FROM RHETORIC TO DECONSTRUCTION
Lecture Eighteen: Structuralism (2)

The pursuit of a universal grammar of sign systems tends to be have a predilection for literature and, within that, narrative.

Tzvetan Todorov. Literature enjoys a particularly privileged position among semiotic systems as it is most directly connected with language. Takes his cue from Russian Formalism, which set an example of juxtaposing "certain manifestations of language with certain literary ones." Point of departure: the structuralist linguist's definition of the <u>meaning</u> of the word: "the sum of its possible relations with other words," = the number of "combinations in which it can fulfil its linguistic function" is analogous to meaning in literature.

Example: the <u>meaning</u> of a monologue or of a description is determined by its relations with other elements within the work (characterization; the point the plot has reached: a climax or a surprise, etc.).

    Todorov is concerned with <u>meaning</u>, not <u>interpretation</u>. Interpretation depends on the type of sign-system: <u>discourse</u>—psychological, psychoanalytical, sociological and other—in which the work or any part of it is embedded.

The semiologist's search for the "universal grammar" of "symbolic activities" may most fruitfully start with literature, which is constructed out of language.

Example: applicability of parts of speech <u>adjective</u> (which describes state and is noniterative) and <u>verb</u> (which describes passage from one state to another and is iterative) to the narrative phenomenon of <u>plot</u>. Plot is movement from one state (equilibrium), when that state is disturbed, to another state (disequilibrium), and back to the restored initial state (equilibrium). The static component of plot is analogous to the adjective, while the component indicating movement fulfils a role associated with the verb.

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Gérard Genette. Use of Levi-Strauss's idea of the critic as <u>bricoleur</u>: one who employs whatever tools he finds at hand. Thus criticism builds "structured sets by means of a structured set, namely, the work. But it is <u>not at the structural level</u> that it makes use of it: it builds <u>ideological castles</u> out of the debris of what was once a literary discourse."

    Note the admission: criticism is not ideologically neutral.

A system of forms and a system of meanings posited; the critic's job is to look not for exact correspondences, but for a <u>homologous</u> connection between forms and meanings (homologous: having the same relative position within a system). Example: in Rimbaud's sonnet "Vowels" ("Voyelles"), in considering how certain vowels evoke certain colours, one should not look for exact correspondences between vowels and colours; the vowels will as a <u>system</u> of sounds evoke a system of colours: "the overall homology creates the illusion of a term-by-term analogy" ("Structuralism and Literary Criticism," [1964]).

Narrative Discourse (and its sequel, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*) focuses on Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* in a broad historical & European context. Something of a synthesis of structuralist efforts in literary studies. Starting point: grammar of language. Narrative = the extension of the verb (cf. Todorov): the *Odyssey* is but the amplification of the sentence "Ulysses comes home to Ithaca," *Remembrance*, of "Marcel [the main character] becomes a writer."

Conceptual/terminological frame: <u>narrative discourse</u> (the narrative text), the study of which leads us to analysis of the relationship between <u>narrative</u> (the <u>signifier</u>, statement, discourse or narrative text itself) and <u>story</u> (the <u>signified</u> or narrative content), as well as the relationship between <u>narrative</u> and <u>narrating</u> (the actual telling). Attention in these operations is directed to the aspects below.

Tense. The temporal relations between narrative and story, concerned with order, duration, frequency.

    <u>Order</u>. (1) How sections are arranged in the narrative discourse (not necessarily chronological); (2) how they follow each other in the story (chronological). Discordance between the two levels: <u>anachrony</u>. Narrating an event that has not yet taken place: <u>prolepsis</u>; evocation of an event that took place before the point reached at the time of narrating: <u>analepsis</u>.

Duration. (1) Duration of the narrative, the time needed for reading it; (2) duration of the story (the days, weeks, years, etc. covered by the events narrated). The relationship between the narrative sequence and the diegetic sequence may be degree zero (hypothetical norm) in the case of isochrony or "equaltimeness," i.e. the concurrence of the two, e.g. in a scene with pure dialogue, described as NT (narrative time) $= ST$ (story time). Departure from norm, anisochrony, is possible because speed of reading is more or less constant, but speed of story variable. Accordingly, there are four narrative movements: (1) pause because nothing happens on the level of story ($ST = 0$), yet there is still no limit to narrative time ($NT = n$), thus the formula is "$NT \infty > ST$"; (2) ellipsis (suppression of part of the story), "$NT = 0, ST = n$"→"$NT < \infty \, ST$"; (3) scene and (4) summary. These four movements determine the tempo of narrative, which is analogous to the canonical movements in music (andante, allegro, presto, etc.).

Frequency. (1) Narrating (N) once what happened (S) only once–singulative narrative: condensed into the "$1N/1S$" formula ("Yesterday I went to bed early"); (2) narrating n times what happened n times, reducible to "nN/nS" ("Monday I went to bed early, Tuesday I went to bed early, etc."), where the temporal units that follow each other are still singulative; (3) narrating n times what happened *once*: "$nN/1S$" ("Yesterday I went to bed early, yesterday I went to bed early," etc.); (4) narrating (at) one time what happened n times: "$1N/nS$" ("Every day I went to bed early"). Genette's name for this fourth type, in which a single utterance serves as the vehicle of a series of events, is iterative narrative.

Mood. (1) Distance: depending on how close or how far we are to the story, we receive more or less narrative information. Consider telling and showing in this light ("He thought that he would go to bed" and "'I will go to bed,' he said/thought"). Mimesis more perfect when distance is reduced; (2) perspective: asking "who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?" is not the same as asking "who is the narrator?" "Who sees?" is not the same as "who speaks?" The latter comes under voice. By deciding who sees we determine perspective, that is, narrative focus; the act itself is focalization.

Voice. The connections between narrating and narrative, and narrating and story." Narrating instance: the "generating instance of narrative discourse"; it raises the question of the relationship of narrating and story (subsequent, prior, simultaneous, interpolated).

Narrative levels: (from Gr. diegesis: story) diegetic (first narrative): product of an extradiegetic narrating instance; metadiegetic: product of a diegetic narrating instance; narrators, accordingly, are extra-, intra- & metadiegetic; depending on their relation to the story: hetero-, homo- (auto-) diegetic narrators.