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WRITING AND THE DISEMBODIMENT OF LANGUAGE

I

As is well known, the study of writing in relation to speech played an important part in opening the door to poststructuralist theory, especially in the seminal works of Jacques Derrida.[1] Taking off from his rereading of Saussurean structuralism, Derrida famously made the deconstructive case that reversed and then dissolved the ancient understanding of writing as the secondary, parasitic representation of the authentic signs of spoken language. But the question may well be asked: How will our understanding of writing and speech change if we take off from a nonrelativistic theory of representation? For it is from a thoroughly relativized theory of signs that poststructuralist theory and its derivatives all one way or the other begin. We will look at this in more detail below, but for now suffice it to say that this kind of theory always takes it that representation precedes the real in a fundamental way. No natural relationship exists between any sign and its referent. Given this fundamental disjunction as a foundation, the various theories lead to the practical work of explaining how signification does manage to occur. For example, meaning is a function of logocentrism in Derrida; desire in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory; discourse in theory after Foucault; ideology in the various new historicisms; and so on. In contrast to these understandings of representation, cognitive linguistics—I will use this broad term to include findings from the related but differentiated subfields of cognitive semantics, cognitive grammar, cognitive rhetoric—claims that at least on a very fundamental level semantics always *precedes* any actual manifestation of language, which is to say meaning precedes representation. This is because a foundational

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level of universal *concepts* arises from biologically determined *percepts*. According to this view, crucial, general kinds of meaning are a function not of discourse or power but of the evolution of the human organism in the ecosystem of the third planet from the sun.[2]

In order to see how the cognitive linguistic arguments run, we will take an example from George Lakoff's *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*. Lakoff brings in the work of cognitive anthropologist Eleanor Rosch in order to explain the way categorization functions in our perceptual interaction with the world. Rosch's findings, obtained through empirical studies using standard scientific methods, strongly suggest that human experience in its most general sense is "preconceptually structured" by our innate ability to categorize according to base-level prototypes (p. 270). Humans, even children as young as two years old, have a kind of gestalt cognitive process that tends to be oriented toward certain objects and features of the world, such that these objects and features—called cognitive reference points or prototypes—are universally "known," apart from culture and language. An example of this would be the response to primary colors as opposed to secondary colors. Rosch showed that even members of cultures lacking words for the primary colors found it easier to learn names for those colors than for secondary colors (pp. 40–41). We are, it appears, cognitively attuned to the primary colors. Further, we are cognitively constructed so as to sort colors automatically by gradations away from or closer to the primary colors. Culture will of course teach us certain beliefs about colors, but we do not "learn" to respond and operate on this basic level of perception.

In the next step of the argument, we find that our "basic-level concepts correspond to [this] preconceptual structure" (p. 270). That is, in considering ourselves as linguistic creatures, we find that thinking or conceptuality also operates according to prototypes. Again, this is held to be true only of specifiable basic-level concepts. Though concepts that arise in cultural life may possibly "impose further structuring on what we experience," nonetheless, "basic experiential structures are present regardless of any such imposition of [learned] concepts" (p. 271). Evolutionarily, language would have to emerge after these innate perceptual structures. Language as a representation would also depend heavily on prototype categorization, not because of the beliefs and values of a certain culture but because of our cognitive architecture. A major consequence of all this, then, is that when

language does appear, semantics (that is, meaning) is already anchored in this bodily conceptuality. In short, there exists a universal core of signifiers that have a natural relationship to signifieds.

On his own and together with Mark Johnson, Lakoff makes plain that these cognitive universals set only a foundation for the immense variety of human knowledge and belief. Nonetheless, if we accept the validity of these particular kinds of universals, then there will be large implications for central claims of poststructuralist-derived theory. For instance, if language is what amounts to an instinct and if we have a base of linguistic concepts that are biologically given, then it seems difficult to sustain the poststructuralist idea that language is essentially traumatic, that language paradoxically separates human beings from the real in order to give them access to the real. This is the general understanding of the desire of language as found for instance in Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva, and others. But given cognitive linguistics, coming into language in general (as opposed to any specific language) would be coming into *human* being in the way that, say, certain kinds of young birds come into their species' song. Entry into language for a human, presumably, would be as natural as any other developmental stage, even though it would have its own difficulties as a development.

But the same would not hold for writing. Writing, as teachers at all levels well know, must be forced upon people. Humans do not move of inner necessity into writing in the way that they move of inner necessity into speech. Writing is an artifice, a technology created by linguistic beings for specific purposes. But as with many human inventions, writing has certain unplanned effects upon those who have invented it. These effects have been studied for some time now by scholars such as Walter Ong, Elizabeth Eisenstein, Eric Havelock, David Olson, Jack Goody, and others. Now Derrida has considered at length writing in relation to linguistic theory, though of course he always distinguishes between his version of "writing" and the "vulgar" meaning of writing, which would be the meaning most of us take for granted. Still, he begins with a consideration of the vulgar meaning in order to go on to enlarge the concept of writing. What most distinguishes him from these other thinkers on writing and speech is that he always takes off from a radicalization of the definitions of arbitrariness and difference established in Saussure's linguistic theory, which is, of course, the move that makes him a poststructuralist. Derrida's critique of logocentrism depends on the (unacknowledged) conviction in earlier linguistic theory of an "absolute privilege to the [spoken] word" (1976, p. 31), and on

Saussure's conviction that the signifier could have no "'natural attachment' to the signified within reality" (1976, p. 46). All of Derrida's major claims, all of his "non-concepts," such as différance, the trace, the supplement, etc., depend on an initial commitment to the fact that signification is from top to bottom purely a function of systematic differences between arbitrary signifiers; by extension, the same holds true for poststructuralism and all its derivatives. Unlike Saussure, he refuses to curtail the genie of difference once it is let out of its bottle. Signification is thoroughly relativized.[3]

But if cognitive linguistics explains, at least, the core of language, then signification is not thoroughly and purely a function of difference. As a result, many of the general conclusions Derrida arrives at through his consideration of writing will not stand. In fact, some of his most important claims will hold *only* for writing as a technology, rather than for language in general, which is where his thinking always takes him. For instance, in *Of Grammatology* and elsewhere, Derrida discusses the anxious way that linguistic theory had always understood the relationship of speech to writing, in which writing was taken to be somehow a negative encroachment—a parasite, a threat, what have you—upon the authenticity of speech. In brief, he argues that writing has always been repressed in relation to speech, and that if we analyze this repression we will discover that speech, and language and therefore identity in general, are ungrounded, decentered, and inherently disunified as a result of the comprehensive arbitrariness of signification. Such conclusions have typically led to analyses of the various ways in which actual disunity can appear as unity, and to subsequent claims about what is at stake, about who or what is being secretly preserved by this necessary illusion. But this strong idea of arbitrariness, foundational to poststructuralism, will not really stand if the findings of cognitive linguistics are true. So the "repression" of writing in relation to speech is historical fact; but if we find cognitive linguistics convincing, then we cannot move from this fact to claims about language and identity in general. This does not, however, mean that writing has no effects upon identity at all.

Writing, we have said, is a technology. But we might more rightly say that it is the technology of technologies, a "pre-emptive and imperialist activity," as Walter Ong puts it,[4] because it affects so fundamentally the way most if not all other technologies appear and evolve. Because it enables storage, preservation, and accuracy, writing promotes all manner of change in human life. Elizabeth Eisenstein and David Olson, for

instance, have in their different ways argued that writing was an indispensable, perhaps the single most important, enabler of modernity itself. Eric Havelock has argued that writing played a primary role in the constitution of what we now take to be the self. Jack Goody and Ong have made equally large claims about writing's effects on thinking, cognition, and such immense historical forces as scientific versions of objectivity.[5] In fact, by enforcing the pressure for newness, writing seems above all to help institute change as a cultural and psychological norm. Most importantly, writing induces us to think differently about language. Just as a visual representation of the world, say a painting or photograph, leads us to view not just visible reality, but the nature of seeing in a different way than before, so writing leads us to view not just the content of language but language itself in a different way than before. In other words, once we have writing, we are able to see language as an object of consciousness. But making language an object of consciousness in this way has different consequences than does transforming other parts of the world into objects of consciousness, for language is not just any old part of the world. Language, most people would agree, is essential to identity. The appearance of language as an object of thought means, in effect, the disappearance of language as what amounts to the simple expression of the self, because the obvious unity of speaker and speech gets, at least on paper, broken up. As Walter Ong asserts, "Enhanced separation of the known from the knower is probably the most fundamental value of writing, from its beginnings to the present. Between knower and known writing interposes a visible and tangible object, the text. The objectivity of the text helps impose objectivity on what the text refers to" (1986, p. 38). So if the "known" is language, which is so intimately involved with the self, then we have the separation of the "knower," who of course must also be the self, from that by which the self is primordially constituted: language.

The objectification of language by writing, then, can entail the disruption of self-identity, but it matters to be as precise as possible about this disruption. If language in general is not essentially arbitrary, then writing produces only a separation of the heretofore purely oral self from its immersion in what amounts to a natural state of orality. Just here is where Derrida and poststructuralist linguistics run into problems. Because of the commitment to semantic relativity, consideration of writing in relation to speech leads to the conclusion that language as the paradigmatic form of representation operates with respect to

identity *in general* as I have just argued that writing operates with respect to orality in general. In other words, poststructuralist linguistics concludes that the self is purely a function of an unanchored system of signs and that, therefore, the self is split in its essence between the realm of signs and the realm of the real. Any kind of apparent unity or, more commonly, self-identity, then, is an illusion, a repression of the actual state of affairs. But deconstruction does not reveal the truth about language and signification in general. Derrida's key concepts (again, such as différance, the trace, arche-writing) are logical necessities about language in general only so long as he can deny what cognitive linguistics has to say about language.

II

Evolutionary theory provides another, related understanding of language that tends to work against a thoroughly relativized theory of signification.[6] If cognitive linguistics can offset relativism by establishing a literal core of language, evolutionary theory can do much the same by establishing language as a naturally selected ability. Poststructuralism always wants to show how representation—paradigmatically, linguistic representation—is always of its nature failing to achieve the desired fit between signifier and signified, the satisfaction of communicative desire, we might say. From the poststructuralist perspective, this structural failure keeps language and therefore identity going, though always unsatisfactorily. But since no one denies that communication does happen, then the failure to satisfy communicative desire must mean the failure to achieve a perfect fit between word and intended meaning. Now if we agree that language is an evolved ability, that language at its core is anchored in genetics and human biology, then to speak of language *in general* failing to achieve this perfect fit is to misunderstand how language or any adaptive feature works. An already successful adaptation can only fail if the environment changes in a manner such that the adaptation becomes detrimental. For example, an adaptive protective coloring can always possibly fail to conceal an animal in a given instance. An adaptive optical ability can possibly fail to see some specific danger coming. But the coloration or the eye itself as genetic endowments cannot be said to fail because of these contingent mishaps. Both in fact do fit the material moments of existence with the kind of exactitude that counts, which is why they were selected. Why would the same not be the case at least in a general way for language as

an adaptive ability? That is, as wings are an adequate means of being in the air for birds, gills are an adequate means of being underwater for fish, eyes are an adequate means of seeing for any creature in a world lit by the sun and moon, so spoken language must be an adequate means of being in the world for humans. Oral language, we must assume, fits human beings to their reality with much the same precision as any other successful adaptation. However, no adaptation works with anything like mechanical precision because, being maladaptive, such inflexibility would be deselected. But the imprecision that *is* an aspect of orality will look like failure or in any case serious inadequacy, precisely, *from the perspective of writing*. Just this is one of the effects of writing as a technology: it tends, like other technologies, to make its original source or model seem inadequate by comparison.

Further, if we understand language through cognitive linguistics and evolutionary psychology, then speech-act theory takes on a new kind of weight. Speech-act theory wants to explain how language actually works as communication between people. The accomplishment of the desire of spoken language will always be a function not solely of words but of the interaction of words, bodies, and material and social contexts. Needless to say, a given speech act can fail to communicate what the speaker wants, but even then the act itself has been existentially successful. It will not have been an inadequacy of language in general that has caused the failure, but rather a contingent failure to generate adequate words in the right way at the right time. Of course, it is an everyday human experience to feel our words failing at times. But it does not necessarily follow that language in and of itself can never adequately satisfy the desire to communicate. Speech-act theory, then, is as adequate an explanation as we are likely to get of the actual functioning of spoken language. Not surprisingly, Derrida felt it necessary to attack speech-act theory in laying out his relativistic theory of signification.

All this brings us to a major question for poststructuralist-derived theories. If language has a literal basis; if language is anchored in the body and the earth's environment; if, further, language's nature and efficacy must be assessed in ways similar to the assessment of other adaptive abilities; then what becomes of that other central concept of poststructuralism, the essential lack of presence? It is hard to see how this idea could stand without the thoroughly relativized sign. In fact, we must conclude that spoken language is just the fullness of presence to and with others that humans can possibly experience. Writing, on the other hand, though it has certain powerful capabilities lacking in

spoken language, crucially lacks the fullness of presence we may experience in speech acts.

Of course, poststructuralism can, conceivably, insist on its understanding of signification and claim that cognitive linguistics has always already forgotten or repressed the difference between signifier and signified. But one way or the other, sooner or later, the issue of claims about language arising from cognitive science and evolutionary psychology will have to be dealt with directly.

Now I want to argue that the same kind of thing that happens when we bring cognitive linguistics to bear on poststructuralism, writing, and language also happens with respect to writing and story. If we take the understanding of signs that is most famously associated with poststructuralism, then we can go on to explain all manner of human representations in much the same way that Derrida explains language in general. But some representations, such as narrative, are more important than others. To investigate narrative in a poststructuralist mode, we would take off from the idea that structures of representation precede and determine the real rather than the other way around. With this idea as a beginning, we can show that narrative does not act as a conceptual expression of the human animal's perception of events in time. Rather, narrative is a form of discourse that determines how human beings know time at all. And since that discourse, like any other, has no natural relation to the real, then human temporality, which is so essential to being human, is a kind of necessary illusion. From this premise, we could analyze how narrative generates the necessary illusion of temporal coherence from an actually unstructured reality.

But if we think in terms of a cognitive narrativity, that is, of narrative in its most basic form as a constitutive element of the human cognitive apparatus, as has been argued by Jerome Bruner and Mark Turner, for instance (not to mention the claims of Damasio, Dennett, and the like for narrative structures on the physiological level), then the human animal will have a nonrelativistic baseline understanding of narrative, and the consequences will be much the same as they are for deconstruction.[7] That is, many of the theories of narrative within literary criticism that have come to be so forceful in the past thirty years, which by and large take off from or create poststructuralist understandings of signification, are in fact only true of written narrative, though they are nearly always generalized to narrative as such. Typically, this generalization will not stand up, for we may claim that storytelling in its most basic sense is as natural for human beings as mating behavior, or

food-gathering behavior, or language. As Steven Pinker has written a book on *The Language Instinct*, so some one could write a book called *The Narrative Instinct*, because narrative as a cognitive endowment precedes any particular story that is told or written.

But then, what of the case of written narrative? If writing has the cognitive effects that have been attributed to it by Ong, Goody, Olson, and others, then what will all this mean for written narrative? If writing in general reveals language in general as a kind of object, then will written narrative reveal narrativity as a kind of object? If writing in general separates humans in a way from their natural unity with orality, then will written narrative separate humans from their natural unity with story? And will we find a confusion between written story, oral story, and story in general similar to the confusion between writing, speech, and language that we have found in poststructuralist linguistic theory? In short, what consequences will writing as a technology have for narrative?

III

Having laid out the issues, let us now step out of the realm of theory proper and look at an example of narrative, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, in order to see how the questions above may be answered.[8] *The Waves* makes a likely choice here because it deals so directly with the situation of creating stories. Woolf's novel is unusual by any generic standards. Though it has a beginning, middle, and end, it does not really have much of what could be called a plot. If anything, it has the linear form of a chronicle. In one way, it reads entirely as a written record of spoken words. Six named characters alternate speaking, always in the present tense and always in quotations. An omniscient narrator is present in only two ways: as the "speaker" of the brief, italicized, poetically descriptive introductory passages to each of the nine chapters, and as the connecting "voice," the "Bernard said" or "Rhoda said" between speeches. And yet though we have "actual" speech always in present tense, we also have the passage of several decades in the characters' lives over the course of the novel. Given all this, much may be said about the relationship between the novel's form, spoken language, and writing. But I want to look specifically at the character Bernard. As Howard Harper has noted, the novel "favors Bernard from the beginning, and at last seems to embody itself in him entirely."[9] Further, Bernard is Woolf's most elaborate portrait of a writer.

Though a writer, Bernard is more important for what he thinks about his art than for any art he actually produces. And what he thinks of, for the most part, has to do with how his writing fails. He is represented as a born storyteller, the telling of stories having been his primary characteristic from childhood on. Interestingly, he describes himself as if he has his own theory of cognitive linguistics and narrativity: he says that he was born "knowing that one word follows another." He spends his life "finding sequences everywhere," even when he tries not to (p. 267). But from the beginning, he also seems to confuse the oral with the written. For instance, at one point Bernard is on the train to the university when a stranger gets into the car. "I instinctively dislike the sense of his presence," Bernard says, because until words have been spoken, the man is "cold, unassimilated." Bernard thinks next of his "collection of valuable observations upon the true nature of human life." These constitute a book not yet written, one intended to get all the world into writing so as to provide material for a novel. "My book," he thinks, "will certainly run to many volumes embracing every known variety of man and woman. I fill my mind with whatever happens to be the contents of a room or a railway carriage as one fills a fountain pen in an inkpot." Here we see an abrupt shift from description in writing ("My book") to description in what must be interior speech ("my mind") through an image of writing, as if there is no significant difference between the two linguistic activities. Simultaneously, Bernard still needs the spoken word between himself and the stranger. "A smoke ring issues from my lips (about crops) and circles him, bringing him into contact. The human voice has a disarming quality—(we are not single, we are one)." Even though the talk has been entirely casual, typical of the specific social situation, the voice effects contact and unification.

Writing cannot hope to unify in this way. Along with the chat, Bernard silently, in the way of writing, begins to "furbish [the traveler] up and make him concrete," to think of the man as a character in a written narrative: "He is indulgent as a husband but not faithful; a small builder who employs a few men. In local society he is important; is already a councillor, and perhaps in time will be mayor. He wears a large ornament, like a double tooth torn up by the roots, made of coral, hanging at his watch-chain. Walter J. Trumble is the sort of name that would fit him. He has been in America, on a business trip with his wife, and a double room in a smallish hotel cost him a whole month's wages" (pp. 221–22). Clearly, this is writerly language, and more precisely,

novelistic language. It is silent, phrased differently than everyday speech, and carries references to unknowable pasts and futures as well as to the present. And just this makes the man "concrete." Rendering the man into the form of written fiction, it appears, solidifies the man, makes him an object, and somehow removes him from the verbal circle in which he had just been enclosed. What we never get in the scene is the actual spoken language that Bernard has used to draw the man into contact. The distinctions between the spoken and the written in these passages do not appear to be understood by Bernard. He simply moves back and forth between speech and writing as if they are the same. But this lack of awareness plagues him. It must be admitted that failing or neglecting to notice the difference between writing and speech is hardly unusual or even avoidable. By "saying" that Bernard "says" this or that, I'm doing it constantly as I write. But in certain instances the difference cannot be left out. I would argue that the otherwise convincing ideas of, for instance, Mary Louise Pratt and Richard Ohmann on speech-act theory and the novel fail from the outset because of a lack of attention to this fact. The same holds at times in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin.[10] In any case, Bernard is Woolf's great image of a writer, and this confusion is the conflict that, unknown to him, drives his story, so in a way Woolf's novel is about the issues I'm "discussing."

Bernard cannot manage an ending of his little story of the man in the train, and this is true of literally every story he begins. In this case, the train stops and interrupts him before he is done. "These are the things," he says, "that forever interrupt the process upon which I am eternally engaged of finding some perfect phrase that fits this very moment exactly" (p. 222). And just this desire—to find the perfect phrase that fits exactly the real—and its disappointment are direct effects of writing upon storytelling. Strictly speaking, the failure to match the phrase to the material reality is only a problem for the literate storyteller. Observational precision of the kind Bernard wants is alien both to the primary orality of thoroughly nonliterate cultures, as well as to the secondary, everyday orality of literate cultures (Ong 1982, p. 136). Orality in general does not worry about such precision because it does not need it. Contexts and an immediately present human audience remove the need for that kind of exactitude except in very specialized situations—a courtroom trial, a marriage ceremony, etc.—and those situations then become as much like written as spoken language. To repeat what we have said above, spoken language works

with the kind of precision it needs in order to carry out its adaptive function. But with the advent of writing and the kind of precision that writing enables, speech and therefore language in general will constantly appear to fail to be adequate to communicative desire. But paradoxically, it is writing that *must* fail as storytelling to one degree or another, at least when compared to an oral story considered as a speech act, which in evolutionary terms is the paradigm model of storytelling. The very fact that writing of its nature decontextualizes language means that writing cannot hope to have the communicative efficacy of a speech act. Similarly, a written story cannot hope to have the communicative efficacy of an oral story. Bernard does not appear to see that he has conflated a relative failure of writing in relation to speech with a failure of language in general.

We must recall that decontextualization generates at once the success and the failure of writing as a technology. Often enough, the material context that gets lost with writing produces powerful new ways of thinking. The kind of objectivity required by the sciences, for instance, was enabled historically in part by this aspect of writing (Olson, p. 171). But still, the failures of the technology pose a dilemma for the novelist. We see this in another example from *The Waves*, when Bernard is again trying to get a story "told." "Let me fill my mind with imaginary pictures," he says (p. 229), and then goes on to give a clearly novelistic description of a stay in the countryside, including spoken "quotes" from an unnamed, imaginary woman. After some lines of description, he says, "I can sketch the surroundings up to a point with extraordinary ease. But can I make it work? Can I hear her voice—the precise tone with which, when we are alone, she says 'Bernard'?" (p. 230). Of course the answer to this question is "no." To "sketch the surroundings" sounds on the surface like simply giving descriptive information, one of the communicative functions in which writing can at times be superior to speech. But Bernard wants to convey felt experience. So the sketch, even as simple description, can only, at best, work up to a point. And the failure gets driven home just in trying to capture the precise tone of her speaking voice in writing. The more he feels the need to get that kind of precision, the more he will feel the failure of his writing. Expecting written narrative to achieve the speech-act fullness of oral story would be like expecting an extraordinarily detailed, even infinitely detailed, written choreography to achieve the physical fullness of not just the dance but the entire dance performance itself, which of course includes the effects of viewers. Ironically enough, then, writing,

which has the capacity for much finer precision of a certain kind than everyday language, cannot hope to equal the communicative precision of a verbal speech act.

So once again, Bernard feels a powerful failure in the endeavor to which he is most committed. A couple of lines later he says: "The real novelist, the perfectly simple human being, could go on indefinitely, imagining. He would not integrate, as I do" (p. 230). Here the confusion of writing and speech comes across with a certain nostalgia that is endemic to literate culture. The "real" novelist in this image cannot in fact be a novelist at all. Instead, Bernard envisions an archetypal oral storyteller, perhaps even a child ("perfectly simple human being") before he or she has been educated into the modes of written story. Writing as a technology pushes narrative to a more and more elaborate attempt to simulate the communicative fullness of speech acts. This is one explanation for the explosion of detailed description that initiates the novel as a genre. To hope to represent a speech act in writing, we need not just the spoken words but the fullness of context in space and time. Historically, one result of this is the steady emergence of more complex texts, and a steadily increasing need for more subtle nuances of material and psychological context—all subsumed under this the constant requirement to "integrate" everything into a whole. But just these necessities move the writer further and further away from the paradigm upon which the written story is modeled. The confusion of written story and oral story appears nowhere more strongly than in this example from *The Waves*, wherein Bernard fails to see that by "real novelist" he must in fact mean oral storyteller.

If cognitive theory is correct in claiming that narrative is part of our cognitive architecture, then we have established one of the most fundamental elements of our being, for narrativity would be the *ur*-schema of apprehending identity, including self-identity in time. We have discussed above how a confusion of the relationship of writing to speech leads to radical concepts of disunity and indeterminacy in which meaning and identity in general become entirely relativized. In *The Waves*, we see how the same thing happens with respect to story as such. All of the characters in the novel (as in Woolf's novels generally) experience fundamental kinds of psychological uncertainty that they deal with in their various ways, Bernard's way being the attempted creation of stories. But far from being "the most effective answer to ontological insecurity" (Harper, p. 240), his search for the one story

always leaves him in despair. Over the course of the novel and especially over the course of the last chapter, Bernard comes to a crisis about the nature of narrative. As an older man he is vacationing in Rome alone. He says: "I have made up thousands of stories; I have filled innumerable notebooks with phrases to be used when I have found the true story, the one story to which all these phrases refer. But I have never yet found that story. And I begin to ask: Are there stories?" (pp. 305–6). Now he has come around to questioning not just his ability as a particular storyteller but the very notion of narrative itself. Given the running confusion between the nature of oral and written story, the "one true story" must be the impossible ideal of a written narrative that reaches the fullness of oral storytelling. Just after this passage, he turns and looks out to the view from his terrace. As before, he describes in novelistic detail the scene before him, including the invention of motives and thoughts for the people he sees at a distance. Having begun this imaginary story, he stops and asks, "But why impose my arbitrary design? Why stress and shape this and that and twist up little figures like the toys men sell in trays in the street? Why select this out of all that,—one detail?" (p. 306).

IV

I have argued that writing disembodies orality, that this disembodiment gets unjustifiably generalized to the disembodiment of language in general, thereby making language appear as a kind of object in the world. Analogously, written narrative disembodies oral story, but this is misconstrued as disembodying story in general, thereby making story appear as a kind of object in the world. Seeing language as a historical and material object leads, perhaps inevitably, toward seeing language as a purely arbitrary construction. In this sense, the objectification of language goes hand-in-hand with linguistic relativity. Similarly, Bernard has come inexorably to see arbitrariness at the core of story. Later he wonders: "But if there are no stories, what end can there be, or what beginning? Life is not susceptible perhaps to the treatment we give it when we try to tell it" (p. 362). Story in general begins to appear as a contrived means for enforcing an illusory order in an existence which in fact has no order. This kind of idea is of course central to much of recent narrative theory, as well as to a more general understanding of narrative since modernism. But though a particular narrative might be arbitrary in some specifiable way, if what Bruner, Turner, and a number

of others have said is true, then narrative ordering is an innate element of human cognition, not an arbitrary enforcement of meaning out of chaos. Still, as happens with writing and language in poststructuralist theory, because narrative is fundamental to the self, this extreme doubt about narrative immediately becomes an extreme doubt about identity.

So Bernard's crisis about story as such becomes a crisis about self as such. One day, out of the blue he slips into one of those suspended moments of being for which Woolf is so famous. "A space," he says, "was cleared in my mind." In this moment, he experiences a disunification and loss of self-identity. "I addressed myself as one would speak to a companion with whom one is voyaging to the North Pole." But "[this] self now . . . made no answer. He attempted no phrase" (pp. 373–74). The imagery here has to do with a verbal speech act between two "people," though it is in fact between two selves of the same body. Throughout these last pages of the novel, Woolf confuses things by having Bernard refer to a not-quite-defined "you," who it seems is Bernard himself. In this first image of self-division, the self that does not or cannot become an originating subject in the speech act turns out to have been Bernard the writer, the "self" who all along has worked at making (written) phrases. The moment of clarity continues with only the speaking self remaining in all its fullness: "'Immeasurably receptive, holding everything, trembling with fullness, yet clear, contained—so my being seems, now that desire urges it no more out and away; now that curiosity no longer dyes it a thousand colours. It lies deep, tideless, immune, now that he is dead, the man I call 'Bernard,' the man who kept a book in his pocket in which he made notes—phrases for the moon, notes of features; how people looked, turned, dropped their cigarette ends; under B, butterfly powder, under D, ways of naming death" (p. 379). The doubt about story has led to the "death" of the novelist, the writer of narratives, and a consequent monumentalizing of the self of speech acts.

But apart from the inevitable failure of rendering the oral self in writing, there can be no simply getting beyond literacy once it has done its work. Writing changes cognition itself, the way we successfully apprehend our world, and we cannot somehow back out of that change once it has happened. Just after the death of this "Bernard," Bernard once again launches into a series of imaginary novelistic descriptions of precisely the same kind he has performed all along. Then further on, we read: "'My book, stuffed with phrases, has dropped to the floor . . .

What is the phrase for the moon? And the phrase for love? By what name are we to call death? I do not know. I need a little language such as lovers use, words of one syllable such as children speak when they come into the room and find their mother sewing and pick up some scrap of bright wool, a feather, or a shred of chintz. I need a howl; a cry. When the storm comes across the marsh and sweeps over me where I lie in the ditch unregarded I need no words'" (pp. 382–83). Bernard feels that his writing, the book stuffed with phrases, fails. But to explain the failure, he turns to a speech act, a conversation between two intimate people, lovers in fact. Writing will necessarily seem to fail when compared in this way to a speech act, just as, conversely, speech will necessarily fail when compared to writing in other ways. But because Bernard is operating from the literate perspective and yet fails to see that written language and speech acts are not comparable, he is led on to create distinctions within verbal communication of the same type he has just made between writing and conversation. In other words, having failed to allow for the fundamental divide between writing and speech, he then automatically generalizes to the failure of language in general, arriving through what seems inexorable logic to the conclusion that only silence ("no words") can be authentic expression.[11]

On the one hand, if we keep in mind the significant differences between speech and writing, then this logic will not be so inexorable after all. Between writing on the one end and silence or noncommunication on the other lies the realm of speech acts, the paradigmatic human communication. But on the other hand, though I have not thoroughly argued the case here, I suspect that this logical sequence has a certain necessity to it on both the microcosmic level of *The Waves* and the macrocosmic level of history, including the ascent of poststructuralist linguistics. To state the case most strongly: the arrival at the relativistic misconception of language must come out of the history of writing as a technology, and the arrival at the relativistic misconception of narrative must come out of the history of written narrative. In other words, it may be that, given the nature of writing in relation to speech, once you have writing, you will inevitably come to have written narrative; and once you have written narrative, you will inevitably come to have a relativistic understanding of story.[12]

In summary, if cognitive linguistics and cognitive narrativity carry the implications for writing and speech that I have been considering, then our most recently built houses of relativism will turn out to rest on a

shared foundation that does not really support their weight. The building of those houses may have been a historical necessity, but now it may be time to build again, on different foundations.

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1. These include *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays of Husserl's Theory of Signs* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973); *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

2. The cognitive bases for language have been argued from a number of different angles. In linguistics, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson emphasize the metaphorical nature of language. See *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); *Philosophy in the Flesh* (New York: Basic, 1999); and George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Works on cognitive grammar include Ronald Langacker, *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); Bernd Heine's *Cognitive Foundations of Grammar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Gilles Fauconnier's *Mental Spaces: Aspects of Meaning Construction in Natural Language* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985). Leonard Talmy's *Toward a Cognitive Semantics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000) is the most famous example of the study of cognitive semantics. Most prominent in the broadly defined area of cognitive rhetoric is Mark Turner's *Reading Minds: The Study of English in the Age of Cognitive Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) and *The Literary Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Finally, cognitive anthropology includes Scott Atran, *Cognitive Foundations of Natural History* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990) and Roy Andrade, *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

3. For a critique of Derrida's understanding of speech and writing, similar to my own, see Jack Goody's *The Power of the Written Tradition* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), pp. 109–18.

4. Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Metheun, 1982), p. 12.

5. Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); David Olson, *The World on Paper: The Conceptual and Cognitive Implications of Writing and Reading* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Eric Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), *The*

Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), and *The Power of the Written Tradition* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000); Walter Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), and "Writing Is a Technology That Restructures Thought," in *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

6. For language as an evolved ability see, for example, Terrence Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997); Philip Lieberman, *Uniquely Human: The Evolution of Speech, Thought, and Selfless Behavior* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991); John McCrone, *The Ape That Spoke: Language and the Evolution of the Human Mind* (New York: William Morrow, 1991); and Derek Bickerton and William Calvin, *Lingua ex Machina : Reconciling Darwin and Chomsky with the Human Brain* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000).

7. Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Turner 1996; Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error* (New York: Avon, 1994); Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991).

8. Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room and The Waves* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959).

9. Howard Harper, *Between Language and Silence: The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), p. 237.

10. Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); Richard Ohmann, "Speech, Literature, and the Space Between," *New Literary History* 4 (1972): 47–63; Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

11. The lure of silence in Woolf has of course been discussed. For instance, see Harper 1984; Madeline Moore, *The Short Season Between Two Silences: The Mystical and the Political in the Novels of Virginia Woolf* (Boston: G. Allen & Unwin, 1984); Leila Brosnan, *Reading Virginia Woolf's Essays and Journalism: Breaking the Surface of Silence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); and Patricia Ondek Laurence, *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991). But the relationship of silence to writing as a technology has hardly been mentioned.

12. See Walter Ong 1982; and Ann Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), for the two most important attempts to write such a history.