constraints that theoretical presuppositions entail, ecological narratives need to approach the stories of others as naively as possible, with a deliberately open mind, and from a position of "not knowing" as the therapist Harlene Anderson (1997) wisely recommends. This is to overcome the ever-present temptation of projecting our own theories onto others and instead, make a concerted effort to take in and to echo what others say they do, how, why, and who they are. While this would seem to make ecological narratives more complex (and possibly less elegant) than monological theories or undigested collections of individual ethnographies, I am suggesting that cross-disciplinary issues, conflicts and opportunities, public policy debates, political scandals, social problems, even family happenings, when seen through such narrative networks, rarely are more complex than the stories their constituents tell of these events, of each others' stories of these events, and of their responses to them.

To be sure, as ecological narrators, we, too, cannot avoid taking positions on what we read. However, our own interpretation should always count as merely one of many and I would suggest relying on it only as a last recourse, when all available responses have been examined -- but even then, not forever because the reception and rearticulations of our narratives are as important as the narratives we interpret and incorporate in ours. To narrate ecologically means to curb our temptation to assume we have the correct interpretation or are so much better informed than everyone else. To show what something means is to embed it, where possible,

within the networks of its responsive (re)articulations.

Writing of terrorism provides a good example of communication across considerable differences. It is also a loaded issue. Terrorists tend to hold well worked-out constructions of reality that make their actions meaningful to them if not to bystanders. However, observe that it is our own normative theory of how all good citizens should behave that justifies our dismissal of their world as a distortion of reality, a self-serving construction we fail to realize as such. In this (our) reality, our actions tend to push uncomfortable others from being mere deviants to active dissenters and then on to being terrorists. They may well end up in the very categories we may fear but also require in order to apply disabling punishments. In effect, the concept of terrorism preserves our world without the need to grant spaces for alternative realities to coexist. By contrast, an ecological narrative of such a situation would postpone global judgements and instead present the narratives of all of its stakeholders sequentially, enabling a reading of the development of this phenomenon in terms of responses to responses, interpretations of interpretations across rather different worlds. From these rather different constructions of reality of the actors involved, the analyst can explore why the interactions unfolded in the way they did. Perhaps an ecological narrative might come to a different conclusion than any one side would. Perhaps an ecological narrative, once inserted in the process, may even lead to a different outcome. The point is not to condone and then justify why, but to understand the differences of the discourses across which we are writing, add an ecological narrative to the process, and see what happens.

(D) As social phenomena arise with the understandings that their constituents bring to them, our understanding of the worlds that others occupy (B) and how they enact their worlds in relation to one another (C) are the keys to the emerging dynamics and our door to enter the very process we are narrating.

In ecological narratives, what would matter most is how the constituents of a social phenomenon perceive each other's capabilities, intentions, views, and respond to what is being said or happens. In classical systems theory, it is the theorist who specifies the relations between the components of a system, before attending to their dynamics. Systems theory, like all theories, provides no room for human agency. It does not conceive of the possibility that the "components" of a system could hold their own systems conceptions and act according to them. Nor does it leave space for the human constituents of social systems to act in the awareness of each other's choices. Game theory would come close to such an awareness, were it not a theorist's conception that is being imposed, with little room to allow players to (re)define the game. In contrast, narrating ecologically means respecting the potentially different worlds of those who language each other into being; give each other accounts of the paths they are pursuing; co-ordinate the stories they tell each other (and us); and thus finding themselves co-directing a social dynamics from inside the process being collectively narrated by them. Dialogical processes, like ecological ones are self-organizing in the sense of (6).

In spite of the necessary openness of narratives, ecological narrators have to make some effort to extend the network of recorded stories into the future, articulating pertinent continuations. Anticipating what could happen in dialogue is as important as the openness to be informed otherwise. The ability to extrapolate interactions or continuations of the stories that people tell serves not only to demonstrate that an ecological narrator understands the network of stories s/he is writing of but would also enable him or her to reenter the process as a participant. Without the willingness to involve him or herself in the interlacing expectations of a dialogue, participation would be suspect.

I suppose one might slip into speaking of predictions here. But this would deny those narrated their agency and dismiss the possibility of their accepting or contesting narratives of concern to them. In order to extend a narrative into the future, ecological narrators might want to avoid assigning agency to abstractions, to systems for example, or to physical conditions (which is what theorizing often encourages). They may find, however storied commitments, hopes and fears that are somewhat unchanging or stable and may be woven together into expectations of what will follow. I would say that respectful communication always requires such a recursively embedded understanding of others understanding. Ecological narrators are committed to that. By comparison, mechanistic explanations, which are unable to account for different understandings, may nevertheless arise in participants' stories, and could well serve as predictors of social interactions, provided they

are followed and appear uncontested. But this would be rare, I suppose.

(E) *As one of the contributors to an ecological narrative, ecological narrators have to live with the humbling experience that the social phenomena, thus narrated, are not under their control and constitutively incoherent and that accounts of them must therefore remain open-ended and tentative.*

Taking the stories that others tell seriously can only mean that the narratives that ecological narrators produces are but one of several. Whereas writing social theory claims a superior perspective, a God's eye view of the world that is inaccessible to observed others, producing theories that can only be rivaled but other theories from within the same discourse, ecological narrators cannot withdraw behind this artificial certainty.

Ecological narratives are always incomplete. Any one written account can manifest no more than its own discursive moment in a process of continuous rearticulation. Their efforts to embrace the narratives of all of its constituents can be at best fair, at worst illusionary, but always contestable. In the documentary film example, one unanticipated stakeholder turned up later, and it is not unimaginable that a better representative of the stakeholding institutions emerges in further conversations. The stories embraced in ecological narratives may well be responsive to unavailable stories.

Ecological narratives reside in the tension between outsiders and insiders perspectives. From an outside, narrators can more readily assert conceptual control over their data. Theorists have merely carried this advantage to its extreme. From the inside, however, narrators have to surrender some of their conceptual control to the different interests they are facing and in response to potentially incompatibility worlds. They need to act situationally, not according to general principles. The great number of seemingly incoherent accounts that social phenomena generate on their own may prove unmanageable to outside observers while they may well make sense to inside participants. And generalizations by outside observers tend to appear shallow and irrelevant to those practically involved. This is why the reentry of narratives into the narrated is so important. But reentry does not entirely eliminate the well known tension between theory and practice which here appears in the tension between single outsiders' and multiple insiders' perspectives on knowing.

Ecological narratives occur in parallel conversational realities that, together, form loosely connected "multi-versa." Their reality is complex, multi-faceted, fractionalized, tentative, continually reconstructed and selectively maintained. In these multi-versa, narrators cannot be everywhere and all at once. These complexities seem to increase rather than diminish. Globalization, the claim that mass media technologies induce a convergence towards a unified world is the myth of an outside perspective. In fact, nation states break down, communities become aware of themselves, and the Internet has increased conversational diversities. Even academic discourses are splitting up into sub-disciplines that increasingly experience difficulties working with each other. Ecological narratives respond to these phenomena but cannot not promise to make the life of the narrator easier.

Ecological narratives may have to present at least as much diversity, inconsistency, and contradiction as is evident in the multi-versity of the interwoven worlds being narrated. Because discrepancies and discontinuities across these worlds motivate communication and dialogue, the stories they generate enable their narrators to extrapolate what might happen. Stories evolve in the very dynamics they individually inform. And in processes of communication, stories rarely ever stay the same – and this applies to ecological narratives as well.

(F) *Ecological narratives prove their viability by having a life within the very phenomenon being narrated.*

Theorists sit back, observe the world from a distance and are rewarded if their predictions come true. Ecological narrators, on the other hand, acknowledge their social/political involvement in what they do and write in the expectation of being held accountable for the consequences of their narratives from all kinds of stakeholders but especially by those whose lives are affected. The criterion for ecological writing is *viability in communication*. Demonstrating the viability of a narrative requires reentering it into the very social phenomenon being narrated, observing the role it starts to play there and ascertaining whether, where and how it

survives. Viability does not preclude considerations of styles, readers' involvement, influence, and truths in the sense of accurate representation -- if this is how the narrative is being read and interpreted -- but it means above all that the criteria emerge in the social practices of all those in whose lives a narrative means something. Viability in communication is not a cognitive (monological) criterion; it cannot be self-righteously imposed by any one narrator. It can also not assumed to be universal.

To be able to reenter the process they speak of, ecological narratives must be understandable to those referred to or mentioned and to those who care for their own reason. This is required of any communication, of course. All stories are told in the expectation of being understood, at least by someone. And this is what makes narratives social or relational. This is not to say that ecological writing needs to please everybody and be held down by the lowest common denominator of its readers, much as television does. On the contrary, ecological narratives entail the possibility of controversy and challenges. The very addition of the voice of the ecological narrator to those described, coupled with the likelihood that ecological narratives take larger perspectives, weave more voices into a story than any one participant could experience, recontextualize familiar voices and thereby suggest new meanings, this has the inclination to disturb existing practices and provoke new perspectives. Thus, ecological narratives create openings for critical scholarship.

Ecological narratives, therefore, do not need to aim at consensus or widespread agreement. In most political situations, conflicts are the rule and disagreements provide the most important fuel for creative debates. Nor do they need everybody's attention -- as long as the key stakeholders have a chance to respond. The opposite of viability is not rejection by a majority or dissent, but lack of public interest or irrelevance.

One way of assuring the viability of ecological narratives is to invite those being narrated to contribute to its writing. By that I do not mean traditional co-authorship of a coherent document, which typically fails to disclose who wrote which part, where the authors' view coincided and differed, and what emerged during the collaboration. The student studying women groups managed to enroll her interviews in her research project, giving them a voice in shaping the direction it was taking, rather than using them for her purpose. In the other example of student research, on documentary film production, interviewees will be asked to comment on the findings, even offer their own analysis. And these unedited comments will be part of the dissertation. Whether they confirm the researcher's analysis or question it, their contributions are a natural continuation of the narratives that produce history through documentary films.

Reentering a narrative process is one thing, surviving its continuous rearticulations among stakeholders is quite another. Ecological narrators are also scholars, practical scholars perhaps, in any case narrators, whose identities are at stake as well. I am suggesting that ecological narratives, in addition to being viable, also do not become embarrassing to their narrators. If ecological narratives are valued, if not praised for their contribution to the lives of the narrated, this would enable their narrator to continue playing a responsible role in that process. If they prove insensitive to the informants, violating the trust presumed between the researcher and the informant, or are outright wrong to the narrated others, then the ecological narrator will have failed to respect the otherness of others.

Other Media

When one looks for media outside academic writing, one can find rudimentary forms that could undermine the rigid monologism of writing social theory. Perhaps my proposal for an ecological narrative is revolutionary only within academic writing. For example email is a medium that enables the receiver of a message to freely enter comments right in the text, wherever it seem called for, and to either return it to the sender or forward it to someone else. A string of >-signs at the beginning of each line counts the number of transmissions of a text, thus distinguishing the original text from comments on it, and these from comments on these comment, etc. Participation in electronic discussion groups creates a dialogical form of writing. Each contribution responds to previous contributions, and each represents the contributor's unedited voice. Some consider the practice of commenting by chopping up one's text as rude or impolite. To me this is a measure of resistance against dialogue -- however constrained it might be here -- a relic from a time when authors were the

undisputed authorities of their texts and consistency was valued over dialogical diversities.

For another medium, consider television, more specifically, the genre of TV news. One of Western journalists' most cherished conviction is that there always are at least two sides to any story, and if one is to be reported, room for another has to be made available. Although I question the idea that objectivity would thereby be achieved, the practice does, however, have the effect of allowing different voices to be heard and be compared side by side. Since television correlates verbal information and visual images and since it is difficult to abstract images from images, television makes it also somewhat difficult to theorize about people who speak for themselves on the screen. Perhaps it is because of this lack of abstraction that academics shy away from using television as a medium for disseminating scientific knowledge. Although television is a one-way medium and viewers cannot engage in dialogue with the screen, they may well observe dialogue on the screen. This brings television somewhat closer to what I seek to accomplish. Keeping in mind that new interactive media are emerging that might further undermine the monologism of writing and the monological knowledge it disseminates, let me use a final example to suggest the moral virtues of ecological narratives. This is an example in which the lack of dialogue had so disastrous consequences: Bosnia. Luckily, academic discourse has more subtle but nevertheless noteworthy effects.

The Moral Virtues of Ecological Narrative

The conflict in Bosnia was explained to us, as distant spectators, as having had a long history, going back at least to the Ottoman Empire, whose boundary went through this area. Our media presented us with images of unprecedented personal violence of neighbors against neighbors and explained the religious nature of these happenings: Orthodox Christians against Muslims against Catholics. However, it must be noted that these are our categories and our theories, and as they are brought to bear from the outside, they naturally depict these events as inevitable, as what happened in the Balkans always and all the time with little chance to make a difference. Historical determinism is a convenient assumption that justifies theories, not engagements. However, theorizing from the safe distance of another continent, provides little understanding of what fuelled these events.

Had we been able to listen to what people actually said to each other, the stories people told of each other, traced where they came from and how they got there, and seen them as interacting ecologically, this might have led us to very different explanations. We now know that the stories that fuelled people's imagination concerned historical events: Turks invading the Balkans, a lost battle defining Serb identity, a local hero challenging the Austrian Empire leading to WWI, atrocities committed by Nazi collaborators during WWII, Yugoslav partisans succeeding against all odds but then also killing each other, and more. Without eyewitnesses, such stories can form whole mythologies and come to populate history books. Most of these stories tell of the deeds of evil strangers, brutal victors, national heroes and wounded pride. Although an older generation could add individual details to some of these stories from memories of more recent events, the references of these stories had long disappeared and the places in which they occurred had changed since drastically. These stories became real, however, in the process of being rearticulated and enacted. Politicians relied on this vast pool of stories to interpret current episodes as historical continuities, demanding actions that were all too well understood from these stories: sacrifices for a people that had suffered far too much. A state-controlled mass media system could compellingly dramatize the stories that supported official policies and disseminate them widely. Protected from competing versions by the Belgrade government, as it were, the mass media became a uni-vocal medium, presenting and representing a single consistent voice, thought to be the voice of the people.

Although even the social reality had changed dramatically since these stories were lived, as exemplified by many inter-marriages during the long Tito government, the resulting violence arose entirely from within these stories. It is best understood in terms of where which stories came to be retold and enacted, and how the physical means available for this multiplicity of individual behaviors to unfolded into unspeakable atrocities that we, outsiders, can hardly imagine. These stories had survived changes of names, places, narrators and means of delivery, but now recreated networks of much earlier but possibly equally heinous interactions.

One feature of these stories was that they theorized, categorized and trivialized the other from outside, which, when believed, would make it impossible to talk to these outsiders, much less open up to them in order to understand their possibly different worlds. Instead of reflecting on the source of these stories and trying to understand otherness, it became imperative to enact these virtual theories and to destroy what had no logical place in them: the uncomfortable strangers, the outsiders whose worlds are inconsistent with one's own. Even 400 year old mosques were erased because they did not fit the image of a Christian state. The monopoly that the state-controlled media system enjoyed for the majority of Yugoslav citizens, its ability to suppress the voices of deviant others and the willingness to scrupulously manipulate images, guaranteed that only a single consistent story would be heard. This monologism, the belief in only one authorized voice, the search for a single, consistent and common understanding of one world for everyone, and the privileging of the whole (people or nation) at the expense of individual experiences (of often good neighborly relations, of cross-religious and cross-ethnic marriages, and of working together) explained the coordination of actions taken by many.

We cannot prevent stories from being reproduced and rearticulated and reentering the life of people who live in them. Nor can we prevent such stories from being enacted and made real, especially to those others who occur in them. This is the recursion that underlies all processes of creating social realities. The observation that writing social theory at the expense of other forms of knowing creates the very culture in which theorizing makes increasing sense is but one incidence of this recursion. But we can always add to already circulating stories other stories that secure spaces for a diversity of people to become recognized and accepted as truly different and to thus encourage dialogue. We can also search for new interactive media that have less of a bias in favor of monologue.

I am suggesting that ecological narratives can have therapeutic effects on a social scale. To be sure, the terrible stories that surfaced in former Yugoslavia lay in waiting for a long time. But they had to be awakened and interpreted by someone to have the effect they had. Rearticulation is a matter of choice. However, had the mass media told these stories in ways remotely resembling ecological narratives, especially by presenting the different worlds of different citizens with equal respect, preferably by narrators who live in these worlds. And had the population of citizens been able to extrapolate the mutual consequences of enacting them, as I suggested ecological narrators do, I believe the disaster could have been avoided. Setting common goals and insisting on consensus ultimately are as disastrous as the imposition of a common universe that everyone needs to accept and comply with. Ecologies thrive with biological diversity and so will a culture that can be at peace with multiple, authentic and inconsistent narratives.

Concluding Remarks

Writing about diverse others, writing social theory, writing across discourses and writing across the academic curriculum is, first of all, writing and as such it is partial to monologue, as I have shown. The knowledge encoded in this medium privileges the conceptions of authors' at the expense of readers. More problematic is that it tends also to neglect the conceptions of those written of. The challenge for the social sciences is to find ways of generating knowledge that respects the voices of those that scientists speak of. The challenge of writing across the curriculum, of writing across discourses, is much the same, for it is people who uphold disciplinary standards, enact discursive practices, speak for their communities, and engage each other across boundaries they draw or seek to erase. Ecological narrative is one approach to counter the monologism of writing and to recover the very social processes in which it participates. I have given three examples of what led up to my effort to find a way to overcome the un-social conceptions that writing, and particularly writing social theory, entails. I mentioned terrorism and gave an account of the recent events in Bosnia as examples for the dynamics that is set in motion when monological narratives govern inherently dialogical political processes. The worlds of terrorists and of complacent citizens are different, so much so as to be judged incompatible from the perspective of each. This incompatibility may not have started the recent problems in Bosnia, but the stories that came to dominate communication within this small country ended up that way. If the world of one is dismissed at the expense of the other we are almost inevitably led into violence, here in both directions. Writing from the perspective of one about the other, writing from a superior perspective of both, coupled with the self-

righteousness of a majority, of being morally right, or of being scientifically correct, is a problem that arises in a particular way of communicating and can only be solved by the addition of another way of communicating.

Reclaiming the respect for the otherness of others has become of pressing importance. Writing across disciplinary cultures needs to respect different discourses and be cognizant of the politics that such writing can set in motion. Ecological narratives are intended to do just this. When relying on writing, we need to recognize the monologism of this medium, not blindly following it. It also calls on us to abandon the comfortable but in the end immoral position of theorists who, in the belief of having superior and positionless observational abilities, claim able to authoritatively write of others, other cultures, other disciplines or other discourses without the need to listen to the voices that constitute these phenomena. And it obligates us to acknowledge that we have but one of several legitimate stakes in any social reality we choose to write into being.

Deviating from established practices of writing might seem to be an unnecessary act of courage. However, the costs of ecological writing are well worth the benefits of permitting us to hear the diversity of voices that contribute to our understanding of how we live together.

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