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Textual Dialogue and the Complexities of Ethical Relationality in the Praxis of Research Scholarship

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Abstract: This essay examines the ethical possibilities and challenges of engaging in scholarly dialogue with textual others in the context of academic research writing. Drawing on the work of Martin Buber, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Paul Ricoeur, I consider how scholarly writers in the humanities and social sciences are invited to participate in an ethics of alterity to *textual otherness*—to encounter, interpret, and interact with research texts as a *Thou* and to respond to the voices of other scholars as human traces conveyed therein. Such an ethics of alterity is often eclipsed, however, by the institutional pressures, publishing dictates, monologic discourse, and disciplinary rhetoric with which scholarly writers must contend in the academy. These tensions complicate but also necessitate the importance of developing a dialogic ethics for textual relationality that not only supports genuinely interhuman scholarship but also has pedagogical implications for students learning the "how" and "why" of academic research writing.

Keywords: ethics of alterity; ethical relationality; attentive receptivity; answerability; responsibility; research scholarship; textual dialogue

One of the questions that has concerned me in the context of scholarly discourse and research composition is how to relate and communicate with other scholars ethically so that our textual interactions are mutually beneficial and the knowledge built between us can promote the common good. I first came to this question while teaching research composition courses to first-year university students a number of years ago. I was introducing students to the technical how-tos of writing a research paper, helping them compose their work within the formal dictates of the genre and the scholarly expectations of humanities and social science disciplines. However, I was struggling to inspire students to generate real questions about their subject matter, engage responsibly with the work of other researchers, and participate in the research interactions they were reading with their own voice and stance.

Beset by these difficulties, I was drawn to the influential composition textbook, *They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* (2010) by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. In it, they propose that writing be seen as a

"social, conversation act" (xvi) and show how academic composition in the humanities and social sciences follows certain "moves" in a clear dialogic pattern of *response* (others say) and *address* (I say) in its textual structure (3–4). Because scholars are already situated in a particular research community before joining an academic conversation, they do not come to their ideas in a vacuum, but relationally, in response to the words and ideas of others (Gadamer 1985, 181; Clark and Holquist 1984, 245). By extension, scholars then write "in relation and response to the work of other scholars" as they assert their particular stance and as they analyze the research content and come to their conclusions (Stumm 2021, 8).

Drawing on this framework in my composition classes, I invited students to practice "joining the dialogue" with their own inquiry, budding research, and stance, and to structure their work as a written scholarly conversation in their areas of interest and study (Stumm 2021). To my relief, the students took to this approach and benefited from the many templates that Graff and Birkenstein provided as they began to learn the "moves" of response and address to others that matter in academic research writing. It soon became apparent to me, however, that while a dialogic methodology was helping students understand how research compositions are structured, it didn't really address *why it matters* that scholars write in a dialogic way. In seeking this "why," I began to look at the relational and ethical underpinnings of written scholarship—the way scholars relate dialogically with each other that signal an interhuman connection taking place at the heart of our research interactions.

If research composition is a relational practice, then how we relate to one another within that practice matters. If this relational practice is dialogic in nature, then how we respond to and address other researchers in our writing is, to my mind, an ethical question. It inquires "what is good for human beings to be and to do" in this particular communication context (Arnett, Bell, and Fritz 2010, 112). From this standpoint, written research dialogue can be seen as both a dialogic practice of address and response between people in a particular community and an ethical way of relating with one another within that practice of communication (Stumm 2021, 8). Given this shift in my own focus, I began to teach students how to encounter research in an ethical and meaningful way, not just as a storehouse of information to be taken and used, but as *people relating to people* through the textual discourse—a dynamic, interactive, and dialogic process between scholars in a community passionate about a particular subject.

In the best-case scenario, academic writing can be seen as a textual medium through which scholars "meet" and relate meaningfully to one another in a generative way, a genuine dialogue that "allows for changing and being changed" (Buber 1958, 12; Cissna and Anderson 1994, 10). Martin Buber calls this an *I–Thou* relation (1958). When we truly "meet" another as a "Thou," we open ourselves to difference or *otherness* in our relationship with attentive receptivity and engaged response, inviting genuine dialogue to emerge between us. This openness toward otherness suggests an ethics of alterity at the heart of genuine dialogue, in which a real encounter with something *wholly other* summons our response and responsibility toward those others whom we meet (Buber 1958, [1947] 2002;

Levinas 1985, 1993, 1998; Atterton, Calarco, and Friedman 2004; Lipari 2004, 2012; Arnett 2003, 2004, 2012).

While Buber is referring to meeting the other in proximate, interpersonal relationships, Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) extends this "meeting" beyond face-to-face interactions to genuine encounters with the written word (75–76). The ethics of alterity that shapes our interpersonal relations, then, can be adopted in and adapted for our textual relations. In academic scholarship in particular, textual "meeting" begins with a receptive listening posture of openness toward otherness in our research practices—reading attentively, reflectively, and discerningly as we interpret one another's work. In the process, we may experience a "meeting of the minds," where we feel truly engaged and inspired by another's discoveries and ideas, encountering new ways of seeing things and coming to understand the subject matter, ourselves, or others differently (Stumm 2021, 8). As we write, we enter the academic conversation with a posture of responsive and responsible agency, acknowledging the other scholars in the conversation and representing their work faithfully as we assert our own perspectives and particular stance. As we reciprocally respond to the research of others with our own insights, we "[conjoin] a new discourse to the discourse of the text," as Paul Ricoeur (1981) puts it, which in turn invites further discussion and fosters additional expressions of "conjunction and renewal" in our research community (158).

At the same time, however, academic writing is a highly-mediated discourse that complicates an ethical praxis of genuine engagement between scholarly writers. Because scholarly interlocutors are not proximate with each other in their acts of reading and response, the discourse of the research text must do the work of bridging the gap between them. On the one hand, this "between" space is dynamic with ethical possibility. Gaps and spaces between scholars create a necessary openness for interpretive flexibility and respect for difference that is crucial for dialogic interactions to emerge in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding (Arnett, Bell, and Fritz 2010; Mancino 2024). On the other hand, this "between" space is rife with ethical complications. Without relational proximity, readers are apt to neglect or forget the very human "trace of the other" within and beyond the text (Üçok-Sayrak, Fritz, and Majocha 2024) and engage with the research solely as an "It" or an object of knowledge to use for their own purposes (Buber [1947] 2002; Stumm 2021). In the process, readers can over-privilege their individual subjectivity in their interpretations and research stance, diminishing the role of other thinkers in the scholarly dialogue and challenging the possibility for genuine dialogic exchange (Arnett 2024, 15).

That said, attempting to bridge the gap with established rules for academic discourse, compositional constraints, and publishing dictates can equally diminish interhuman connection and dialogic interaction between scholarly interlocutors. These closures create useful containers for interpretative practice and conserve the scholarly rigor and necessary rules of the genre (Mancino 2024, 55), but research texts can become relationally static in the process, a tome to objectivity and detachment in the quest for quality scholarship (Nevo 2013, 268–70). Here we face another "It" of research writing that remains intact across the disciplines: research writing is preserved as a monologic discourse, which can obscure the research

interlocutors themselves and the subjectivity and bias they necessarily bring to the process of knowledge development and dissemination (Arnett, Bell, and Fritz 2010, 120–21).

In this article, then, I circle the dialogic space between scholarly authors, readers, and texts, reflecting on the ethical possibilities and complexities that emerge in the praxis of research composition. As I see it, dialogic ethics invites a twofold inquiry of relationality in this context: (a) How might we encounter a research text ethically, as a dialogic interaction with a *Thou* alongside its discursive *It* status as information to use? and (b) How might we encounter the scholars whose work we engage with ethically, given that we are relating in a mediated and textual way in our research practices? In short, what kind of "meeting" and meaningful relation is possible over a research text and what dialogic complications and ethical challenges emerge in the process of such mediated relationality? In this inquiry, I draw principally on the work of Martin Buber, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Paul Ricoeur to flesh out a dialogic ethics for research scholarship and I propose that the textual space "between" scholars both invites and impedes its praxis. Instead of forging a middle ground that mollifies these tensions, I contend that navigating between them is the necessary and inevitable task of academic writers as they seek to encounter and engage with each other's work in dialogic and ethical ways.

Navigating the Intersecting Discourses of Research Composition

In considering how to engage ethically with research texts, scholarly readers and writers must first of all recognize the tensions that emerge between its monologic and dialogic discourses, as they inform the kind of relationships and interactions that occur in and through the text. As a *genre*, research writing is meant to build knowledge and understanding about a certain subject in a particular research community. As a *practice*, research writing invites scholars to share discoveries and shed new light on long-held notions, learning from each other and building on each other's work in the process. While the practice of reading and writing research texts tends to be dialogical, the genre of research writing is typically monologic in its communication of research knowledge. This double discourse can complicate our ability to engage in *genuine dialogue* with other scholars across texts, even as it invites thoughtful research interactions with the knowledge being conveyed.

Buber describes genuine dialogue as a whole-being encounter and wholly present relation with an *other* as a *Thou* ([1947] 2002, 22; 1958, 4–5). In genuine dialogue, we meet others without agenda or expectation and, as such, become momentarily open to encounter their unique expression of being and discover the revelatory insights that occur unbidden and unexpectedly between us (Arnett 2022, 199). This encounter with otherness happens most often in proximate, face-to-face human interactions but it can also occur in our encounters with the natural world, in divine revelation, in our research discoveries, and in our reading

practices (Buber 1958, 6). It occurs when we suddenly see something in its immediacy and full presence, free from our preconceived notions about it or the ways we envision using it (Buber 1958, 40–42). These moments take us off guard, surprise us, and put us in direct relation with something entirely different from ourselves, which becomes a powerful basis for learning and a means by which we shift our perspectives and develop our understanding (Arnett 2011).

As a textual product of knowledge, however, research writing is typically not encountered as a *Thou* but experienced as an "*It*"—a monologic source of information about a certain subject matter that has been confirmed by reputable scholars. Drawing on Buber's work, Arnett, Bell, and Fritz (2010) describe monologic communication as a way "to state what we know" (120). Buber (1958) puts it this way: "Being is disclosed to the man who is engaged in knowing, as he looks at what is over against him. He will, indeed, have to grasp as an object that which he has seen with the force of presence, he will have to compare it with objects, establish it in its order among classes of objects, describe and analyze it objectively. Only as *It* can it enter the structure of knowledge" (40). While such objectivity maintains a high standard for research knowledge in the academic community as a whole, scholarly authors can be effaced in the process (Ricoeur 1981, 152)—their human subjectivity and relational interconnectedness in the community sidelined by the text—and the revelatory potential of genuine dialogue all but obscured.

While some fields of research directly affirm the authorial *other*, other disciplines enact authorial erasure in order to maintain a sense of scholarly detachment, a means to let the information "speak for itself," as it were. The "I" doing the research and writing is eclipsed by the "It" of the research text. And while many scholarly voices are acknowledged and cited for their research merit, the authors themselves often remain unseen beyond their signature, their subjectivity and alterity concealed. This absence can lead to relational closures in the praxis of research composition. Because scholars are not proximate to each other or share an immediate context in their written research interactions, the relational space between them where textual "meeting" may occur (Buber [1947] 2002, Bakhtin 1984, Arnett 1986, 2004; Mancino 2024) is also one where interlocution is highly mediated and dialogically fraught (Ricoeur 1981, 148). As Ricoeur (1981) puts it, "The book divides the act of writing and the act of reading into two sides, between which there is no communication. The reader is absent from the act of writing; the writer is absent from the act of reading. The text thus produces a double eclipse of the reader and the writer. It thereby replaces the relation of dialogue, which directly connects the voice of one to the hearing of the other" (146–47). Academic scholarship appears to reinforce this "double eclipse" in its research discourse, magnifying relational absence and personal detachment for the sake of objectivity in research texts and limiting the potential of genuine dialogue to emerge.

A tension thus exists at the heart of scholarly knowledge production. On the one hand, very real, subjective, biased, and situated scholars are authoring research texts and engaging with the voices of other very real scholars in the process. The texts are thus "signs of another mental life" (or many other mental

lives) existing *outside* of the research content and shaping its knowledge, rather than simply objective records of the research itself (Ricoeur 1981, 150). On the other hand, the genre of research writing demands objectivity and authorial detachment to present research knowledge as factual and impartial, so that it is deemed reliable and trustworthy in the scholarly community. While scholars do have the capacity to be wholly present to the research texts they read and write, co-constructing meaning with other scholars through their written discourse (Arnett 2004, 79), the focus of those textual dialogues tends to be the knowledge of things being recorded—the objectified content of research findings and ideas. As a result, Ricoeur observes, "the text has no outside but only an inside" (153), a record of research knowledge distinct from the scholar's genuine experience of discovery, nuanced relational contexts, and rich mental life outside of and informing the scholarly text.

The way scholars share knowledge in research writing, then, typically takes the form of a "technical dialogue" (Buber [1947] 2002), where they "exchange information" about what they see and know and share their understanding of the subject matter (Arnett, Bell, and Fritz 2010, 120). Technical dialogue is helpful for knowledge production and dissemination, as well as for expanding understanding as scholars exchange information about their views, theories, and conclusions. In fact, technical dialogue is arguably the most common form of interpersonal exchange both inside and outside the academy. As Arnett, Bell, and Fritz observe, "Most of life rests in the realm of technical dialogue, attending to the complexity of images of self and Other in informative exchange" (120). In the technical dialogue of scholarship, however, we must take our genuine "Aha!" moments of discovery and the dynamic interplay of ideas we have drawn from the scholarly community and fix them in the formulated phrase of academic speech and structure—what Emmanuel Levinas (1998) calls "the *said*" of a system of thought.

And yet, research composition does reveal revelatory glimpses and possibilities of genuine dialogue in Buber's sense of the term: as an *I–Thou* relation in its concrete uniqueness and its opening toward alterity in mutual meeting (Arnett 2022, 199; Buber [1947] 2002, 22). While technical dialogue may well be the main discourse modality that scholars use to convey their research knowledge and learning, there are moments where genuine dialogue breaks through with an insight that springs forth "as a by-product of the interaction" and creates unexpected resonance within and beyond the research content and context (Arnett, Bell, and Fritz 2010, 120). In genuine dialogue, the words of the text are brought out of the past—as a "dead thing" or "the said" of an established system of thought (Bakhtin 1984, 285; Levinas 1998)—and into the present living moment as a textual voice of epiphany or revelation. In this moment, the text "opens onto other things," Ricoeur (1981) observes, as scholars share what they have discovered in intertextual or extra-textual dialogue, giving textual voices further reach and a myriad of new contexts in which to speak and find meaning (158).

What we see in research scholarship, then, is an interplay between the monologism of research texts, the technical dialogue of learning and knowledge dissemination, and the genuine dialogue that unexpectedly emerges in

interpretative reading and compositional practices, which become revelatory insights for scholars to explore and share. As Arnett, Bell, and Fritz (2010) observe, all three forms of discourse are necessarily part of our communication interactions. In fact, Arnett (2011) proposes that "the 'I–It' relationship . . . actually makes dialogue possible" in that it creates the basis for our relationality and the context for genuine dialogue to break through (51). We do not have the capacity to relate and learn in a perpetually open, wholly present, spontaneous, and revelatory way, nor can we demand it of others (51). Instead, scholars are invited to "meet the Other" who appears in and through the multiple, overlapping discourses of research composition and navigate the mediated space between these discourses in receptive and responsive ways (51).

This navigation becomes one of the primary ethical tasks of researchers in their scholarly communication. An ethics of receptivity and response to the other is invited by every written word, but it is also challenged by textual mediations, scholarly expectations, readerly impulses to utilize scholarship rather than join its dialogue, and the "monologism of thinking" that typifies the human and natural sciences (Friedman 2002, 363). Given that research writing is both a textual *product* of research and a compositional *process* of scholarly exchange—*a thing* and *an act*—its monologic and dialogic aspects continually intersect and undermine any possibility of engaging with research texts in a single discursive way. As readers and writers of scholarly texts, we oscillate between taking research material as information to be used for our own purposes, and encountering research material as a dialogue between scholars that inspires us to participate in its reciprocal exchange. As a result, we are often challenged in our ability to engage in ethically receptive and responsive ways in our research practices because we are unclear about whether we are interacting with things or with people, with monologic information or a dynamic, interhuman dialogue between scholars.

What seems to be in question, then, is to what extent scholars can enact an ethics of receptivity and responsibility to a *textual other*, to encounter, interpret, and interact with research texts as a *Thou* and to respond to the voices of others conveyed as human traces within the written text (Üçok-Sayrak, Fritz, and Majocha 2024, 2)? Given the complexity of this question, I want to consider these two postures—attentive receptivity and generative response, as well as the pivotal act of interpretation that conjoins them—in detail, as they each suggest an ethically dialogic way to approach research texts and genuinely encounter the voices therein, but are also fraught with complications in the praxis of written research communication.

A Reading Posture: Attentive Receptivity and the Appropriative Act of Interpretation

Being attentively receptive to a research text is one of the key postures for ethical reading praxis in a scholarly context (Stumm 2021). Attentive receptivity involves an open, mindful, and generous orientation to the text *as other* and to the voices *of others* in the text in one's reading practice (Üçok-Sayrak, Fritz, and Majocha 2024,

2). Donning an "open-minded" posture toward the otherness of the text—what Ricoeur (1981) calls "the world of the work" (178)—and the scholarly voices conveyed therein involves a willingness to listen and to learn, "welcoming unfamiliar ideas with interest and curiosity" rather than indifference, cynicism, or hostility (Stumm 2021, 26). Attentive receptivity can thus be seen an initiatory posture of listening that creates the space for otherness by which genuine responsivity and dialogic exchange can ensue (Lipari 2012, Arnett 2019).

For Lisbeth Lipari (2012), listening to the words of another "enacts an infinite surplus of welcoming invitation and reception, no matter what is said or heard" (237). She elaborates as follows: "In listening, I create a space to receive you, letting your speech enter me, flow through me" (237). In creating "a dwelling space to receive the alterity of the other, and let it resonate," as Lipari describes it, listening invokes an attentive posture of reception that opens to the words of another with generous hospitality (237). Drawing on the phenomenological ethics of Emmanuel Levinas, Lipari points to a phrase that he uses to signify a wholly open orientation toward the alterity of another: "Here I am" (238). In the Jewish religious tradition, "Here I am," or *hineni* (in Hebrew), signifies a posture of radical receptivity and submission to the summons of God—an infinite *Other* or *Thou* who is wholly separate from and exterior to oneself (Ricoeur 1992, 336). For Levinas (1985), "Here I am" is a receptive response to divine Otherness that extends to the otherness of other people, the divine trace of God or *Thou* in the face of each person one meets (105–6). Such a "Here I am" orientation toward the other is *both* a passive posture of receptivity that bears witness to the alterity of another person without the impulse to subsume that otherness into oneself (Levinas 1998, 145), *and* a self-assignation of submission and responsibility toward the other who summons one's response (142).

Lipari (2012) invokes this expression in the context of rhetoric and dialogue, suggesting that "Here I am" signals "a posture of openness—a readiness to listen to the other who is at once hidden and about to be revealed" (238). I am drawn to Lipari's interpretation of "Here I am" as an ethical posture of receptivity because it extends fruitfully to the context of scholarly reading, where authors and other researchers are "hidden" from view and obscured by monological research discourse, revealed only as traces in the text (through quotation and citation). In our reading praxis, we are not proximate or face-to-face with others, but concretely alone with the research text, distanced from its authors and doubly-distanced from the scholars cited in their work. While we may well be informed by multiple co-present dialogues resonating in our minds as we approach a research text (Arnett 2022, 198), in our particular moment of textual encounter, we do not directly see the others with whom we relate, nor do we share their concrete context. We only have their words. The ethical call of attentive receptivity to otherness thus becomes more urgent as a result. Because we are hidden from each other, mediated by the text between us, we can easily slide into seeing what we want in the words of others, ignoring what does not fit our views, criticizing what we do not like, or taking what we do like—heedless of alterity.

A "Here I am" orientation in the act of scholarly reading thus suggests a locative being-fully-present (*I am here*) to the text, attentively listening to the world

of the work and the voices of other scholars who are hidden from view but nonetheless revealed in the textual traces of the research content. When we inhabit a "Here I am" posture, we bear witness to textual alterity with generosity and care *before* following the ego-impulse to agree or disagree with the research content, and to assimilate, thematize, utilize, or judge the scholarship. In this way, "Here I am" enacts a readerly responsibility to alterity that steps back and holds space to receive the textual other as a *Thou* (Lipari 2012, 237), while at the same time remaining wholly present and attuned to what has been written. It is an affirmative, "Yes, I hear you!" that creates space for others to dwell without imposition. It is precisely this openness to difference across textual distance that allows for genuine dialogue to emerge (Friedman 2002, 98).

For Daniel Coleman (2009), such a receptive listening posture is actualized when readers become "slow and active" in encountering a text (30). He writes, "Readers must do the actual mental and physical labour of tracing the lines of print across the page, across page after page, to exercise their capacities for recognition, comprehension, and imagination to create meaning from it" (30). He describes this process as "reflective" and "contemplative," as readers are summoned to engage the text with "continuity and slowness"—perhaps even reading the text aloud—in order to genuinely attend to what has been written (31). In fact, as Alan Jacobs (2001) contends, "Nothing can compensate for a failure to attend to what is being indicated" (52), and goes on to contrast attentiveness with indifference, which, in Bakhtin's words, "will never be able to generate sufficient attention to slow down and *linger intently* over an object" (1993, 64). To linger intently, scholarly readers must be willing to "enter another sphere of existence" (Bakhtin 1984, 184) and truly inhabit the intertextual world of the research text.

Because research texts reveal the scholarly horizons of another world (Gadamer [1975] 2004, 301–2; Ricoeur 1981, 178), readers are invited to receive that which is "initially alien" or *other* by inhabiting its sphere of existence and discovering new ideas and a multiplicity of scholarly perspectives in the process (178). In receiving that which is different from one's own views, receptive readers allow the research content *to be what it is* and seek to understand it *for its own sake* without a scholarly objective or personal agenda principally in view. In effect, readers are invited to inhabit a "Here I am" posture of presence characterized by a slow and attentive reading practice, not only to glean more insight or broaden their horizon of understanding but also to be able to engage genuinely and generously with the polyphony of textual voices they encounter in the world of the work (Arnett 2022, 205).

Research texts do not invite attentive receptivity, however, without also summoning active interpretation. Scholarly reading necessitates that scholars bring themselves to the research material, casting an eye towards how they might incorporate and integrate the world of the text into their own world and create new meaning by that conjunction. (Ricoeur 1981, 159). Moreover, academic research environments demand such interpretative practices as critical analysis and assessment, meaning that scholarly readers cannot simply *let the text be what it is* in its alterity without also donning a "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Ricoeur 1970) by which to question the research material, critique the author's conjectures

and arguments, and unmask limitations in the methodology or conclusions (Coleman 2009, 32–35).

The ethical mandates for receptive reading, then, are meant to inform not undermine a reader's own positionality and interpretative practice in relation to textual alterity. Attentive receptivity can thus be seen as an ethical starting point, a way to dwell with otherness *before* responding, not a way to evacuate the self for the sake of an other. The danger of receptivity taken on its own as an ideal reading posture, Alan Jacobs (2001) observes, is that it can enact a *kenosis* or a "self-emptying" that avoids genuine interaction with and response-ability to the text and the scholarly voices therein (107). As Bakhtin (1981) similarly cautions, "Even . . . an understanding of the speaker's [or writer's] intention insofar as that understanding remains purely passive, purely receptive, contributes nothing new to the word under consideration, only mirroring it, seeking, at its most ambitious, merely the full reproduction of that which is already given in the word" (281). The text thus remains monologic in a purely receptive framework; it can offer a unidirectional flow of information from the research text to an attentive reader, but it cannot move toward dialogic exchange without the interpretative agency of a responsive reader.

It is only when the alterity of the text is conjoined with the interpretive action of the reader that the text is "brought out of the alienation in which it finds itself and into the living present of conversation" (Gadamer [1975] 2004, 376–77). Through interpretation, the world of the research text becomes real or "actualized" in the world of the receptive reader (Ricoeur 1981, 185). "Initially the text had only a sense, that is, internal relations or a structure," Ricoeur posits, "now it has meaning, that is, a realization in the discourse of the reading subject" (159). In other words, while scholarly readers initially immerse themselves in the world of the research text and think along its lines, they must also conjoin the research text with their world and make meaning of it along their own lines of thought.

Ricoeur (1981) uses the term "appropriation" to characterize this conjunctive movement (159). As he puts it: "'Appropriation' . . . means 'to make one's own what was initially 'alien'" through the realization and actualization of textual meaning for the present reader (185). Ricoeur concedes that appropriation is typically conceived in the negative, as a way of "subsuming interpretation to the finite capacities of understanding of the present reader" (190). Indeed, as Lisbeth Lipari (2012) cautions, appropriation is akin to relational closure in that it collapses the space between self and other. From her Levinasian perspective, appropriation is a way of "doing violence to the otherness of the other" and "absorbs the other into conformity with the self" (237). In a textual context, Alan Jacobs calls this a "quixotic" hermeneutical impulse that "transforms books into mirrors" wherein readers see reflections of themselves superimposed onto the text (91). In this self-reflective gesture, Jacobs warns, "otherness [or] difference cannot be tolerated" (92). The result of such "reflexion" is yet another monologic experience of the text, where textual otherness is absorbed as an object by the interpreting subject (Friedman 2002, 103).

For Ricoeur, however, appropriation is not limited to *I–It* relations or absorptions of otherness in the interpretative process. From his perspective,

making that which is "alien" in the text "one's own" refers to a reader's participatory and conjunctive act of meaning-making that enlarges textual significance in the reader's interpretative practice rather than enacting a power-play that subsumes alterity by means of subjective projections onto the text (190). While readers necessarily bring their concerns, investments, and biases to research texts as part of their unique positionality, appropriation need not result in an interpretative "taking possession" of the text *as an object for oneself* (Ricoeur 1981, 191). Instead, it invites a flexible "letting go" of oneself into the alterity of the text (191) and the polyphony of scholarly voices represented therein (Bakhtin 1981, 354), which can shift one's established notions or raise questions about one's assumptions and cause one to reorient oneself in the process (Ricoeur 1981, 158). In this sense, making a research text "one's own" is to *make it real for oneself* in the moment of interpretation and to respond to it from that position of realization. It is in this moment that the research text opens up on to other things, offers new insights and a deeper understanding of the topic, has transformational power for the reader, and lives on dialogically in and through the reader's response (158).

Such appropriative meaning-making invites dialogic "conjunction and renewal" not only in the context of research understanding but also in the practice of self-understanding (Ricoeur 1981, 158), culminating in new ways of looking at oneself. Genuine research inquiry does not typically begin in the abstract realm of detached objectivity, but with a reader's real and present concerns or pressing questions about a particular subject matter. While scholarly readers are expected to perform critical and objective analyses of research material, scholarly interpretations cannot be disconnected from the rest of the reader's life (Arnett 2011, 46). "The content, after all, does not fall into [one's] head like a meteor from another world," as Bakhtin (1993) remarks, perhaps with tongue in cheek, but rather it is "woven into the . . . fabric of my emotional-volitional, my living and effective, thinking-experiencing" (33). When readers actualize research texts through their interpretative practice, then, they not only appropriate the content intellectually, but consider its full impact for themselves: What does this research material mean *for me* in the various contexts and communities in which I find myself? In such moments of genuine inquiry, scholars set down their abstract queries contrived in an ivory tower to descend into the "mud of everyday life" (Arnett 2011, 46).

While this impulse toward "research as me-search" can lead to forms of textual absorption or a disregard of otherness in the meaning-making process, Ricoeur (1981) points to an alternative understanding of self-reflection as *self-inquiry* or *self-critique* (191), in which textual alterity has the power to bring a reader's perspectives, prejudices, beliefs, or behaviours into question. In the best-case scenario, appropriation summons self-analysis and self-discernment: "the interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself" (Ricoeur 1981, 158). This form of self-reflection is wholly present and open to multiple voices and various perspectives, as readers connect the views they have received in other contexts with those in the text and seek new insights or alternative ways to approach their concerns (Jacobs 2001, 92).

By way of inquiry and self-analysis, scholarly readers have the potential to release their preconceived notions and interpretative projections in order to ask genuine questions and gain revelatory understanding (Ricoeur 1981, 193), thus engaging in a perpetual process of "becoming" rather than confirming a fixed state of ego-consciousness or reified identity marker (Ewald 1993, 341).

In ordinary practice, however, scholarly readers are not perpetually open to alterity, polyphony, or self-inquiry in their acts of research appropriation. To make something initially alien "one's own," means that readers inevitably *take in otherness* in multiple ways, some that are genuinely dialogic and constructively self-critical and others that are monologic and self-absorbed. Indeed, many different motivations come into play in reading research. Regardless of our ethical ideal for a Thou-orientation in appropriative reading practices, research texts are still typically taken up as objects of information and made "one's own" as a means to a particular intellectual end: We are primarily trying to figure out what a research text has to offer, how it relates to other research material in the field, how we can make meaning of it for our purposes, and how we can conjoin our ideas with it in productive ways. This praxis is not necessarily unethical but confirms an inevitable convergence between dialogic and monologic discourses that become more or less ethical depending on one's orientation toward otherness within them.

Scholarly reading thus involves inhabiting multiple interpretive locations and taking on various orientations in relation to research texts, orientations that range from passive to active, from receptive to appropriative, from critically distanced to personally invested, from objective to subjective. What scholarly readers bring to the text in any given moment and how they orient themselves in relation to textual alterity through their meaning-making practices will determine whether the research offers a revelatory word or an informational resource, whether it stimulates a new perspective or confirms old assumptions. How readers make the text "one's own" proves to be multifaceted, nuanced, and variable because it necessarily involves a textual interplay between discourses and a relational interplay between oneself and others in the process of discovering one's position on a topic and discerning how to situate oneself in relation to the research of others.

A Writing Posture: Answerability and Generative Response in Research Composition

Through the process of interpretative appropriation, scholarly readers transition from an orientation of attentive receptivity to a praxis of reciprocal response, by which scholarly dialogue begins to unfold. This dialogue becomes manifest to others in and through one's written research compositions. In the research writing of most humanities and social science disciplines, a dialogic response typically takes the form of a written stance in relation to the research of others and takes the shape of a responsible interaction throughout the work by means of a writer's careful representations and considered analyses of others' works (Stumm 2021). While this written interaction is typically structured as a "technical dialogue"

(Buber [1947] 2002; Arnett, Bell, and Fritz 2010, 120), it nonetheless retains an ethical impulse and has ethical implications for scholarly communication. If research texts summon a response by their very acts of articulation, then writers are responsible for the "answer" they compose.

For Bakhtin (1993), the possibility of ethical dialogue depends on an "answerable" self who receives and responds to the textual utterances of others in an active and participatory way (27–30). As Bakhtin describes it, *answerability* is not an abstract, ethical principle of response, but "the self-activity of a performed act" effected as an "actual, real deed" or "uttered word" (27) that affirms one's own "unique truth" in a particular, concrete, singular moment of response (28). In the context of research composition, answerability is directly linked to one's authorship. As Helen Ewald (1993) succinctly puts it, "Answering is authoring. Authoring is responding" (341). To convey a response to the written research of others, then, one answers by authoring one's own work and actualizing one's own unique positionality in one's written utterance. As we *answer from* our unique placement, we conjoin our agency and individuality to the alterity of other scholarly voices in the ongoing discussion (Bakhtin 1993, 28; Clark and Holquist 1984, 245). As we *answer for* our unique placement, we take ownership and responsibility for our response because no one else can stand and speak from the same place that we do (Holquist 1990, 167).

Ricoeur (1992) similarly places activity and agency at the heart of one's response and responsibility toward others. He holds that one must be able to designate oneself in the act of response in order to be genuinely responsive and responsible to others (341). As he writes, "It is in me that the movement coming from the other completes its trajectory: the other constitutes me as responsible, that is, capable of responding. In this way, the word of the other comes to be placed at the origin of my acts" (336). For a dialogue to occur, one cannot maintain a purely receptive orientation of "Here I am" with an affirmative "Yes!" to the words of another but must also offer a declarative word of self-designation in response: "Here is where I stand!" (168). In taking a stance, research writers do not evacuate an affirming, receptive orientation toward the research of others, but conjoin their own position to that affirmation, offering a "Yes, *and*" or "Yes, *but*" response that builds on, questions, and contends with the work of others. Such a stance calls for conviction (Ricoeur 1992, 339) and self-investment (Bakhtin 1993, 32) in the dialogic development of research knowledge.

In this sense, a research stance necessarily involves the subjectivity of the author, as their valuations and evaluations, background, experience, and bias will inevitably come into play as they position themselves and share what they see from where they stand (Holquist 1990, 167; Arnett 2011, 55; Arnett 2024, 16). As George Steiner (1984) aptly puts it: one "cannot be impartial or take a stance outside [oneself]" (70). Indeed, the fact that one has begun to speak or write about something at all, "means that [one has] already assumed a certain attitude toward it—not an indifferent attitude, but an interested-effective attitude," Bakhtin observes (1993, 32). While such expressions of human disclosure shake the semblance of research writing as wholly objective, abstract, or informational, they are in fact the most authentic way of engaging dialogically with the research of

others. This is not to say that research writers should privilege their subjectivity in solipsistic ways or engage in egocentric critiques of other viewpoints. Rather, human disclosure means that in positing a research stance, authors directly convey that they are situated in a particular context and community with a specific lens through which they are viewing the topic (Steiner 1984, 72–73). They may even allude to their own story as it has come to inform their positionality and inquiry. They are also honest in showing how they are engaging with the work of others from that stance in conjunctive, generative, and responsible ways.

Taking a stance, then, not only involves determining one's position in relation and response to others, it also suggests a posture of accountability at the heart of one's response. As Ricoeur (1992) observes, taking a stance means that "I am *accountable for* my actions before another" and I conduct myself in such a manner "that others can *count on*" me (165). In other words, to be answerable in my authorship means that I am not only capable of responding, "Here is where I stand!" in relation to others, I am also affirming my accountability to others in my research community in the very act of taking a stance. I take responsibility for my research position—its insights and limitations of perspective—so that readers can trust that I am authoring my own work and representing the truth as I see it (this is *my account*), as well as openly *accounting* for the research of others that has informed my position through citational acknowledgement (Stumm 2021, 119–20).

To be accountable to my readers and to the researchers I have invoked in my work, I must constantly ask myself: Is my audience able to recognize the multiplicity of others with whom I am engaged in my research process and the multiple ways I have come to my information and conclusions by means of their insights (Stumm 2021, 55–56)? Ewald extends this responsibility further, suggesting that we also need to be attuned to "the difference between our responses, our perceptions of accountability, and those of others" (343). In my responsible and answerable authorship, then, I must take into account "all the factors," as Bakhtin puts it (1993, 28)—my unique positionality, intentionality, background, and scholarly context, other scholars in the conversation, our differing frameworks and discourses, the range of readers, etc.—in order to engage with other scholars in ethically dialogic ways within a research composition.

As we consider the multiple factors of accountability, it becomes clear that authoring a stance is not simply for one's own sake as a means to direct one's writing. Rather, it is *other-orientated* in at least two ways. First, as we have seen, authoring a stance is a conjunctive way to answer or respond to other researchers, thereby joining a dialogue about the topic that is already in motion and contributing new knowledge or insight to that discussion. Second, authoring a stance is a means to open the dialogue to other readers, inviting them to consider another perspective and respond with their stance and scholarly insights.

A stance can be considered an opening to readers in that it represents an author's unique position and limited viewpoint from where they stand, conveying an "open unity" or "open totality" in their work (Bakhtin 1986, 6, 7; Jacobs 2001, 53): "Here is *what I see* from where I stand." Since one's location is wholly singular, there will always be something else to see and say on the subject from another place. A research stance is also a temporal-locative assertion—"Here is where I

stand *right now*"—which suggests that one's authorial position is provisional, in flux, and shifting over time in the face of new research, interests, contexts, interlocutors, and experiences. Indeed, one's inquiry is never finished: while one might be standing *here now*, the research impulse is to wonder where to go from here. When we posit genuine or open-ended questions as part of our research inquiry or conclude our work by pointing out areas for further study, we implicitly turn toward our audience (Stumm 2021, 308). We call on readers to engage with our work in conjunction with the work of others, addressing gaps in the dialogue with their stance and taking things *from here* for the overall benefit of the research community (Giltrow 2005, 183). There is always something yet-to-be-determined about a topic in our communal inquiry. There is always something more to be seen and told from another position. Hence, there are continual openings for each of us to participate anew in "the living, ongoing event" of written scholarly dialogue (Bakhtin 1993, 32–33).

In research composition, most of these dialogues take the form of an informational exchange over specific research material in an effort to share understanding and develop knowledge together. However, moments of genuine dialogue can imbue a reciprocal scholarly exchange with an *I–Thou* encounter. In taking a responsive stance to the work of others, research writers may have an unexpected and momentary meeting with "real presence" in their scholarship, where the reflections of another thinker or the research data itself ceases to be an object of analysis and *comes alive* (Steiner 1984, 85). As Buber (1958) aptly describes it: "Here the word has from time to time become life, and this life is *teaching*" (42). Such moments of learning are most likely to occur when researchers already inhabit an ethical orientation of openness and curiosity in their explorations, seeking a range of perspectives and being willing to change their minds. But actual revelation cannot be forced. It happens unbidden, "an unsought, unwilled encounter with and answerability to the 'real presence'" of something outside one's ego (Steiner 1984, 91). While new information can certainly redirect an author's research objectives or compositional process, an *I–Thou* encounter reveals a glimpse of "the spirit behind the letter" (85), something *wholly other* which incites a genuine "Aha!" moment that shakes one's convictions and changes one's stance.

Such an encounter heralds a moment of genuine discovery in the research writing process, whereby the research data, theoretical frameworks, scholarly ideas of others, or one's own novel insights are temporarily dislodged from their informational status to become a revelatory *gift* here and now (Steiner 1984, 84). In this moment, one's *I–It* relations are interrupted, summoning a new vision and a whole-being answer or response to a *Thou* (Buber 1958). This form of transformational learning is not limited to scholarly research contexts but extends outward into the rest of life, opening and re-opening us to alternative ways of being and inspiring moments of genuine dialogue about our research with others beyond the text. Notably, such moments of extra-textual dialogue often lead researchers back into textual discourse, imbuing their work with deeper conviction as they revise their research stance and redirect their compositional activity. And yet, while having deeply informed an author's way of being and

revitalized their thought processes, this revelatory gift typically remains a secret, hidden behind the monologic discourse of the research composition itself.

Indeed, even a genuinely dialogic *I–Thou* encounter in the research process will inevitably slip into an *I–It* relation so it can "enter the structure of knowledge," as Buber notes (1958, 40). The "It" of scholarly knowledge is composed of ideas, images, explanations, analyses, and comparisons that objectify "real presence" by reducing existence to consciousness and fixing discovery in the established monologic discourse of the academic disciplines (Bakhtin 1984, 81; Buber 1957, 40–42; Friedman 2002, 72). Notably, this practice is not unethical per se. It is a necessary part of our scholarly communicative process (Arnett, Bell, and Fritz 2010), as we cannot remain in a revelatory state of learning for long. We must descend the mountain of vision and re-enter the structures of knowledge by which we describe and discuss our discoveries in the scholarly community.

However, the *I–It* relation of monologic discourse does become problematic when it blocks the possibility of an *I–Thou* encounter and the revelatory insights that arise from a genuine relation with the research material or the people discussing it (Friedman 2002, 72). This relational block can be manifest in various ways—from privileging informational knowledge at the expense of other forms of insight, to erasing human positionality for the sake of scholarly objectivity; from favoring the subjective autonomy of authorship over the intersubjective nature of research dialogue, to avoiding human subjectivity altogether with totalizing, abstract, or over-generalized truth-claims. In light of these tensions and blockages we continually need to ask ourselves: What is research for? What is our aim and purpose in its development and dissemination? If it is to accrue, possess, convey, and exchange information, then using monologic discourse in a technical dialogue will suffice. We can focus our ethics of difference on a respect for *things*—the research data we accumulate, the frameworks and theories we use, the concepts and illustrations we develop, and the ideas of others that we integrate in our work—formulating them in our cognition and then in our compositions with clarity and regard.

If, however, our purpose is to explore subject matter as a living encounter with otherness in order to discover meaningful truths together for the good for the research community and beyond, then it is critical that we be willing to open ourselves again and again to the inquiry, renewal, and transformation of learning, leaving space for the spirit of the research to speak and for genuine dialogue with other scholars to emerge in the compositional process. While this form of relation is more involved, messy, and time-consuming to cultivate, it is also more rewarding and impactful. It invites authors to be present to the insights and the enigmas, the slippages and the play involved in the event of understanding research with others—to listen, to take a stance, to respond, to change one's mind, and to start anew. As Barthold (2010) aptly puts it, genuine dialogue "catches us up in its movement just like play does. We want to keep it going" (107). It is precisely this movement that enlivens our research scholarship and keeps us playing on.

Concluding Thoughts

In this article, I have endeavored to convey something of the ethical and existential nature of the research process—both in its readerly and writerly dimensions—in order to reflect on some of the possibilities and complexities of engaging dialogically with others within the context of scholarly communication. In particular, I applied some key ethical orientations toward alterity established in dialogic ethics to this context: an open and attentive receptivity toward the words of others, an appropriative hermeneutics that is both conjunctive and mindful of difference, and an assertive and accountable response to the research of others in one's stance and compositional development. Ideally, researchers are opened to difference by a genuine encounter with the "real presence" of alterity (a *Thou* moment) in the research being studied and the researchers being interacted with. Such a revelatory encounter takes research writing beyond its *I–It* world of information and knowledge dissemination into an event of genuine dialogue and transformative learning.

I observed, however, that while these orientations toward otherness are deeply ethical, they cannot be demanded or enforced (Arnett, Bell, and Fritz 2010). Moreover, our ability to practice them is complicated by the institutionalized structures of knowledge that direct our communication and the monologic discourse and technical dialogue that pervades our written scholarship. We must also contend with our own egoic inclinations toward utility, economy, autonomy, and speed in producing research material and toward criticism, self-absorption, or detachment in engaging with the research of others. Given these ethical tensions, I want to conclude by returning to the pedagogical context in which I started this inquiry and touch briefly on how we might help introductory students navigate the ethical complexities of research writing and better understand why research dialogue matters.

In general terms, research dialogue matters as a necessary counterpart to the monologic discourse that pervades scholarly writing. Undergraduate students are typically introduced to research scholarship as an *It*—the objective knowledge they must gather and use for a particular research assignment. Most research composition textbooks reinforce an *I–It* model of relationality, focusing on the "how-tos" or technical aspects of writing, so that students' work fits within the established structures and strictures of the research essay genre. Students thus learn that scholarly composition is a matter of rules to follow, formulations to learn, methods to replicate, language to emulate, and procedural hoops to jump through in order to complete an assigned task and fulfill the expectations of their instructor. Incidentally, AI technology like *Grammarly* and *Chat GPT* further strengthens this monologic relation, since these tools are geared to help students fix the written formulations and structural dimensions of a research composition and produce a generic, automated *It* that reflects the conventional style and tone of research prose. Even the dialogic "moves that matter" in research writing proposed by Graff and Birkenstein (2010) are framed monologically as a structural

interaction—a way to organize and convey one's research information as a response to what other researchers have said.

While the rules, forms, and styles of scholarly discourse are important for introductory students to grasp in order to reflect the communication situation in which they are writing, reducing the dialogic process of research writing to a technical practice leaves much to be desired in helping students encounter the genuinely human traces and interhuman dimensions of research composition. Humanizing research is critical for introducing scholars as real people with particular values and concerns who are thinking with other scholars and developing knowledge together as they share their written work. With this in mind, students need not don an intellectualized pseudo-self to read and write research papers. They can bring their real selves—their actual identities, interests, and ideas—to the table as they join a research dialogue. Many introductory students may not yet be ready or able to engage in this way because they are unable to discern what the research might mean for them or know where they stand in relation to it. We can nonetheless cultivate openings for dialogic relationality to emerge that inform their *I–It* experiences of research texts and initiate moments of revelatory insight and learning. There are undoubtedly many ways to do this. Let me briefly mention three that have come to the fore in the course of my writing here.

First, we can foster the students' practice of "real presence"—their genuine *being here now*—existentially and intellectually. One way to do that is by helping them to discover how they are uniquely situated in the world by means of the "narrative ground" on which they stand (Arnett 2011): What are their stories? What are their concerns? What do they care about? What does it mean for them to be here now? Sharing stories of background and identity (orally or in writing) and discussing the various ways they are located in the world can offer students a tangible starting point from which to understand what it means to be positioned, located, and biased in one's research viewpoints. It can also help them to discern what kinds of topics and forms of research they truly care about in order to inspire a personally-invested and meaningful research inquiry.

Second, we can invite students to take a posture of openness to difference. One way to do that is to cultivate curiosity about a relevant topic and introduce a set of diverse readings about it, showing a range of differing perspectives that are all equally valid. Another way is to introduce small writing projects that involve summarizing the words of a scholar with whom the student *disagrees* or orchestrating the voices of several thinkers together according to how their viewpoints connect and differ from each other. In the process, students can learn to practice receptive listening to alternate viewpoints, develop a generous hermeneutics and the careful representation of other voices, and begin to locate themselves in the mix. For instance, students could be invited to visually map out where various scholars "stand" on a topic and then indicate where they stand. As they find themselves situated closer to one thinker than another, they may begin to discern the interhuman relationality that exists between themselves and other thinkers and be able to articulate why they've located themselves where they have.

Third, we can empower a posture of conviction and response-able agency. This is perhaps the most difficult for introductory students to actualize. To be able to respond—"Here is where I stand!"—to the research of others and to be accountable for one's stance in the dialogue necessitates that students not only understand the prose they are reading, but can discern what the research *means* for them and articulate their convictions to others in responsive and responsible ways. Most students, however, are deeply uncertain about taking a stance in a research conversation, anxious about their ability to respond to experts in the field, and convinced they have nothing valuable to contribute to the dialogue by means of their research writing. In trying to assuage their fears, they may decide to give up on the effort of discerning what they think and don someone else's ideas—in the form of plagiarism or parroting—to speak for them. These choices prove to be problematic not only because they steal or subsume the voices of others rather than respond to them, they also result in the evacuation of one's own agency and circumvent the genuine pleasures that come from sharpening one's creative and constructive capabilities and asserting one's own voice. It is critical for students to recognize that every effort toward honing their own response-able stance, no matter how tenuous or unpolished, offers a valuable contribution to a research dialogue precisely because no one else can see exactly what they see or say exactly what they can say from where they stand.

Ultimately, dialogue matters in research composition because it is one of the main ways that scholars can genuinely meet like-minded others and develop meaningful research relations between them for the benefit of the scholarly community and beyond. Despite the fact that research texts can obscure our human traces and monologic discourse necessarily pervades our scholarly interactions, we can nonetheless create openings for genuine dialogue to occur in our research and pedagogical practices, enriching our mutual learning with revelatory insights and inspiring our research knowledge with interhuman connections. Given the many ways that *I–It* relations have come to dominate our academic, social, and political spheres and the collective difficulties we face in opening to otherness, any moments of genuine encounter with the "real presence" of another are a welcome gift.

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