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Introduction

Narrative and the varied ingenious uses we make of it as we negotiate among different cultures, histories, and locations constitute the primary focus of this book. As anyone realizes, though, that statement implicates much of the theoretical debate and strategic maneuvering that have characterized recent research in several disciplines. All the talk and writing has created a situation in which, as Bill Nichols has said, "narrative's not the thing it used to be. More than standing as one form of artistic expression to be worried over by those attending to the nature of art, narrative has become a central preoccupation in its own right, pushing matters of art and levels of culture to the side. . . . This was always, however, a science with a difference."[1]

If *levels of culture* are set aside when narrative takes center theoretical stage, that move merely emphasizes narrative's central role in any study of culture, a role that takes on some extra and time-honored importance when the critical perspective is cross-cultural. Narrative orchestrates the organizing principles setting up an entire cultural field within which agents improvise on the cultural script.[2] And as for *art*, well, that term is but our way of designating the transformations of experience occurring when virtuosity informs high-intensity improvs; and when the critical spotlight is on cross-cultural narrative, it reveals previously unsuspected artistic moves and countermoves. But this book is by no means an unrelentingly abstract rehearsal of academic theory. It is a book about actual people and places and the stories that these people use to account for who they are in relation to where they are. It is a book about stretching critical boundaries a bit to include more art in social science and to encourage the poetic speculation that can be a happy side effect of detailed empirical analysis.[3] Therefore, each chapter tells a theoretical story that is no more or less than a precisely plotted critical design to allow a few people to have their say on the global stage and to give the worldwide audience some clues about how to find contemporary significance in these historical and local dramas.

The first chapters of this book contextualize narratives that I learned in two strikingly different communities: the Yanktonai Sioux in North Dakota and their German-Russian neighbors. These communities exhibit about as much cultural, historical, and linguistic contrast as can be found anywhere in the world. Both have had a history of colonial rule even though the two colonial experiences encompass

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as many variations as we can imagine or account for with our academic understandings of what colonialism has meant for different peoples in shifting political relationships to nationalisms. What the contrasts and similarities characterizing each group's historical experience might have to do with the narratives told in each community is one of the controlling questions around which my critical narrative develops. And, of course, today both groups share a landscape and they have both used stories to transform its places into spaces of the mind; therefore that process of transformation can focus our contemporary interest as we give more nuanced attention to what kind of variable place is in the dynamics of human agency.

Colonial and postcolonial studies now come in for enough academic discussion that one no longer need rehearse all the terms of academic efforts to find a legitimate position from which to develop responsible criticism that recognizes how power relations cross-cut just about every other relational category.[4] But the question of how to factor in the countless variables engendered by personal history in definite communities seems more intractable, precisely because it is a task more appropriate to the poet than to any theoretician. The local frames the irreducible splendor of what is unique, even idiosyncratic, and the theoretical generalities of any discipline insist on eclipsing that quality. If, however, we think of theory as a form of translation, perhaps even as a kind of subtitling allowing audiences from diverse positions to follow a performance that takes place in the mind and follows the energies of individual intellect and spirit, then theory is no more or less than a convenient adjunct to help the international crowd keep up with what is happening as the exquisitely detailed and immediate is gathered into some bigger picture, which theory communicates to global participants. That easy observation implies a process of getting quickly to the theoretical perspective and comment that counts, that communicates something that really matters to actual audiences. And that achievement is by no means easy or guaranteed by any method.

In other words, theory does not just have to connect; it really should do so in ways that respond to audiences that we may choose to make more inclusive than just that group of colleagues who share our current predictable methodological moves and assumptions. To do this we have to remember that theory can be narrative too; as metanarrative, hopefully it can gather in some of the momentum by which any really good plot engages readers and listeners of all kinds. As we elaborate our theoretical plots about human knowing, we do well to enrich our critical tales with details that we can gain only by listening to what ordinary people actually say about their own places on the map. Or, to get at the more common twentieth-century condition, we have to listen to what people say about what it has meant for them to move from place to place, about what has given them a necessary security in the midst of transitions of all kinds that take them from place to place. And giving

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some actual detail to the narrative process that accounts for what has been called "the interpenetration of person and place" is a primary purpose of this book.[5]

Even though there is a growing body of theoretical literature about place as constitutive of subjectivity, I find that much of it still remains aloof from the literal actualities of place, the kind of thing that the western writer Ivan Doig was asking about when he said, "Tell me why it is that details like that, saddle stirrups a notch longer or sunshine dabbed around on the foothills some certain way, seem to be the allowance of memory while the bigger points of life hang back?"[6] I decided to place a lot of my theoretical bets on commonplace details, trusting them to advance me one definite step at a time to some of those bigger points of life and theory. And for me, at least in relation to what I do in this book, the commonplace is empirically exact. It is actual spoken or written language that can be traced back to a real human interactional context that opens out onto others and so on to community after real community. Furthermore, these speakers and writers remain in touch with places where the weather changes and so do other definite factors like real estate taxes and the distance to the best supermarket or school; and all these changes pose yet other questions about narrative that can take us anywhere, even into cyberspace. But the real interactional contexts where it all begins have their histories, and I have listened to how real individuals talk about the histories that give them a definite purchase on the meaning of their present positions in their present communities.

By referring to "listening" instead of reading, I allude to another theoretical and methodological subtext occurring in every chapter of this book. The primary texts I analyze in the first three chapters are oral. The exceptions are memoirs written by amateur historians, usually with family members as the intended audience; therefore one can argue that these texts are, for the most part, transcriptions of the oral traditions or that their function is the same as that of the oral texts. Such texts pose a whole series of questions about context that can be summarized by saying that the critic always has to move back and forth between questions about history as narrative, narrative as history, and narrative in history. As a practical heuristic strategy, concentrating on narrative's meaning-effects also allows for the critical insertion of the analytic incongruities set up by distinctions between oral and written texts. Each perspective implies slightly different critical procedures, different approaches to cognitive style. And that brings me to the most basic critical subtext in this book. It is a book about cognitive style in narrative.

All of my work on cognitive style goes back to my initial efforts to understand the strategic vitality of oral narratives that I was learning among the Yanktonai Sioux. People told me that their stories were an indispensable part of how they managed to live with their past and present experience. I believed them. But at first I had to take it all on faith. I could not really understand why the material I was hearing and

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recording should be so important. What I was learning was so different from the tales I had found in earlier collections that I had to question whether any continuity connected the older to the more recent narratives. I entertained—and rejected—the idea of a complete cultural break as a consequence of changes imposed first by reservation culture and then by a second relocation as a result of flooding when the Oahe Dam was built on the Missouri River. I chose to try to interpret the texts as evidence of how narrative is an active force at work in all spheres of adaptation. That decision, though, did not quickly lead to any theoretically adequate approach to this material.

As I studied the Sioux language, analyzing text after traditional text, examining all the available manuscript material on Sioux culture, I began to see distinctions at work that revealed a cognitive terrain quite different from any that can be directly translated into European categories. The sheer excitement of that first insight has never diminished; and if linguistic research is admittedly tedious, its results are such rich testimony to the options available to human intelligence that I now believe that comparative linguistic studies should receive as high a priority in research about the nature of human knowing as that which we give to any physical science. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis deserves further exploration. Only when I began to concentrate on specific features of spatial categories in Siouan languages and their effects on narrative forms did I begin to catch on to the experiences behind narrators' insistence that the life of local narratives was intimately bound up with the community's geographical setting.

The next step was to find ways to move from all that detail to something other than a purely formalistic study of narrative. I had to gather all the detail derived from analysis of specific semantic and pragmatic categories back into the bigger questions that had motivated the search for all that detail in the first place.

We can document historical events. It is far harder to document a history of interpreting those events. I was fortunate enough to go on living for many years in the communities whose narratives focused my work, so I could follow through and test what I was beginning, tentatively, to understand as a comprehensive relationship between cognition and narration that was communicated at the level of style and not just through content. More to the point, that set of factors summed up by the word *style* was a verifiable set of traditional features that supported and guided changing adaptive content. The effort to formulate theory with enough descriptive adequacy and predictive power to generate a critical account of the relevant features of continuity motivated my revision of my developing theories of cognitive style. Clearly the narrative features that I was trying to specify were defined by a communal context. Equally clear was the fact that these features derived from narrative performance conditions rather than from semantic content alone. Simply by taking seriously what people said about their stories, I had wandered

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into all the questions and problems of relationships between narrative structure and developing ideas about how to address narrative context and pragmatics. Some of these problems admit of exact methodological framing, and what is learned by so doing opens the way to other critical considerations that are more daring, more creative, and, therefore, less easily reined in by precise theoretical models. These less constrained pursuits have proven, at once, closer to the emergent strategies characterizing cultures and more likely to motivate collaborative explorations of a changing matrix of questions. The intensely detailed empirical focus and the more widely ranging speculative critical studies proved to be necessary, balancing perspectives.

Over the years I have published different phases of a developing theory of cognitive style. One basic early analysis gives some of the technical linguistic data supporting critical judgments I make in my chapter on Cannon Ball narrative traditions.[7] That article along with the first chapter in this volume, "Theoretical Foundations," gives evidence of the ethnolinguistic foundations for discourse theory that generate the hypotheses guiding more general chapters. I want the material published here to retain a certain lively readability even though each chapter derives from precisely developed analytic foundations that I address in the theoretical chapter that sets up the rest of the book's organization.

The concept of cognitive style, as I was developing it, seemed to work as a method for marking surprising features of continuity within Sioux narratives. But what about other traditions? Could the critical strategy work for oral materials from altogether different cultures? That question was an important impetus and guide for my research in German-Russian communities. Of course, it was not the only one. Equally basic was a whole set of questions about the role of the researcher. From the beginning I remained vigilant and distrustful of the academic tendency to make observations and data fit the needs of imposed theory. I worried about the ingenuity that lets a researcher find whatever fits the theoretical bill, even as I pursued a range of theoretical means to account for observations about collected narratives. By combining analysis of my own culture with that of another group, I hoped to use each situation as a way to guard against inevitable blind spots, unrecognized presuppositions, and sheer theoretical creativity. I tried to make productive use of the equally inevitable dynamics of insider/outsider. I also tried to let what I was learning in each community assume its own appropriate critical narrative structure, because I believe that many of the implications of the experiment can become manifest only through the actual process of writing as the critical narrative sought and dictated its own form and style. I believe that is what happened, but my critics will necessarily see and understand more than I do. That anticipated exchange is part of the purpose of this book. The Yanktonai Sioux and German-Russian chapters are paired and placed in their Dakota setting. These

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chapters explore aspects of cognitive style as it operates to establish specific textual communities.

My emphasis on the cognitive implies a knowing that prompts the leap from the individual to the community, from *I* to *we*. Whatever sparks that leap is knowable; it may not have any easy or direct articulation, though, and that is why it motivates so much narrative, especially when cross-cultural contact challenges the boundaries of group identity. I had to make that leap, not just describe it. My own position in relation to each community had to function as part of the theoretical story. Just how to describe that position and what part it might play as a responsible element within the critical narrative remained, for many years, an insurmountable obstacle to publication. I regularly revised and reconsidered the crucial personal distances and tensions that had to be part of the analysis I was making of stories told to me by people whom I could never call "informants" because they are the friends and relatives who give meaning to my own life. Finally, changing critical attitudes throughout academia as well as my own growing conviction that the material I possessed could and should add to the general, international understanding of cultural and narrative dynamics resulted in my writing the critical story—or stories—keeping my sights firmly fixed on the theoretical goal while gathering in as much concrete human detail as the narrative could sustain. I tried to tell responsible historical and theoretical stories about stories that were about history and theory and actual people building modern communities.

My primary academic discipline is literary criticism, not history or anthropology or cognitive linguistics even though I routinely move among all these disciplinary positions. I spend far more time teaching and writing about written literatures than I do oral ones. If cognitive style proved to have heuristic value in relation to oral texts, I therefore assumed that I should be able to make the concept work for novels, even for poetry. I gradually explored those discursive transfers, testing the usefulness of my developing theory of cognitive style as a critical concept for different written discourses. I did so first in relation to novels that were obvious experiments incorporating some of the epistemological assumptions of oral narrative performance into the dynamics of writing and reading. Usually such novels concentrate on a single cultural tradition with its many possible points of intersection with other global traditions. More and more I found that the concept of cognitive style could highlight a range of different literary strategies that different authors employed to explore the cross-cultural negotiations at work in different discursive registers. That led to my writing a whole series of articles and chapters in books that depend on the theory of cognitive style in relation to different discursive formations at work in several different cultural traditions.

One of my earliest articles was on James Welch, the Montana writer.[8] Other critics were publishing fine responses to his early work, but I needed to find my own

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way among his words. I wanted my own "spaces of the mind," a phrase I borrowed from one of Welch's poems. The writing that followed was particularly satisfying to me. Few of my essays have ever been so quickly completed or accomplished with so much continuing sense of discovery. In the meantime James Welch has written novel after fine novel. I read his new works but never found the time to give myself the satisfaction of finding my own way through them as I had done with *Winter in the Blood*. Never, that is, until now. In thinking about the second half of this volume, I decided to give myself a long-deferred critical satisfaction and, at the same time, give the theory of cognitive style another test, this time in relation to showing how history can be a source for new features of cognitive style. As stated, this goal represents an apparent contradiction, one that only a truly good novelist could possibly resolve. I wanted to pursue my early sense that Welch was intuitively motivated to work this apparent contradiction as just the right source of narrativity to give him a genuinely distinctive take on otherwise ordinary events. And since I am a westerner (North Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska) living now in New England or in Europe, I wanted to see if working with Welch's novels would help me articulate a more nuanced critical take on what the West means and what the West hides even as it advertises itself as the "last great place." My answer to my own question constitutes the chapters of this book that transfer the question of cognitive style from oral to written literatures.

Writing about Welch pulled me into the context of Montana novels in general, and that made me take another look at the whole issue of regional writing. The timing was right. The shifting critical winds are blowing in a fresh determination to redefine and generally refurbish the notion of *regional* as an adjective qualifying the noun *literature*. In an issue of *American Literary History*, Michael Kowalewski speculated on a new regionalism in American literature, and I find in his statements a complex common sense that I miss whenever the critical debates about regionalism get pulled into debates about power politics:

> *A new attention to place in American literary studies might do more than simply add another molecule to a model of identity now defined in terms of race, class, and gender. It might help alter the model itself, perhaps by way of a few new metaphors, like photosynthesis or an ecology of the self, in place of omnipresent notions of "constructed identity." Yet the force of such a new emphasis will only be successful if the "ecology" turns out to be something challengingly new and not simply a rubric under which to smuggle in thoughtlessly familiar terminology. The new regional studies must be capable of exploring regional identity without reverting to mere local localism. It will need to establish a new critical equilibrium, one as wary of redemptive pseudotheology or appeals to*

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> *environmental determinism as it is of geographical ignorance and representational melodrama. It is hard work but it is already well under way.*[9]

Perhaps, with a bit of stretching, cognitive style implies an ecology in that it always implies interaction between personal history and how a person uses the history of a community as placed or replaced. Even without that stretch, I could see that cognitive style has a certain instrumental value for studying regionalism, new or otherwise. With that value in mind, I reread a novel about Montana that I had found in a used bookstore many years ago. That novel was *Winter Wheat* by Mildred Walker. It rang true, somehow, not just to my Montana experiences but also to my childhood experiences in western North Dakota. I started to write about that novel, then I set the work aside because of other urgent agendas and all but forgot about it. Then one day, browsing through a bookstore, I found a Bison Books reprint of it with an introduction by none other than James Welch. Now I have finished my study and made it a companion piece to my reading of Welch's novels. It also happens to work as a companion to the study of the German-Russian immigrant community paired with the Cannon Ball study in the first part of this book. The German-Russian fieldwork emphasizes community, almost to the point of excluding individual experience. Mildred Walker's novel, by contrast, depicts the loss of community on the part of an immigrant woman who comes from Russia and marries a Vermont-born American with whom she then moves to an isolated farm in Montana. What can a novel such as this tell us about the impact of that absent communal dimension in relation to language and cognitive style? That is the subject of my final chapter, which reveals the primary structure of this book. From the theoretical first chapter, I proceed to two chapters about actual communities in North Dakota; then as the region moves westward, I move into novels that allow for a different kind of approach to discursive space. Each chapter, though, advances my approach to cognitive style.

As I responded to various requests for articles and occasionally taught advanced seminars, new dimensions of cognitive style kept falling into place. Soon I was talking and writing about it so often that I could almost anticipate the moment when someone would ask, "But what exactly is cognitive style?" I needed a few direct, clear statements about just what I had been doing in essay after essay, seminar after seminar, for so many years. I now answer that cognitive style is the linguistic evidence of historical processes at work in speech acts that function to define an individual's place in a textual community; I do have definite statements about stages of analysis involved in achieving the critical perspective that guides the essays in this book. That answer is now the purpose of my first chapter, "Theoretical Foundations." I have been evolving a whole series of analytic steps, each taking into account different sources of information, different discursive elements, and, therefore, different

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subsidiary critical frames. The foundations, though, are definitely dependent on linguistic analysis and the application of discourse theory allowing for attention to specific speech acts and the conditions of their performance.

Cognitive style is always bound up with an aspect of communication that taps the very sources of narrativity. Its elaboration by way of narrative is an inherent aspect of our existence as cognitive beings. It does not lead the analyst to rules governing linguistic or even narrative competence or structure; it leads the analyst to elementary cognitive factors affecting narrative performance. The initial specification of culturally specific cognitive features in relation to the semantic fields controlling narrative themes reveals what I call the "implicit narrative." This is an abstraction that gives explicit critical formulation to related cognitive themes, themselves the hypothesized basis for assertions of continuity between a tradition and the individual narrative in question, which may or may not show direct continuity at the level of content. These cognitive themes, orchestrated by way of narrative, prove adaptable to many different discursive conditions and, in fact, empower different kinds of discourse by instrumentalizing their adaptive function.

My goal, as noted above, has been to keep that initial analytic groundwork in the background, inserting only what is really needed to sustain an argument or validate some surprising move. Since few readers are likely to have the patience for repetitions of the kind of exact demonstration I give in the chapter on theoretical foundations, I have concentrated on maximizing narrative energy while substantiating theoretical claims. Each chapter depends on every other one although each can, if it must, stand on its own. Chapters move from community to community, assuming a process of communal individuation that is directly analogous to the process of individuation shaping each person's psychological integration. My best hope is that individuals from other places and cultures will recognize how the steps that I illustrate could enable them to do something similar for vastly different communities and regions.

The various chapters of this book take a definite position in the present from which to look at some of the details by which the past is constituted as a force in the present; and at every stage of this book's preparation, I have thought about how the people and events that I study can seem extraordinarily distant or remote in a world where the word *space* is immediately associated with *cyberspace* or *outer space*, which conjures an ever-expanding cosmos; and *time* automatically invokes the distinction between real and virtual time. Spaces of the mind are now enabled by faster and faster technology with greater and greater memory capacity. Therefore, it is, I believe, appropriate that a television advertisement finally gave me the image that allows me to set all of the decidedly backward-looking work to which this book calls attention in active conjunction with experiences enabled by

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new technology. This particular Sprint advertisement begins with a man standing in the street outside one of those featureless skyscrapers that house legions of urban workers. He is shouting to those within that they should come out. It is OK. Weary-looking individuals whose sun-starved skin tones and blinking eyes imply self-imposed incarceration in front of computer screens slowly emerge, shielding their eyes from the intense light. The healthy cheerful herald hands each of them a cellular phone with Internet capacity. They are mobile again. But as every viewer knows, they are also living in parallel universes, moving about in cyberspace and geographical space at the same time. For these exemplars of our contemporary world of work and communication, E. M. Forster's famous admonition "connect only connect" is now a very real survival strategy as they move between cyberspace and whatever requirements a particular parcel (or freeway stretch) of geographical space may be making at any given moment. And there is nothing surprising or accidental about the fact that such a commonsense admonition comes to us as a citation from a novelist with an eye for minute psychological detail and the talent to trace that detail to contexts that often involved more than one culture.

Narrative, in any space, is primary evidence of the human mind's astonishing capacity to connect and to reflect on its own powers. Studying narrative from any place or any time is always a matter of studying human intelligence at work making connections; and those who have been looking at narrative with an acute working awareness of how different cultures have used it to sustain distinctive categories of experience have anticipated the formalisms of the future in the way they have utilized the categories of the past. We may be ready for a new look at formal analysis. But formalism, new or otherwise, is only the elementary beginning. It merely launches us. What matters is what we do with the insights that can come from a careful look at how form gathers significance to a particular focus and application.

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