Participatory Knowing: A Story-Centered Approach to Human Systems

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Abstract

The tendency of systems approaches to rely on and look for causal explanations creates problems for democratic practice. Causal analysis must generalize and thus assign fixed identities, which inevitably encourages viewing society in terms of competing interest groups whose conflicting goals move them inexorably toward conflict. A second problem with reliance on causality is the sheer complexity of causal analysis of complex social systems, which gives the expert analyst enjoys a claim to superior knowledge and de facto authority over community members.

An alternative to causal analysis is to approach systems in 'story-centered' terms. Treating the story that the individual or collective 'inhabits' as the relevant system for analysis counters the anti-democratic tendencies identified above. Since stories—understood as such—are fluid and shifting, it becomes less natural to define individuals by their interests and identities; in turn, this encourages community participants to engage other community members as cohabitants rather than adversaries. And since story-inhabitants are better equipped than the expert to investigate the story *within* which they live and act, the authority of the expert is correspondingly reduced.

Of the many levels at which story-centric analysis can proceed, a focus on the systemic nature of the environing story is especially appropriate to the needs of today's complex and heterogeneous democracies. To engage the story at this level allows for honoring multiple stories in society without focusing exclusive at the level of story content, thus creating a foundation for dialog and shared inquiry even among those who inhabit widely varying story-worlds. The individual who learns to analyze the structures of her own story gains essential distance from her own forms of knowledge and commitment, making appreciation of the other more likely. Finally, since this approach encourages analysis of prereflective experience, it creates prospects for personal growth that can support higher levels of democratic functioning.

Keywords: causality, stories, identity

Introduction

In her illuminating history of systems thinking in the social sciences, Debora Hammond (2003, 270 ff.) expresses dismay and some perplexity at the frequently heard charge that general systems theory amounts to an updated version of positivism, an attempt by technocrats to manipulate human beings to meet the demands of a systemic whole, ignoring in the process their essential humanity. Such a view would certainly have surprised the pioneers of systems theory, who saw themselves as bring human values and concerns back into the scientific enterprise. Thus Laszlo (1972a, 6), in a relatively early statement, asserts the relevance of systems theory to the existential dimension of human life:

> The demand for "seeing things whole" and seeing the world as an interconnected, interdependent field or continuum, is . . . a healthy reaction to the loss of meaning entailed by overcompartmentalized research and piecemeal analysis, bringing in particularized "facts"but failing in relevance to anything of human concern.

The "positivist critique" of systems thinking clearly fails to gain any traction for Hammond herself, who argues convincingly throughout her book that such a view misses much of what is most interesting in systems thought. Still, it is worth reflecting on why such a charge continues to surface (e.g., Lilienfeld, 1978; Lyotard, 1984), even among champions of a systems-theory approach (Berman, 1984).

One reason is certainly the language and basic approach of systems thinking, which reflect its origins in biology, computing, and more generally the so-called "hard" sciences. This basic orientation make its writings difficult for the non-scientist to penetrate; more importantly for present purposes, it feeds the suspicion that humans figure in systems theory as experimental subjects or items to be manipulated, rather than autonomous actors. But a more fundamental dynamic is also at work. Systems theory necessarily analyzes systems from *outside* the system, while the hallmark of being human is to *inhabit* a system, whether that system be psychological, cultural or political. In every moment of their waking lives, human beings find themselves already engaged in being who they are, in living out the situation they find themselves in. And there is a sense that systems theory, in attempting to explain human systems, misses this fundamental 'withinness'. This is the kernel of truth in the inchoate rage with which Dostoevesky's "underground man" rejects science and rationality:

> I, for instance, would not be in the least surprised if all of a sudden, *a propos* of nothing, in the midst of general prosperity a gentleman with an ignoble, or rather with a reactionary and ironical, countenance were to arise and, putting his arms akimbo, say to us all: "I say, gentleman, hadn't we better kick over the whole show and scatter rationalism to the winds" . . . And all that for the most foolish reason, which, one would think, was hardly worth mentioning: that is, that man everywhere and at all times, whoever he may be, has preferred to act as he chose and not in the least as his reason and advantage dictated . . . One's own free unfettered choice, one's own caprice, however wild it may be, one's own fancy worked up at times to frenzy--is that very "most advantageous advantage" which we have overlooked, which comes under no classification and against which all systems and theories are continually being shattered to atoms. (1960/1864, 201)

This distinction between analysis-from-outside and experience-from-within resonates with an ongoing debate in the field of consciousness studies. On one side are those who maintain that consciousness can be understood from a "third-person" perspective (e.g., Dennett, 1991), giving rise to a

science more or less like any other whose object of inquiry is the brain and nervous system. On the other side are those who say that consciousness is ultimately an interior phenomenon, to be understood by taking the first-person "view from within" (Varela and Shear, 1999). Those who insist on this first-person view often use as a rallying cry the observation made by Nagel (1974) that there is "something it is like" to be conscious. They insist that an analysis that proceeds from outside—as will be true for any attempt to "explain" consciousness—will be unable to get at this essential interiority of consciousness.

The implicit rejection of explanation by those who explore consciousness from within sets up a potential conflict with systems thinking. Systems theory. like all of science, aims at causal explanations, even if systemic explanations range far beyond the simple notions of linear causality that have dominated much of Western thought (Macy, 1991; Senge, 1990). Yet to explain is to step outside what is experienced, to look back on what has already happened (Petranker, 2005). Hence the joke common in consciousness-studies circles that Dennett's *magnum opus*, *Consciousness Explained* (1991), should really have been called *Consciousness Explained Away*. If we stay *within* experience, we inhabit a realm that resists being analyzed in causal and rational terms.

Explanation can be viewed as a form of narrative, and it might seems that a narrative approach gives us a way to bring explanation and human experience together after all. Inasmuch as narrative necessarily engages a level of meaning that third-person science leaves out, it has been claimed that narrative knowing offers an alternative to scientific ways of knowing (Polkinghorne, 1988; Czarniawska, 1997, ch. 1). Yet in terms of the inward-outward distinction, the difference between narrative and logical explanation is not that great. The narratives that make sense of experience, whether they take the form of compelling stories or dry, mechanistic analysis, are always backward looking (Weick, 1995), and thus remain cut off from the immediacy of conscious human experience (Petranker, 2005). Even narratives that make no attempt to explain share with causal analysis a view from *outside* what is narrated. When we analyze systems as narratives (consider, for example, the work of Bateson [1972a] on the double bind) the objection that systems theory does not connect with the truth of being human still holds.

To move beyond this impasse, we need to take a closer look at what actually distinguishes systems thinking from more conventional theoretical approaches to human experience. The qualities of complexity and mutual causality (Macy, 1989; Capra, 1996) that characterize systems theory suggest that narratives (cf. the cognate word "narrow"), with their linear temporal sequencing of one event following the next, are inadequate to the systems that comprise human beings and their worlds. Systems thinking points to a more inclusive approach, one that I will refer to not as "narrative" but as "story." In what follows, I will contrast the "lived" story that human beings embody to the "told story" of the narrative and explore the implications of this distinction for the study of human systems, with special reference to democratic theory and practice.

The interplay between (lived) story and system seems to me to have great potential in allowing human beings to come to terms with their own experience in ways that stay true to that experience. To explore this interplay may give access to a new kind of knowledge, one of great potential in this age of fractured societies and increasing gridlock in the democratic process.

Story and System

Gregory Bateson (1972b, 407) characterizes the subject matter of cybernetics (which I will take for present purposes to be equivalent to systems theory) as "the propositional or informational aspect of the events and objects in the natural world." If we stopped with this definition, we would be squarely in the realm of the narrative, for as statements that assert something to be true, propositions are the building blocks of narrative. Yet Bateson (1972b, 408) almost immediately goes on to qualify his initial definition in an important way, arguing that the content of a given proposition will always depend on the *context* of the proposition, and that this context in turn will depend on a larger context, and so on. As he writes elsewhere (1972a, 315), "In the natural history of the human being, ontology and epistemology cannot be separated."

Once we bring in context, we have left the realm of narrative and entered a more complex world in which events have meaning only in relation to a larger whole. I call this larger whole the story, or lived story, as opposed to the told story of the narrative. Just as there is more to a novel than its plot, so there is more to a lived story than the sequence of events that give it its sequential form. While we *tell* a narrative, we *inhabit* a story. No narrative telling can capture the inhabited story, since to tell what has happened (and telling, as already noted, always looks backwards in time) is to abstract from the lived story what makes it alive: elements such as emotion, mood, associations, sense of presence, self-image, and so on (Petranker, 2003).[1]

The relation of story to narrative parallels in interesting ways the relation between mutual causality (systems theory) and the mechanistic causality of linear forms of thinking. For example, here is a simplified version of four properties that Macy (1989, 76-77) lists as inherent in every natural system, viewed as a system:

- the system is a nonsummative whole that cannot be reduced to its parts
- the system is homeostatic, stabilizing itself through negative feedback
- the system is self-organizing, encoding new patterns that allow it to continue functioning
- the system is part of a hierarchy, containing subsystems and itself a subsystem of a larger system

Now consider the following description (Tulku, 1987, 171-73) of what I am calling the lived story (in this case, what Tulku calls the "founding story" of the self). The same four properties appear:

> Stories make meaningful the self's doings, thoughts, and imaginings, giving coherence to the flow of events . . . The rules of logic and social intercourse, the vivid imagery of the human mind, the interlocking domains of perception, feelings, naming, explanations, and interpretations all take their meaning and significance from the manifold structures of the web of stories.
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> A single story may be fully formed, subtle, and intricate, or fragmentary and suggestive. In either case, it allows for the possibility of subsidiary stories, bars the telling of conflicting stories, and establishes a framework for later experience, defining the understanding within which [conventional knowledge operates]. As stories interweave and grow more elaborate, parts slip out of view, too complex in form and content to be grasped as a whole.

> . . . The self learns to turn to its own stories for gratification and to make sense of events. Tracing out the patterns of interlocking stories permits the creation of new, more comprehensive, or more satisfying stories, including stories about stories, or even stories (such as this one) about how the story-telling mechanism operates. Common to all these stories is the narrator itself . . . The central narrative structures—"I am; I feel; I experience; I want; I act"—are the self-authenticating truth of every story.[2]

In other words, the lived story can itself be understood as a system, a whole that is constantly remaking itself (encoding new patterns) through adjustments that take the form of subsidiary stories, all for the purpose of preserving homeostasis (the ongoing existence and ownership status of the self).

To see the self-story as a system, however, does not yet address the "withinness" of human experience. If the self is the "founding story" we inhabit (Tulku, 1987), we should be able to see it as just that: a story about the way things are rather than the truth of our experience. Yet that is precisely what we cannot do. Instead, we always find ourselves *within* the story, and so accept it as the truth. Under ordinary conditions, the inhabited story is sealed off from systemic analysis. This is what it means to say we *inhabit* the story.

Whenever we make the withinness of human experience our focus, we will find that systems analysis tends to miss the point. Consider Gregory Bateson's (1972a, 317-18) well-known example of a man chopping down a tree. Viewed in systemic terms, writes Bateson, the system (or Mind) at work here is the one consisting of tree-eyes-brain-muscles-axe-stroke-tree. He continues:

> But this is *not* how the average Occidental sees the event sequence of tree felling. He says, "*I* cut down the tree" and he even believes that there is a delimited agent, the "self," which performed a delimited "purposive" action upon a delimited object.

Bateson's mock consternation here (compare Dennett, 1992) is disingenuous. Bateson's systemic analysis offers a narrative—tells a story—that may be superior to a conventional linear causal account. But this account leaves unaffected the story we inhabit, a story in which it is incontestably the self that acts, decides, tells, objects, and so forth. It suggests a different way of *telling* the story, a different view, but it lacks the purchase on our experience to become a different way of *living* the story. Like the Underground Man, human beings acting within the lived story are beyond the reach of rational explanations. Experientially speaking, no one is a system to herself.[3]

The difficulty is that the method of science depends precisely on stepping outside the story, on emerging out of the darkness of prereflective experience into the light of reflection. There are certainly scientists who defend the need to engage the withinness of prereflective experience (Freeman, 2000, Dreyfus, 1993) and explore tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1962), but they generally concede that such familiarity is purchased at the cost of scientific knowledge and analytic rigor. Bateson's woodsman, involved in cutting down a tree with an axe, is not thinking to himself, "I am part of a system that involves the tree, the axe, impulses from the brain, the muscles of the arms, and so on." But he is also not thinking, "I am the one cutting down the tree." Within the story he inhabits, he does not think at all; it is enough for him to be within it. As Searle (1992, 98) writes: "Our idea of an objectively observable reality presupposes a notion of observation that is itself ineliminably subjective, and that *cannot be made the object of observation*." (emphasis added)

This, then, is the challenge. Systems thinking recognizes the complexity of the lived story, but necessarily steps outside the story and thus loses touch with the essential withinness that makes human stories what they are. Yet from within the story, systems thinking is not possible, for as Bateson (1972a, 314), the elements that constitute the story are large inaccessible to consciousness. In fact, some writers sympathetic to systems theory have been prepared to accept that living *within* a system is tantamount to abandoning consciousness (Hampden-Turner, 1982, 192; Berman, 1984, 303). We are on the horns of a dilemma. What are the prospects for a resolution through synthesis?

The Lived Story: The System from Within

Consider breathing as a system. The air enters the body and passes through the bronchial tubes, the lungs and rib cage expand, the diaphragm drops down, and so on. The usual principles of feedback, homeostasis, etc. apply. Breathing, however, is a special kind of system, because it is one we can be aware of from within. As the lungs expand, there is the experience of the lungs expanding. As the diaphragm drops down, there is the experience of that movement. We may not tune in to these experiences—in fact, we usually do not—but the potential is there. In this particular instance, at least, the system has its own within.

But that is only the beginning of the story. Once I connect with the withinness of breathing, the whole realm of the within becomes available to me in a new way. For instance, as I am breathing, I may from time to have a thought. There is a withinness to the thinking that has the thought, one that parallels the withinness of breathing. Just as the breath breathes, so the thought thinks, and while thoughts have the special characteristic of being *about* something, the withinness of thinking (including the structure of aboutness) has nothing to do with the content of what is thought. In the same way, there is a withinness to seeing, to hearing, to swallowing, a a withinness to the mood that permeates my experience, the emotion or longing that frames my perception, and the intention that directs my action. Starting with breathing (one of countless possible entry points), I have gained access to the withinness of the lived story.

Of course, the way things are for any particular person, the unexamined content of the lived story, may vary dramatically. For a person of faith, the withinness of the lived story might include the immediate presence of a divine being or force, accompanied by a flow of blessings. For a salesman, the withinness of attending a party might include a heightened sensitivity to clues that a potential customer is in the vicinity. Nor will any one such description be complete: In each case, multiple layers of meaning will be available. Like stars and planets sweeping through the ether, we swim within a sea of significance, inhabiting a world that ordinarily "makes sense" at each and every level we care about.[4]

My view is this possibility for experiencing the lived story from within represents the synthesis I asked after at the end of the last section. Tulku (1987, 300-301) explores this idea in some depth:

> Thinking 'about' thinking steps outside the conventional structure of 'knower' and 'known', for it occurs within thinking. In the same way, knowledge is known *in the act of knowing*. The interplay of language, ideas, observation, and integration, of mental and sensory activity, of positioning and identification, is available for knowledge *directly* . . . Retracing through its own momentum the dynamic that experience embodies, analysis allows active knowing to emerge. Working together, inquiry and analysis need no longer rely exclusively on thoughts and concepts as tools, but instead can find knowledge directly within each moment—not isolated in the knower or hidden within the known, but freely available in a way that links the mind and the surrounding without necessarily locating either 'mind or 'world'.
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> As understood by conventional knowledge, 'knowing' and 'not-knowing' alike manifest in patterns of feedback between 'subject' and 'object.' . . . When inquiry has made knowledge active and available, feedback has a more creative aspect. 'Subject' and 'object' can be seen as correlative, interdependent facets of knowledge. In this way of seeing, knowing arises between subject and object . . .

It is this "knowing between subject and object" that I have in mind when I speak of a knowledge accessible *within* the lived story.

Let us return for a moment to Bateson's woodsman, chopping down a tree. It would be a rare individual indeed who experienced this activity in the way Bateson describes. But it is easy enough to imagine that same woodsman inhabiting a story in which the tree will serve as the central beam in the roof of a vacation cabin that he has planned to build for his family for years. Now we are in that rich domain of meanings that constitute the withinness of the story, alive with emotions, impressions, recollections, and so on. All that remains is for the woodsman to be aware, as he is cutting down the tree, of these levels of of meaning, and of how they inform his 'world system'. At that point, the lived story has become accessible to inquiry from within the story. One is both inside and outside the story.

This "inside/outside" status is related to the systems analysis, which also turns away from the content of a story to analyze its working. To know withiing the story in this way, allows for what Bateson (1972c) calls "Learning III," within which, as Heron and Reason (1997) put it, "the mind can choose its premises of understanding and action, can detach itself from all frameworks to peer into and reflect on their presuppositions." With this, we can see how systems thinking relates to the knowing *within the story* that I have been trying to identify. "In a Batesonian framework," writes Berman (1984, 275), "we can actually focus on the circuit, not just be immersed in it." That is precisely the point of a knowing that knows from within the act of knowing, from within the lived story.

Transforming the Story from Within: Implications for Democratic Theory

Systems of government, and also nation-states, are artificial constructs. They are tools or machines, ad hoc "things" created by human beings to accomplish specific ends. As artificial constructs, they lack the defining characteristic of being human, for they have no within. In this respect they differ dramatically from cultures, which are defined precisely by the fact that they instill in their members—and in effect 'embody'—the essential elements of a lived story that make that culture what it is.[5] Systems analysis may be effective for government, the mechanisms of which can be analyzed. But insofar as it seeks to explain the systemic structure of a lived story, systems analysis will not be relevant to the inhabitants of that story, for whom the story is simply not permeable to such external analysis.

For modern, large-scale democracies, this impermeability of the cultural story to analysis is deeply problematic, for government must attempt to maintain order and safeguard the welfare of citizens who belong to a multiplicity of cultures, no longer united by a unifying lived story. When group identities conflict, when members of a single nation no longer find common ground, the result is conflict that can easily erupt into violence. We have seen the consequences countless times in recent decades.

The situation is actually more complicated than this view suggests. We live in an era when lived stories have been brought into the open, have been made visible *as*stories. In the past, each culture had its own "way things are," its own founding story, which remained invisible because it was all-inclusive. Today, there is no one way that that things are, for today we have access to every culture, and as a result we find it increasingly difficult to maintain the truth of one particular story, one "totalizing narrative" (Lyotard, 1984). Those who insist on their truth nonetheless—fundamentalists—are likely to respond to this threatening cultural surround by growing ever more rigid, ever more ready to strike out at those who disagree with them. The rest of us are left holding on to stories we can no longer justify, but which for that very reason may go underground, more difficult to recognize and acknowledge than ever.

The prevalent loss of faith in the lived story—the inability to justify it in terms of the logic of the appropriate narrative—is precisely what can make systems thinking applied to human systems especially attractive. For if the lived story comes to be reinterpreted as a told story, then it too is an artifice, subject to causal explanation and perhaps even rational reformation. If only, we may imagine, we could develop "systemic wisdom" (G. Bateson, as quoted in Berman, 1984, 258), we could find a way to live with one another and with our environing world. But here we come up against the same problem we have encountered before. Whatever narrative we may adopt, the lived story—even a lived story we can no longer justify in narrative terms, can no longer tell with conviction—remains impermeable to systems analysis, and thus impermeable to change. Shifting and fluid as it responds to the evolving situation of the moment, the lived story at a more basic level it is rigid and unyielding, strongly committed to the fundamental positions and identities around which the web of stories has been woven. In terms of the lived story in an era of contested narratives, there is no such thing as systemic wisdom, only the competing systemic wisdoms of each lived story.

The natural response to this dilemma is to look for ways to create or identify a new lived story or modify the old ones. But how is this to be done, if not through rational analysis? It is a question similar to the question Berman (1984, 290-297) raises about Bateson's (1972) paradigm-breaking Learning III: how can we arrive there, absent a complete conversion to a new story that could as easily lead to fundamentalism as to freedom.

One solution to this problem is to create a new cultural homogeneity: to communicate insistently a narrative that can gradually become a lived story. Advertising, the successor to classical rhetoric, is already busy working at this level, and the popular media does something similar: consider the unifying effects for the relevant community, at least at a superficial level, of a successful sports team, or the impact of megahit televisions shows such as American Idol. Another example, less successful, is the attempt to impose "political correctness." But in a world where so much information

competes for our attention, this approach either drifts inevitably toward the lowest common denominator, to what will appeal to the most people at the simplest level, or is ridiculed as a clumsy attempt at thought-control.[6]

Another solution is to create a new lived story, one that large segments of the population can accept. In recent times, the most sustained attempt to do this is the ecology movement, insofar as it seeks to redefine being human as standing in a stewardship relation to the earth. There is no doubt that this approach has had some success, perhaps because it appeals to the lived dimensions of human being (the simple power of encounters with nature). Whether it can hold its own when it comes into conflict with other lived stories that focus more on self as consumer, etc. remains to be seen.

Here I want to consider a third approach, consistent with the focus on "knowing within the story" that I developed above. If we can understand the story from within the story, if we can analyze the story systemically without stepping outside the story, the prospect opens that we can give up our commitment to the content of the story. This can happen without changing our story (though the very act of knowing, arising within the story, will work some sort of change) or adopting a new one. In effect, we are trading on the fluidity of story-structures to undermine their concurrent rigidity. And we are using our own capacity to know systemically to do so.[7]

When we are no longer committed to the content of the story, we are ready to ready to let that story merge with the stories of others. We have created a basis for interaction among cultures and for individual representatives of those cultures. Such interaction happens not by learning to accept the prima facie validity of the stories told by the other, but by letting go of the claims made by our own stories. It is an openness that emerges from within.

A good metaphor for such an openness, based on the notion that each lived story is its own world, is the image of a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 1986). I have discussed elsewhere (Petranker 2005) how such a fusion can come about. For our purposes the key point is that a fusion of horizons does not depend on abandoning or even modifying our particular lived story, but rather on letting go of its claim to be decisivean authoritative. The shift is ontological, for it has to do with the status of the way things are. It comes about by activating a knowing from within. In some cases this may happen through challenging specific aspects of the story. More fundamentally, however, it happens simply through learning to appreciate the story as story.

A person ready to see her own most fundamental stories in operation, to know them from within, is ready to be a citizen of a multicultural and postmodern society, one in which no story commands complete loyalty from all, but core stories continue to operate at deep, unacknowledged levels. If that is the sort of citizen we want and need, there are clear and immediate implications for education in a democracy. It is not enough to accept diversity. Instead, we must educate citizens to tune in to the stories they live, both personally and culturally. This will involve a three-step process. First, they should gain skill in the kind of analysis that makes those stories available to inquiry. Second, they should learn to experience stories from within, in all their depth and multiple layering. Finally, they should move beyond their truth claims, ready to accept that others live stories that are different. It is this third step, of course, that is vital. My claim, which remains to be investigated, is that it will come about naturally as members of society learn to know from within the story. For it is only narratives that insist on their truth. The lived story, experienced as story, makes no claims at all. It only sets up a world. And worlds imbued with the kind of inner knowing I have been exploring here are inherently available to fuse with the worlds—the stories—of others.

Conclusion

Ervin Laszlo (1972b, 10-15) has suggested that systems thinking, in breaking with mechanistic reductionist science, did not reject it; rather, it simply moved on, motivated by the fact that there were new areas of knowledge to be investigated for which the old approaches could not effectively be applied.

What I am suggesting is that when it comes to human systems, a similar move may be necessary. Systems thinking has not developed a good way to get at the withinness of human experience. But in focusing on the lived story, we are inviting into the within something very like a systems approach. Knowledge 'within' the lived story depends precisely on approaches that mirror and to some extent enact the insights of systems thinking. To me, this suggests that systems thinking can be extended into the realm of experience . . . in a way that stays true to what goes on in experience. Expanded in this way, systems thinking can be a vital tool in extending inquiry into a new area of knowledge, one that democratic theory in our time badly needs.

How a "story-systems thinking" could be used to help create the democracies our times demand depends in part on how we understand the functioning of society. If the role of society is to instill virtue, an education that undermines commitment to the (unexperienced) lived story can be a vital tool, first because it naturally promotes equality, freedom, and tolerance, and second because it invites a personal inquiry into moral issues and concerns that is unwilling to settle for presupposed answers to the questions that most concern us.

It is possible that society can do even more. Suppose the aim of our great democracies were to make of its citizens better people (Norton, 1991). Here too knowledge from within has something important to offer. When as individuals we understand more clearly how we craft our identity through the stories we live, we gain the freedom to craft different stories, and ultimately to discover how stories are the very fabric of our existence. We bring to light what prereflectively remains in the dark, and we do so without relying on the narrative turn of consciousness to "control" the inhabited story of our lives.

Neither instilling morality nor encouraging greater self-knowledge are usually considered value aims for democratic systems tody. No doubt this is due in part to the perceived difficulty of instilling or enforcing morality when lived stories are in conflict, to the risk of authoritarianism. But knowing from within may offer another way to foster these aims, a way to promote values in a world where values are inevitably contested. If a story-systems "knowing from within" could encourage keeping such possibilities open for everyone, it would be making a substantial contribution to our circumstances and our time.

Notes

1. Bateson in his early anthropological work made a similar distinction, drawn from the writings of the anthropologist Ruth Benedict. As described in Berman (1984, 200-201) he distinguished between the ethos of a culture—its general emotive tone—and its eidos, or underlying cognitive system. For evidence that non-Western cultures place much more emphasis on the ethos than the the eidos—the story rather than the narrative—see Keeney (2005).

2. Tulku does not explicity separate the told story (narrative) from the lived story, as I do here. His contribution, fundamental to my own thinking, is to clearly identify the lived story and its role is shaping and limiting experience.

3. My favorite example for clarifying this point involves the claim that the earth circles the sun, rather than the other way round. Scientifically speaking we know this to be true, but in terms of the lived story, we know that the sun rises each day in the east and continues across the sky until it sets in the west. It would be possible with some effort to change this partucular lived story, and I have read of scientists who say they have done so, but the point remains: to know at the narrative level that the facts are one way does not mean knowing the same thing at the level of the lived story.

4. The multiple layers of the lived story may suggest avenues of inquiry for systems analysis, and vice-versa. For instance, my emotional state will affect the specifics of the way I breathe, such as the movement of the diaphragm and the openness of the throat. Recognizing this from within helps define the system to be analyzed; specifying it from without suggest new layers of withinness to investigate.

5. Of course, members of a government bureaucracy may develop their own shared culture. That is, government may become an environment with which cultures specific to that environment evolve their own lived stories. This happens as well within corporations, and indeed in any group.

6. For an illuminating analysis of the media (i.e., the poets) of Hellenic Greece that understands them to be performing just this role, see Havelock (1967). Havelock's account helps clarify why Plato in *The Republic* was so firm about rejecting poets from his ideal state; more generally, it sheds light on the process through which the told story (narrative) can shape and reinforce the lived story. When the told story transforms the lived story in such a way that the transformation is integral to the telling (or performing), we are inclined to call that telling art. Compare Berman (1984, ch. 9).

7. This emphasis on fluidity stands in sharp contrast to Bateson's (1972a) reflections on the effectiveness of Alcoholics Anonymous in bringing about Learning III. The alcoholic is living a story that has become increasingly rigid in the face of information inconsistent with it. Eventually, the strain grows too great, and the story/system that shapes the alcoholic's life cracks, allowing for conversion to a new lived story.

An alternative analysis is that the alcoholic's narrative ("I can control my drinking") comes into increasing conflict with the story of the alcoholic's life. Eventually the tension leads to a conversion: the alcoholic tells a new story ("I am an alcoholic"), and the new clarity that this story allows makes possible a fundamental shift in the lived story. For more on this interplay between narrative and story, which figures prominently in talk-therapies; for more, see Petranker (2003).

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