Warning Concerning Copyright Restrictions

The Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If electronic transmission of reserve material is used for purposes in excess of what constitutes "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.
6 TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF POE'S 'VALDEMAR'

Roland Barthes

[Barthes's 'semioclasm', first demonstrated in 'Mythologies' (1957), has always been directed against the naturalisation of the sign. For literature, this means an attack on the assumption that language is a transparent medium of communication, and that the novel provides simply 'a window on to the world'. Barthes's interest in realism stems from the fact that it masquerades as the form in which language achieves the state of direct representation of the real. The reverse, of course, is more the case: the 'real' can only be created and organised in language, in a particular society and at a particular time. Barthes's 'S/Z', his famous analysis of a Balzac short story, was an interrogation of the status of realist writing and the limits of realist discourse. Barthes shows how the self-effacing language that 'mirrors' the real constantly threatens to break down into the opacity of text, of layers or fragments of writing (écriture). The following essay, published three years later in 1973, has the advantage of representing and staging the method of 'S/Z' in a much more compact form, and yet at the same time, by emphasising those aspects of 'S/Z' that were most radical, forcing us to re-read and rethink 'S/Z' itself. 'S/Z' was the result of the mutation in Barthes's semiology, already discussed in terms of the shift 'from work to text'. Here Barthes begins by distinguishing between 'structural' and 'textual' analysis; whereas the former records a structure, a grammar or model of narrative, the latter produces instead 'a mobile structuration of the text', allowing the reader to stay within the symbolic, the plurality of the text, its 'significance'. Instead of the closed system of structural analysis, textual analysis substitutes the tissue of codes or voices and intertextual relations that traverse the space of the single text. Refusing a rigorous methodology, Barthes advocates instead a number of 'operating tactics' which will be mobile enough to avoid positivism or closure. The most effective strategy is to refuse the story its 'totality' or 'unity' and to break it up into fragments, following instead the structuration as it unfolds and tracking down the moments of text. These fragments, or 'lexia', are units of any size, from a word to a paragraph or more. Unlike linguistics, which stops its analysis at the purely grammatical unit of the sentence (langue), Barthes's analysis operates at the level of discourse. The lexia are only hypothetical and arbitrary. The importance of this is that the reader himself is implicated as the divider of the text into units, and thus has to be aware of his own psychic involvement in the analysis. The reader himself produces the text.
and thus an identification between the notions of writing and reading.

This step-by-step method, the 'decomposition' of the work of reading, is structured via the play of 'codes'. The codes are not part of a rigorous unified system: they operate simply as 'associative fields, a supra-textual organisation of notations which impose a certain idea of structure.' Their realm is broadly that of connotation, polysemy:

We use 'code' here not in the sense of a list, a paradigm that must be reconstituted. The code is a perspective of quotations, a mirage of structures; we know only its departures and returns; the units which have resulted from it (those we inventory) are themselves, always, ventures out of the text, the mark, the sign of a virtual digression toward the remainder of a catalogue (-The Kidnapping- refers to every kidnapping ever written); they are so many fragments of something that has always been already read, seen, done, experienced; the code is the wake of that already... each code is one of the forces that can take over the text (of which the text is a network), one of the voices out of which the text is woven. Alongside each utterance, one might say that off-stage voices can be heard: they are the codes: in their interweaving, these voices (whose origin is 'lost' in the vast perspective of the already-written) de-originate the utterance ('S/Z', pp. 20-1).

In the convergence of the voices, text becomes volume, a stereography.

In 'S/Z' Barthes began by grouping all the codes into five major codes; here he allows the network, the process of structuration, to build up through the text before grouping them together at the end. This has the advantage of highlighting the fact that while it may be possible to group the codes for the purposes of analysis, they do not make up a rigid system. The eventual grouping in the two essays differs at only one point: in -Vendémiaire- there is also a code of communication or exchange, comprising every relation stated as an address, including that of narrator to reader. These codes traverse the text as departures of the 'déjà-lu', the frayed edges of intertextuality, providing explosions, contracts, flashes of meaning, a 'broken or obliterated network - all the movements and inflections of a vast "dissolve", which permits both the overlapping and loss of messages'.

All this 'volume' is pulled forward in the reading process by the irreversible structure of the conventional realist narrative. But Barthes is not keen to exaggerate the differences between the classic and the modern text: 'what is specific to the text, once it attains the quality of a text, is to constrain us to the undecidability of the codes.' Writing is the point of the obliteration of origins, voices, in any text, the moment when 'one simply notes, speaking has started.'
TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The structural analysis of narrative is at present in the course of full elaboration. All research in this area has a common scientific origin: semiology or the science of signification; but already (and this is a good thing) divergences within that research are appearing, according to the critical stance each piece of work takes with respect to the scientific status of semiology, or in other words, with respect to its own discourse. These divergences (which are constructive) can be brought together under two broad tendencies: in the first, faced with all the narratives in the world, the analysis seeks to establish a narrative model - which is evidently formal -, a structure or grammar of narrative, on the basis of which (once this model, structure or grammar has been discovered) each particular narrative will be analysed in terms of divergences. In the second tendency, the narrative is immediately subsumed (at least when it lends itself to being subsumed) under the notion of 'text', space, process of meanings at work, in short, 'significance' (we shall come back to this word at the end), which is observed not as a finished, closed product, but as a production in progress, 'plugged in' to other texts, other codes (this is the intertextual), and thereby articulated with society and history in ways which are not determinist but citational. We have then to distinguish in a certain way structural analysis and textual analysis, without here wishing to declare them enemies: structural analysis, strictly speaking, is applied above all to oral narrative (to myth); textual analysis, which is what we shall be attempting to practise in the following pages, is applied exclusively to written narrative.¹

Textual analysis does not try to describe the structure of a work; it is not a matter of recording a structure, but rather of producing a mobile structuration of the text (a structuration which is displaced from reader to reader throughout history), of staying in the signifying volume of the work, in its 'significance'. Textual analysis does not try to find out what it is that determines the text (gathers it together as the end-term of a causal sequence), but rather how the text explodes and disperses. We are then going to take a narrative text, and we're going to read it, as slowly as is necessary, stopping as often as we have to (being at ease is an essential dimension of our work), and try to locate and classify without rigour, not all the meanings of the text (which would be impossible because the text is open to infinity: no reader, no subject, no science can arrest the text) but the forms and codes according to which meanings are possible. We are going to locate the avenues of meaning. Our aim is not to find the meaning, nor even a meaning of the text, and our work is not akin to literary criticism of the hermeneutic type (which tries to interpret the text in terms of the truth believed to be hidden therein), as are Marxist or psychoanalytical criticism. Our aim is to manage to conceive, to imagine, to live the plurality of the text, the opening of its 'significance'. It is clear then that
what is at stake in our work is not limited to the university treat­
ment of the text (even if that treatment were openly methodo­
logical), nor even to literature in general; rather it touches on a
theory, a practice, a choice, which are caught up in the struggle
of men and signs.

In order to carry out the textual analysis of a narrative, we
shall follow a certain number of operating procedures (let us call
them elementary rules of manipulation rather than methodological
principles, which would be too ambitious a word and above all an
ideologically questionable one, in so far as 'method' too often
postulates a positivistic result). We shall reduce these procedures
to four briefly laid out measures, preferring to let the theory run
along in the analysis of the text itself. For the moment we shall
say just what is necessary to begin as quickly as possible the
analysis of the story we have chosen.

1) We shall cut up the text I am proposing for study into con­tigu­ous, and in general very short, segments (a sentence, part
of a sentence, at most a group of three or four sentences); we
shall number these fragments starting from 1 (in about ten pages
of text there are 150 segments). These segments are units of
reading, and this is why I have proposed to call them 'lexias'.
A lexia is obviously a textual signifier; but as our job here Is not
to observe signifiers (our work is not stylistic) but
meanings, the
cutting-up does not need to be theoretically founded- (as we are
in discourse, and not in 'langue', we must not expect there to be
an easily-perceived homology between signifier and signified: we
do not know how one corresponds to the other, and consequently
we must be prepared to cut up the signifier without being guided
by the underlying cutting-up of the signified). All in all the
fragmenting of the narrative text into lexias is purely empirical.
dictated by the concern of convenience: the lexia is an arbitrary
product, it is simply a segment within which the distribution of
meanings is observed; it is what surgeons would call an operat­
ing field: the useful lexia is one where only one, two or three
meanings take place (superposed in the volume of the piece of
text).

2) For each lexia, we shall observe the meanings to which that
lexia gives rise. By meaning, it is clear that we do not mean the
meanings of the words or groups of words which dictionary and
grammar, in short a knowledge of the French language, would be
sufficient to account for. We mean the connotations of the lexia,
the secondary meanings. These connotation-meanings can be
associations (for example, the physical description of a character,
spread out over several sentences, may have only one conned
signified, the 'nervousness' of that character, even though the
word does not figure at the level of denotation); they can also
be relations, resulting from a linking of two points in the text,
which are sometimes far apart, (an action begun here can be com­
pleted, finished, much further on). Our lexias will be, if I can
put it like this, the finest possible sieves, thanks to which we
shall 'cream off' meanings, connotations.
3 Our analysis will be progressive: we shall cover the length of the text step by step, at least in theory, since for reasons of space we can only give two fragments of analysis here. This means that we shan't be aiming to pick out the large (rhetorical) blocks of the text; we shan't construct a plan of the text and we shan't be seeking its thematics; in short, we shan't be carrying out an explication of the text, unless we give the word 'explication' its etymological sense, in so far as we shall be unfolding the text, the foliation of the text. Our analysis will retain the procedure of reading; only this reading will be, in some measure, filmed in slow-motion. This method of proceeding is theoretically important: it means that we are not aiming to reconstitute the structure of the text, but to follow its structuration, and that we consider the structuration of reading to be more important than that of composition (a rhetorical, classical notion).

4 Finally, we shan't get unduly worried if in our account we 'forget' some meanings. Forgetting meanings is in some sense part of reading: the important thing is to show departures of meaning, not arrivals (and is meaning basically anything other than a departure?). What founds the text is not an internal, closed, accountable structure, but the outlet of the text on to other texts, other codes, other signs; what makes the text is the intertextual. We are beginning to glimpse (through other sciences) the fact that research must little by little get used to the conjunction of two ideas which for a long time were thought incompatible: the idea of structure and the idea of combinational infinity; the conciliation of these two postulations is forced upon us now because language, which we are getting to know better, is at once infinite and structured.

I think that these remarks are sufficient for us to begin the analysis of the text (we must always give in to the impatience of the text, and never forget that whatever the imperatives of study, the pleasure of the text is our law). The text which has been chosen is a short narrative by Edgar Poe, in Baudelaire's translation: "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." My choice – at least consciously, for in fact it might be my unconscious which made the choice – was dictated by two didactic considerations: I needed a very short text so as to be able to master entirely the signifying surface (the succession of lexias), and one which was symbolically very dense, so that the text analysed would touch us continuously, beyond all particularism: who could avoid being touched by a text whose declared 'subject' is death?

To be frank, I ought to add this: in analysing the 'significance' of a text, we shall abstain voluntarily from dealing with certain problems; we shall not speak of the author, Edgar Poe, nor of the literary history of which he is a part; we shall not take into account the fact that the analysis will be carried out on a translation: we shall take the text as it is, as we read it, without bothering about whether in a university it would belong to students of English rather than students of French or philosophers. This does not necessarily mean that these problems will not pass
into our analysis; on the contrary, they will pass, in the proper
sense of the term: the analysis is a crossing of the text; these
problems can be located in terms of cultural quotations, of depa-
tures of codes, not of determinations.

A final word, which is perhaps one of conjuration, exorcism:
the text we are going to analyse is neither lyrical nor political,
it speaks neither of love nor society, it speaks of death. This
means that we shall have to lift a particular censorship: that
attached to the sinister. We shall do this, persuaded that any
censorship stands for all others: speaking of death outside all
religion lifts at once the religious interdict and the rationalist
one.

ANALYSIS OF LEXIAS 1 - 17

(1) - The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar -

(2) Of course I shall not pretend to consider it any matter for
wonder, that the extraordinary case of M. Valdemar has excited
discussion. It would have been a miracle had it not - especially
under the circumstances. (3) Through the desire of all parties
concerned, to keep the affair from the public, at least for the
present, or until we had further opportunities for investigation
- through our endeavours to effect this - (4) a garbled or exag-
gerated account made its way into society, and became the
source of many unpleasant misrepresentations, and, very
naturally, of a great deal of disbelief.

(5) It is now rendered necessary that I give the facts -
as far as I comprehend them myself.

(6) They are, succinctly, these:

(7) My attention, for the last three years, had been repeat-
edly drawn to the subject of Mesmerism; (8) and, about nine
months ago, it occurred to me, quite suddenly, that in a series
of experiments made hitherto, (9) there had been a very remark-
able and most unaccountable omission: (10) no person had
as yet been mesmerised 'in articulo mortis'. (11) It remained to
be seen, (12) first, whether, in such condition, there existed
in the patient any susceptibility to the magnetic influence;
(13) secondly, whether if any existed, it was impaired or in-
creased by the condition; (14) thirdly, to what extent, or for
how long a period, the encroachments of Death might be arres-
ted by the process. (15) There were other points to be ascer-
tained, (16) but these most excited my curiosity (17) - the last
in especial, from the immensely important character of its con-
sequences.

(1) -The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar- [-La vérité sur le
cas de M. Valdemar-]

The function of the title has not been well studied, at least from
Roland Barthes 139

a structural point of view. What can be said straight away is that for commercial reasons, society, needing to assimilate the text to a product, a commodity, has need of markers: the function of the title is to mark the beginning of the text, that is, to constitute the text as a commodity. Every title thus has several simultaneous meanings, including at least these two: (i) what it says linked to the contingency of what follows it; (ii) the announcement itself that a piece of literature (which means, in fact, a commodity) is going to follow; in other words, the title always has a double function; enunciating and deictic.

(a) Announcing a truth involves the stipulation of an enigma. The posing of the enigma is a result (at the level of the signifiers): of the word 'truth' [in the French title]; of the word 'case' (that which is exceptional, therefore marked, therefore signifying, and consequently of which the meaning must be found); of the definite article 'the' [in the French title] (there is only one truth, all the work of the text will, then, be needed to pass through this narrow gate); of the cataphorical form implied by the title: what follows will realise what is announced, the resolution of the enigma is already announced; we should note that the English says: - The Facts in the Case . . . -: the signified which Poe is aiming at is of an empirical order, that aimed at by the French translator (Baudelaire) is hermeneutic: the truth refers then to the exact facts, but also perhaps to their meaning. However this may be, we shall code this first sense of the lexia: 'enigma, position' (the enigma is the general name of a code, the position is only one term of it).

(b) The truth could be spoken without being announced, without there being a reference to the word itself. If one speaks of what one is going to say, if language is thus doubled into two layers of which the first in some sense caps the second, then what one is doing is resorting to the use of a metalanguage. There is then here the presence of the metalinguistic code.

(c) This metalinguistic announcement has an aperitive function: it is a question of whetting the reader's appetite (a procedure which is akin to 'suspense'). The narrative is a commodity the proposal of which is preceded by a 'patter'. This 'patter', this 'appetiser' is a term of the narrative code (rhetoric of narration).

(d) A proper name should always be carefully questioned, for the proper name is, if I can put it like this, the prince of signifiers; its connotations are rich, social and symbolic. In the name Valdemar, the following two connotations at least can be read: (i) presence of a socio-ethnic code: is the name German? Slavic? In any case, not Anglo-Saxon; this little enigma here implicitly formulated, will be resolved at number 19 (Valdemar is Polish); (ii) 'Valdemar' is 'the valley of the sea'; the oceanic abyss; the depths of the sea is a theme dear to Poe: the gulf refers to what
is twice outside nature, under the waters and under the earth. From the point of view of the analysis there are, then, the traces of two codes: a socio-ethnic code and a (or the) symbolic code (we shall return to these codes a little later).

(e) Saying 'M(onsieur) Valdemar' is not the same thing as saying 'Valdemar'. In a lot of stories, Poe uses simple christian names (Ligela, Eleonora, Morella). The presence of the 'Monsieur' brings with it an effect of social reality, of the historically real: the hero is socialised, he forms part of a definite society, in which he is supplied with a civil title. We must therefore note: social code.

(2) 'Of course I shall not pretend to consider it any matter for wonder, that the extraordinary case of M. Valdemar has excited discussion. It would have been a miracle had it not - especially under the circumstances.'

(a) This sentence (and those immediately following) have as their obvious function that of exciting the reader's expectation, and that is why they are apparently meaningless: what one wants is the solution of the enigma posed in the title (the 'truth'), but even the exposition of this enigma is held back. So we must code: delay in posing the enigma.

(b) Same connotation as in (1c): it's a matter of whetting the reader's appetite (narrative code).

(c) The word 'extraordinary' is ambiguous: it refers to that which departs from the norm but not necessarily from nature (if the case remains 'medical'), but it can also refer to what is supernatural, what has moved into transgression (this is the 'fantastic' element of the stories - 'extraordinary', precisely [The French title of Poe's Collected Stories is 'Histoires extraordinaires'] - that Poe tells). The ambiguity of the word is here meaningful: the story will be a horrible one (outside the limits of nature) which is yet covered by the scientific alibi (here connoted by the 'discussion', which is a scientist's word). This bonding is in fact cultural: the mixture of the strange and the scientific had its high-point in the part of the nineteenth century to which Poe, broadly speaking, belongs: there was great enthusiasm for observing the supernatural scientifically (magnetism, spiritism, telepathy, etc.); the supernatural adopts a scientific, rationalist alibi; the cry from the heart of that positivist age runs thus: if only one could believe scientifically in immortality! This cultural code, which for simplicity's sake we shall here call the scientific code, will be of great importance throughout the narrative.

(3) 'Through the desire of all parties concerned, to keep the affair from the public, at least for the present, or until we had further opportunities for investigation - through our endeavours to effect this -'
(a) Same scientific code, picked up by the word 'investigation' (which is also a detective story word; the fortune of the detective novel in the second half of the nineteenth century - starting from Poe, precisely - is well known: what is important here, ideologically and structurally, is the conjunction of the code of the detective enigma and the code of science - scientific discourse - , which proves that structural analysis can collaborate perfectly well with ideological analysis).

(b) The motives of the secret are not given; they can proceed from two different codes, present together in reading (to read is also silently to imagine what is not said): (i) the scientific-deontological code: the doctors and Poe, out of loyalty and prudence, do not want to make public a phenomenon which has not been cleared up scientifically; (ii) the symbolic code: there is a taboo on living death: one keeps silent because it is horrible. We ought to say straight away (even though we shall come back and insist on this later) that these two codes are undecidable (we can't choose one against the other), and that it is this very undecidability which makes for a good narrative.

(c) From the point of view of narrative actions (this is the first one we have met), a sequence is here begun: 'to keep hidden' in effect implies, logically or pseudo-logically, consequent operations (for example: to unveil). We have then here to posit the first term of an actional sequence: to keep hidden, the rest of which we shall come across later.

(4) 'a garbled or exaggerated account made its way into society, and became the source of many unpleasant misrepresentations, and, very naturally, of a great deal of disbelief.'

(a) The request for truth, that is, the enigma, has already been placed twice (by the word 'truth' [in the French title] and by the expression 'extraordinary case'). The enigma is here posed a third time (to pose an enigma, in structural terms, means to utter: there is an enigma), by the invocation of the error to which it gave rise: the error, posed here, justifies retroactively, anaphorically, the [French] title ( - La vérité sur . . . - ). The redundancy operated on the position of the enigma (the fact that there is an enigma is repeated in several ways) has an aperitive value: it is a matter of exciting the reader, of procuring clients for the narrative.

(b) In the actional sequence 'to hide', a second term appears: this is the effect of the secret: distortion, mistaken opinion, accusation of mystification.

(5) 'It is now rendered necessary that I give the facts - as far as I comprehend them myself.'
(a) The emphasis placed on 'the facts' supposes the intrication of two codes, between which — as in (3b) — it is impossible to decide: (i) the law, the deontology of science, makes the scientist, the observer, a slave to the fact; the opposition of fact and rumour is an old mythical theme; when it is invoked in a fiction (and invoked emphatically), the fact has as its structural function (for the real effect of this artifice fools no one) that of authenticating the story, not that of making the reader believe that it really happened, but that of presenting the discourse of the real, and not that of the fable. The fact is then caught up in a paradigm in which it is opposed to mystification (Poe admitted in a private letter that the story of M. Valdemar was a pure mystification: it is a mere hoax). The code which structures the reference to the fact is then the scientific code which we have already met. (ii) However, any more or less pompous recourse to the fact can also be considered to be the symptom of the subject's being mixed up with the symbolic; protesting aggressively in favour of the fact alone, protesting the triumph of the referent, involves suspecting signification, mutilating the real of its symbolic supplement; it is an act of censorship against the signifier which displaces the fact; it involves refusing the other scene, that of the unconscious. By pushing away the symbolical supplement, even if to our eyes this is done by a narrative trick, the narrator takes on an imaginary role, that of the scientist: the signified of the lexia is then the asymbolism of the subject of the enunciation; 'I' presents itself as asymbolic; the negation of the symbolic is clearly part of the symbolic code itself."

(b) The actional sequence 'to hide' develops: the third term posits the necessity of rectifying the distortion located in (4b); this rectification stands for: wanting to unveil (that which was hidden). This narrative sequence 'to hide' clearly constitutes a stimulation for the narrative; in a sense, it justifies it, and by that very fact points to its value (its 'standing-for' ['valant-pour']), makes a commodity of it: I am telling the story, says the narrator, in exchange for a demand for counter-error, for truth (we are in a civilisation where truth is a value, that is, a commodity). It is always very interesting to try to pick out the 'valant-pour' of a narrative: in exchange for what is the story told? In the 'Arabian Nights', each story stands for a day's survival. Here we are warned that the story of M. Valdemar stands for the truth (first presented as a counter-distortion).

(c) The 'I' appears [in French] for the first time — it was already present in the 'we' in 'our endeavours' (3). The enunciation in fact includes three 'I's, or in other words, three imaginary roles (to say 'I' is to enter the imaginary): (i) a narrating 'I', an artist, whose motive is the search for effect; to this 'I' there corresponds a 'You', that of the literary reader, who is reading 'a fantastic story by the great writer Edgar Poe'; (ii) an I-witness,
who has the power to bear witness to a scientific experiment; the corresponding 'You' is that of a panel of scientists, that of serious opinion, that of the scientific reader: (iii) an I-actor, experimenter, the one who will magnetise Valdemar; the 'You' is in this case Valdemar himself; in these two last instances, the motive for the imaginary role is the 'truth'. We have here the three terms of a code which we shall call, perhaps provisionally, the code of communication. Between these three roles, there is no doubt another language, that of the unconscious, which is spoken neither in science, nor in literature; but that language, which is literally the language of the interdict, does not say 'I': our grammar, with its three persons, is never directly that of the unconscious.

(6) 'They are, succinctly, these:'

(a) Announcing what is to follow involves metalanguage (and the rhetorical code): it is the boundary marking the beginning of a story in the story.

(b) 'Succinctly' carries three mixed and undecidable connotations: (i) 'Don't be afraid, this won't take too long': this, in the narrative code, is the phatic mode (located by Jakobson), the function of which is to hold the attention, maintain contact; (ii) 'It will be short because I'll be sticking strictly to the facts': this is the scientific code, allowing the announcement of the scientist's 'spareness', the superiority of the instance of the fact over the instance of discourse; (iii) to pride oneself on talking briefly is in a certain sense an assertion against speech, a limitation of the supplement of discourse, that is, the symbolic; this is to speak the code of the asymbolic.

(7) 'My attention, for the last three years, had been repeatedly drawn to the subject of Mesmerism;'

(a) The chronological code must be observed in all narratives; here in this code ('last three years'), two values are mixed; the first is in some sense naive; one of the temporal elements of the experiment to come is noted: the time of its preparation; the second does not have a diegetical, operative function (this is made clear by the test of commutation; if the narrator had said seven years instead of three, it would have had no effect on the story); it is therefore a matter of a pure reality-effect: the number connotes emphatically the truth of the fact: what is precise is reputed to be real (this illusion, moreover, since it does exist, is well known; a delirium of figures). Let us note that linguistically the word 'last' is a 'shifter': it refers to the situation of the speaker in time; it thus reinforces the presence of the following account.

(b) A long actional sequence begins here, or at the very least a
sequence well-furnished with terms; its object is the starting-off of an experiment (we are under the alibi of experimental science); structurally, this setting-off is not the experiment itself, but an experimental programme. This sequence in fact stands for the formulation of the enigma, which has already been posed several times ('there is an enigma'), but which has not yet been formulated. So as not to weigh down the report of the analysis, we shall code the 'programme' separately; it being understood that by procuration the whole sequence stands for a term of the enigma-code. In this 'programme' sequence, we have here the first term: the posing of the scientific field of the experiment, magnetism.

(c) The reference to magnetism is extracted from a cultural code which is very insistent in this part of the nineteenth century. Following Mesmer (in English, 'magnetism' can be called 'mesmeric') and the Marquis Armand de Puységur, who had discovered that magnetism could provoke somnambulism, magnetisers and magnetist societies had multiplied in France (around 1820); in 1829, it appears that it had been possible, under hypnosis, to carry out the painless ablation of a tumour; in 1845, the year of our story, Braid of Manchester codified hypnosis by provoking nervous fatigue through the contemplation of a shining object; in 1850, in the Mesmeric Hospital of Calcutta, painless births were achieved. We know that subsequently Charcot classified hypnotic states and circumscribed hypnosis under hysteria (1882), but that since then hysteria has disappeared from hospitals as a clinical entity (from the moment it was no longer observed). The year 1845 marks the peak of scientific illusion: people believed in a psychological reality of hypnosis (although Poe, pointing out Valdemar's 'nervousness', may allow the inference of the subject's hysterical predisposition).

(d) Thematically, magnetism connotes (at least at that time) an idea of fluid: something passes from one subject to another; there is an exchange (un entrédit) (an interdict) between the narrator and Valdemar: this is the code of communication.

(8) 'and, about nine months ago, it occurred to me, quite suddenly, that in a series of experiments made hitherto,'

(a) The chronological code ('nine months') calls for the same remarks as those made in (7a).

(b) Here is the second term of the 'programme' sequence: in (7b) a domain was chosen, that of magnetism; now it is cut up; a particular problem will be isolated.

(9) 'there had been a very remarkable and most unaccountable omission:'
(a) The enunciation of the structure of the 'programme' continues: here is the third term: the experiment which has not yet been tried - and which, therefore, for any scientist concerned with research, is to be tried.

(b) This experimental lack is not a simple oversight, or at least this oversight is heavily significant; it is quite simply the oversight of death: there has been a taboo (which will be lifted, in the deepest horror); the connotation belongs to the symbolic code.

(10) ' - no person had as yet been mesmerised "in articulo mortis".'

(a) Fourth term of the 'programme' sequence: the content of the omission (there is clearly a reduction of the link between the assertion of the omission and its definition, in the rhetorical code: to announce/to specify).

(b) The use of Latin (in articulo mortis), a juridical and medical language, produces an effect of scientificity (scientific code), but also, through the intermediary of a euphemism (saying in a little-known language something one does not dare say in everyday language), designates a taboo (symbolic code). It seems clear that what is taboo in death, what is essentially taboo, is the passage, the threshold, the dying; life and death are relatively well-classified states, and moreover they enter into a paradigmatic opposition, they are taken in hand by meaning, which is always reassuring; but the transition between the two states, or more exactly, as will be the case here, their mutual encroachment, outplays meaning and engenders horror: there is the transgression of an antithesis, of a classification.

(11) 'It remained to be seen'

The detail of the 'programme' is announced (rhetorical code and action sequence 'programme').

(12) 'first, whether, in such conditions, there existed in the patient any susceptibility to the magnetic influence;'

(a) In the 'programme' sequence, this is the first coining of the announcement made in (11): this is the first problem to elucidate.

(b) This Problem I itself entitles an organised sequence (or a sub-sequence of the 'programme'): here we have the first term: the formulation of the problem; its object is the very being of magnetic communication: does it exist, yes or no? (there will be an affirmative reply to this in (78): the long textual distance separating the question and the answer is specific to narrative structure, which authorises and even demands the careful con-
struction of sequences, each of which is a thread which weaves in with its neighbours).

(13) 'secondly, whether if any existed, it was impaired or increased by the condition;'

(a) In the 'programme' sequence, the second problem here takes its place (it will be noted that Problem II is linked to Problem I by a logic of implication: 'if yes . . . then'; if not, then the whole story would fall down; the alternative, according to the instance of discourse, is thus faked).

(b) Second sub-sequence of 'programme': this is Problem II: the first problem concerned the being of the phenomenon; the second concerns its measurement (all this is very 'scientific'); the reply to the question will be given in (82); receptivity is increased: 'In such experiments with this patient I had never perfectly succeeded before . . . but to my astonishment, . . .'.

(14) 'thirdly, to what extent, or for how long a period, the encroachments of Death might be arrested by the process.'

(a) This is Problem III posed by the 'programme'.

(b) This Problem III is formulated, like the others - this formulation will be taken up again emphatically in (17); the formulation implies two sub-questions: (i) to what extent does hypnosis allow life to encroach on death? The reply is given in (110): up to and including language; (ii) for how long? There will be no direct reply to this question: the encroachment of life on death (the survival of the hypnotized dead man) will end after seven months, but only through the arbitrary intervention of the experimenter. We can then suppose: infinitely, or at the very least indefinitely within the limits of observation.

(15) 'There were other points to be ascertained,'

The 'programme' mentions other problems which could be posed with respect to the planned experiment, in a global form. The phrase is equivalent to 'etcetera'. Valéry said that in nature there was no etcetera; we can add: nor in the unconscious. In fact the etcetera only belongs to the discourse of pretence: on the one hand it pretends to play the scientific game of the vast experimental programme; it is an operator of the pseudo-real: on the other hand, by glossing over and avoiding the other problems, it reinforces the meaning of the questions already posed: the powerfully symbolic has been announced, and the rest, under the instance of discourse, is only play acting.

(16) 'but these most excited my curiosity,'
Here, in the 'programme', it's a matter of a global reminder of the three problems (the 'reminder', or the 'résumé', like the 'announcement', are terms in the rhetorical code).

(17) ' - this last in especial, from the immensely important character of its consequences.'

(a) An emphasis (a term in the rhetorical code) is placed on Problem III.

(b) Two more undecidable codes: (i) scientifically, what is at stake is the pushing back of a biological given, death; (ii) symbolically, this is the transgression of meaning, which opposes life and death.

ACTIONAL ANALYSIS OF LEXIAS 18-102

Among all the connotations that we have met with or at least located in the opening of Poe's story, we have been able to define some as progressive terms in sequences of narrative actions; we shall come back at the end to the different codes which analysis has brought to light, including, precisely, the actional code. Putting off this theoretical clarification, we can isolate these sequences of actions so as to account with less trouble (and yet maintaining a structural import in our purpose) for the rest of the story. It will be understood that in effect it is impossible to analyse minutely (and even less exhaustively: textual analysis is never, and never wants to be, exhaustive) the whole of Poe's story: it would take too long; but we do intend to undertake the textual analysis of some lexias again at the culminating point of the work (lexias 103-110). In order to join the fragment we have analysed and the one we are going to analyse, at the level of intelligibility, it will suffice to indicate the principal actional sequences which begin and develop (but do not necessarily end) between lexia 18 and lexia 102. Unfortunately, through lack of space, we cannot give the text which separates our two fragments, nor the numeration of the intermediate lexias; we shall give only the actional sequences (and moreover without even being able to bring out the detail of them term by term), to the detriment of the other codes, which are more numerous and certainly more interesting. This is essentially because the actional sequences constitute by definition the anecdotic framework of the story (I shall make a slight exception for the chronological code, indicating by an initial and a final notation, the point of the narrative at which the beginning of each sequence is situated).

1 Programme: the sequence has begun and been broadly developed in the fragment analysed. The problems posed by the planned experiment are known. The sequence continues and closes with the choice of the subject (the patient) necessary for the experiment: it will be M. Valdemar.
takes place nine months before the moment of narration).
II Magnetisation (or rather, if this heavy neologism is permitted: magnetisability). Before choosing M. Valdemar as subject of the experiment, P. tested his magnetic receptiveness; it exists, but the results are nonetheless disappointing: M.V's obedience involves some resistances. The sequence enumerates the terms of this test, which is anterior to the decision on the experiment and whose chronological position is not specified.
III Medical death: actional sequences are most often distended, and intertwined with other sequences. In informing us of M.V's bad state of health and the fatal outcome predicted by the doctors, the narrative begins a very long sequence which runs throughout the story, to finish only in the last lexia (150), with the liquefaction of M. V's body. The episodes of this sequence are numerous, split up, but still scientifically logical: ill-health, diagnosis, death-sentence, deterioration, agony, mortification (physiological signs of death) - it is at this point in the sequence that our second textual analysis is situated, disintegration, liquefaction.
IV Contract: P. makes the proposal to M. Valdemar of hypnotising him when he reaches the threshold of death (since he knows he is to die) and M. V. accepts; there is a contract between the subject and the experimenter: conditions, proposition, acceptance, conventions, decision to proceed, official registration in the presence of doctors (this last point constitutes a sub-sequence).
V Catalepsy (7 months before the moment of narration, a Saturday at 7.55): as the last moments of M. V have come and the experimenter has been notified by the patient himself, P. begins the hypnosis 'in articulo mortis', in conformity with the programme and the contract. This sequence can be headed 'catalepsy'; among other terms, it involves: magnetic passes, resistances from the subject, signs of a cataleptic state, observation by the experimenter, verification by the doctor (the actions of this sequence take up 3 hours: it is 10.55).
VI Interrogation I (Sunday, 3 o'clock in the morning): P. four times interrogates M. Valdemar under hypnosis; it is pertinent to identify each interrogative sequence by the reply made by the hypnotised M. Valdemar. The reply to this first interrogation is: 'I am asleep' (canonically, the interrogative sequences involve the announcement of the question, the question, delay or resistance of the reply, and the reply).
VII Interrogation II: this interrogation follows shortly after the first. This time M. Valdemar replies: 'I am dying.'
VIII Interrogation III: the experimenter interrogates the dying, hypnotised M. Valdemar again ('do you still sleep?'); he replies by linking the two replies already made: 'still asleep - dying'.
IX Interrogation IV: P. attempts to interrogate M. V a fourth time; he repeats his question (M.V will reply beginning with lexia 105, see below).
At this point we reach the moment in the narrative at which we are going to take up the textual analysis again, lexia by lexia. Between Interrogation III and the beginning of the analysis to
follow, an important term of the sequence 'medical death' intervenes: this is the mortification of M. Valdemar (101-102). Under hypnosis, M. Valdemar is henceforth dead, medically speaking. We know that recently, with the transplantation of organs, the diagnosis of death has been called into question: today the evidence of electro-encephalography is required. In order to certify M.V's death, Poe gathers (in 101 and 102) all the clinical signs which in his day certified scientifically the death of a patient: open rolled-back eyes, corpse-like skin, extinction of hectic spots, fall and relaxation of the lower jaw, blackened tongue, a general hideousness which makes those present shrink back from the bed (here again the weave of the codes should be noted: all the medical signs are also elements of horror; or rather, horror is always given under the alibi of science: the scientific code and the symbolic code are actualised at the same time, undecidedly).

With M. Valdemar medically dead, the narrative ought to finish: the death of the hero (except in cases of religious resurrection) ends the story. The re-launching of the anecdote (beginning with lexia 103) appears then at once as a narrative necessity (to allow the text to continue) and a logical scandal. This scandal is that of the supplement: for there to be a supplement of narrative, there will have to be a supplement of life: once again, the narrative stands for life.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF LEXIAS 103-110

(103) 'I feel that I have reached a point of this narrative at which every reader will be startled into positive disbelief. It is my business, however, simply to proceed.'

(a) We know that announcing a discourse to come is a term in the rhetorical code (and the metalinguistic code); we also know the 'aperitive' value of this connotation.

(b) It being one's business to speak the facts, without worrying about the unpleasantness, forms part of the code of scientific deontology. [At this point the French text has 'mon devoir est de continuer.']

(c) The promise of an unbelievable 'real' forms part of the field of the narrative considered as a commodity; it raises the 'price' of the narrative; here, then, in the general code of communication, we have a sub-code, that of exchange, of which every narrative is a term, cf. (5b).

(104) 'There was no longer the faintest sign of vitality in M. Valdemar; and concluding him to be dead, we were consigning him to the charge of the nurses,'
In the long sequence of 'medical death', which we have pointed out, the mortification was noted in (101): here it is confirmed; in (101), M. Valdemar's state of death was described (through a framework of indices); here it is asserted by means of a meta-language.

(105) 'when a strong vibratory motion was observable in the tongue. This continued for perhaps a minute. At the expiration of this period,'

(a) The chronological code ('one minute') supports two effects: an effect of reality-precision, cf. (7a), and a dramatic effect: the laborious welling-up of the voice, the delivery of the cry recalls the combat of life and death: life is trying to break free of the bogging-down of death, it is struggling (or rather it is here rather death which is unable to break free of life: we should not forget that M.V is dead: it is not life, but death, that he has to hold back).

(b) Shortly before the point we have reached, P. has interrogated M.V (for the fourth time); and before M.V replies, he is clinically dead. Yet the sequence Interrogation IV is not closed (this is where the supplement we have mentioned intervenes): the movement of the tongue indicates that M.V is going to speak. We must, then, construct the sequence as follows: question (100)/(medical death)/attempt to reply (and the sequence will continue).

(c) There is quite clearly a symbolism of the tongue. The tongue is speech (cutting off the tongue is a mutilation of language, as can be seen in the symbolic ceremony of punishment of blasphemers); further, there is something visceral about the tongue (something internal), and at the same time, something phallic. This general symbolism is here reinforced by the fact that the tongue which moves is (paradigmatically) opposed to the black, swollen tongue of medical death (101). It is, then, visceral life, the life of the depths, which is assimilated to speech, and speech itself is fetishized in the form of a phallic organ which begins to vibrate, in a sort of pre-orgasm: the one-minute vibration is the desire to come ['le désir de la jouissance'] and the desire for speech: it is the movement of desire to get somewhere.

(106) 'there issued from the distended and motionless jaws a voice,'

(a) Little by little the sequence Interrogation IV continues, with great detail in the global term 'reply'. Certainly, the delayed reply is well known in the grammar of narrative; but it has in general a psychological value; here, the delay (and the detail it brings with it) is purely physiological: it is the welling-up of the voice, filmed and recorded in slow-motion.
(b) The voice comes from the tongue (105), the jaws are only the gateway; it does not come from the teeth: the voice in preparation is not dental, external, civilised (a marked dentalism is the sign of 'distinction' in pronunciation), but internal, visceral, muscular. Culture valorises what is sharp, bony, distinct, clear (the teeth); the voice of death, on the other hand, comes from what is viscous, from the internal muscular magma, from the depths. Structurally, we have here a term in the symbolic code.

(107) ' - such as it would be madness in me to attempt describing. There are, indeed, two or three epithets which might be considered as applicable to it in part; I might say, for example, that the sound was harsh, and broken and hollow; but the hideous whole is indescribable, for the simple reason that no similar sounds have ever jarred upon the ear of humanity.'

(a) The metalinguistic code is present here, through a discourse on the difficulty of holding a discourse; hence the use of frankly metalinguistic terms: epithets, describing, indescribable.

(b) The symbolism of the voice unfolds: it has two characteristics: the internal ('hollow'), and the discontinuous ('harsh', 'broken'): this prepares a logical contradiction (a guarantee of the supernatural): the contrast between the 'broken-up' and the 'glutinous' (108), whilst the internal gives credit to a feeling of distance (108).

(108) 'There were two particulars, nevertheless, which I thought then, and still think, might be stated as characteristic of the intonation - as well adapted to convey some idea of its unearthly peculiarity. In the first place, the voice seemed to reach our ears - at least mine - from a vast distance, or from some deep cavern within the earth. In the second place, it impressed me (I fear, indeed, that it will be impossible to make myself comprehended) as gelatinous or glutinous matters impress the sense of touch.

I have spoken both of "sound" and of "voice". I mean to say that the sound was one of distinct - of even wonderfully, thrillingly distinct - syllabification.'

(a) Here there are several terms of the metalinguistic (rhetorical) code: the announcement ('characteristic'), the resume ('I have spoken') and the oratorical precaution ('I fear that it will be impossible to make myself comprehended').

(b) The symbolic field of the voice spreads, through the taking-up of the 'in part' expressions of lexia (107): (i) the far-off (absolute distance): the voice is distant because/so that the distance between death and life is/should be total (the 'because' implies a motive belonging to the real, to what is 'behind' the paper; the 'so that' refers to the demand of the discourse which
wants to continue, survive as discourse; by noting 'because/so that' we accept that the two instances, that of the real and that of discourse are twisted together, and we bear witness to the structural duplicity of all writing. The distance (between life and death) is affirmed the better to be denied: it permits the transgression, the 'encroachment', the description of which is the very object of the story; (ii) 'under the earth'; the thematics of voice are in general double, contradictory: sometimes the voice is a light, bird-like thing that flies off with life, and sometimes a heavy, cavernous thing, which comes up from below: it is voice tied down, anchored like a stone: this is an old mythical theme: the chthonic voice, the voice from beyond the grave (as is the case here); (iii) discontinuity founds language; there is therefore a supernatural effect in hearing a gelatinous, glutinous, viscous language; the notation has a double value: on the one hand it emphasizes the strangeness of this language which is contrary to the very structure of language; and on the other hand it adds up the malaises and dysphorias: the broken-up and the clinging, sticking (cf. the suppuration of the eyelids when the dead man is brought round from hypnosis, that is, when he is about to enter real death, (133)); (iv) the distinct syllabification constitutes the imminent speech of the dead man as a full, complete, adult language, as an essence of language, and not as a mumbled, approximate, stammered language, a lesser language, troubled by non-language; hence the fright, the terror: there is a glaring contradiction between death and language; the contrary of life is not death (which is a stereotype), but language: it is undecidable whether Valdemar is alive or dead; what is certain, is that he speaks, without one's being able to refer his speech to life or death.

(c) Let us note here an artifice which belongs to the chronological code: 'I thought then and I still think': there is here a co-presence of three temporalities: the time of the story, the diegesis ('I thought then'), the time of writing ('I think it at the time at which I'm writing'), and the time of reading (carried along by the present tense of writing, we think it ourselves at the moment of reading). The whole produces a reality-effect.

(109) 'M. Valdemar spoke - obviously in reply to the question I had propounded to him a few minutes before. I had asked him, it will be remembered, if he still slept.'

(a) Interrogation IV is here in progress: the question is here recalled (cf.100), the reply is announced.

(b) The words of the hypnotised dead man are the very reply to Problem III, posed in (14): to what extent can hypnosis stop death? Here the question is answered: up to and including language.
(110) 'He now said: - "Yes; - no; - I have been sleeping - and now - now - I am dead."'

From the structural point of view, this lexia is simple: it is the term 'reply' ('I am dead') to Interrogation IV. However, outside the diegetical structure (i.e. the presence of the lexia in an actional sequence) the connotation of the words ('I am dead') is of inexhaustible richness. Certainly there exist numerous mythical narratives in which death speaks; but only to say: 'I am alive'.

There is here a true hapax of narrative grammar, a staging of words impossible as such: I am dead. Let us attempt to unfold some of these connotations:

(i) We have already extracted the theme of encroachment (of life on death); encroachment is a paradigmatic disorder, a disorder of meaning; in the life/death paradigm, the bar is normally read as 'against' (versus); it would suffice to read it as 'on' for encroachment to take place and the paradigm to be destroyed. That's what happens here; one of the spaces bites unwarrantedly into the other. The interesting thing here is that the encroachment occurs at the level of language. The idea that, once dead, the dead man can continue to act is banal; it is what is said in the proverb 'the dead man seizes the living'; it is what is said in the great myths of remorse or of posthumous vengeance; it is what is said comically in Forneret's sally: 'Death teaches incorrigible people to live'. But here the action of the dead man is a purely linguistic action; and, to crown all, this language serves no purpose, it does not appear with a view to acting on the living, it says nothing but itself, it designates itself tautologically. Before saying 'I am dead', the voice says simply 'I am speaking'; a little like a grammatical example which refers to nothing but language; the uselessness of what is proffered is part of the scandal: it is a matter of affirming an essence which is not in its place (the displaced is the very form of the symbolic).

(ii) Another scandal of the enunciation is the turning of the metaphorical into the literal. It is in effect banal to utter the sentence 'I am dead!': it is what is said by the woman who has been shopping all afternoon at Printemps, and who has gone to her hairdresser's, etc. The turning of the metaphorical into the literal, precisely for this metaphor, is impossible: the enunciation 'I am dead', is literally foreclosed (whereas 'I sleep' remained literally possible in the field of hypnotic sleep). It is, then, if you like, a scandal of language which is in question.

(iii) There is also a scandal at the level of 'langue' (and no longer at the level of discourse). In the ideal sum of all the possible utterances of language, the link of the first person (I) and the attribute 'dead' is precisely the one which is radically impossible: it is this empty point, this blind spot of language which the story comes, very exactly, to occupy. What is said is no other than this impossibility: the sentence is not descriptive, it is not constative, it delivers no message other than its own enunciation. In a sense we can say that we have here a perform-
ative, but such, certainly, that neither Austin nor Benveniste had foreseen it in their analyses (let us recall that the performative is the mode of utterance according to which the utterance refers only to its enunciation: 'I declare war'; performatives are always, by force, in the first person, otherwise they would slip towards the constative: 'he declares war'); here, the unwarranted sentence performs an impossibility.11

(iv) From a strictly semantic point of view, the sentence 'I am dead' asserts two contrary elements at once (life, death): it is an enantioseme, but is, once again, unique: the signifier expresses a signified (death) which is contradictory with its enunciation. And yet, we have to go further still: it is not simply a matter of a simple negation, in the psychoanalytical sense, 'I am dead' meaning in that case 'I am not dead', but rather an affirmation-negation: 'I am dead and not dead'; this is the paradox of transgression, the invention of an unheard-of category: the 'true-false', the 'yes-no', the 'death-life' is thought of as a whole which is indivisible, uncombinable, non-dialectic, for the antithesis implies no third term; it is not a two-faced entity, but a term which is one and new.

(v) A further psychoanalytical reflection is possible on the 'I am dead'. We have said that the sentence accomplished a scandalous return to the literal. That means that death, as primordially repressed, erupts directly into language; this return is radically traumatic, as the image of explosion later shows (147: 'ejaculations of "dead! dead!" absolutely bursting from the tongue and not from the lips of the sufferer'): the utterance 'I am dead' is a taboo exploded. Now, if the symbolic is the field of neurosis, the return of the literal, which implies the foreclosure of the symbol, opens up the space of psychosis: at this point of the story, all symbolism ends, and with it all neurosis, and it is psychosis which enters the text, through the spectacular foreclosure of the signifier: what is extraordinary in Poe is indeed madness.

Other commentaries are possible, notably that of Jacques Derrida.22 I have limited myself to those that can be drawn from structural analysis, trying to show that the unheard-of sentence 'I am dead' is in no way the unbelievable utterance, but much more radically the impossible enunciation.

Before moving on to methodological conclusions, I shall recall, at a purely anecdotal level, the end of the story: Valdemar remains dead under hypnosis for seven months; with the agreement of the doctors, P. then decides to wake him; the passes succeed and a little colour returns to Valdemar's cheeks; but while P. attempts to activate the patient by intensifying the passes, the cries of 'Dead! dead!' explode on his tongue, and all at once his whole body escapes, crumbles, rots under the experimenter's hands, leaving nothing but a 'nearly liquid mass of loathsome - of detestable putridity'.
METHODOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

The remarks which will serve as a conclusion to these fragments of analysis will not necessarily be theoretical; theory is not abstract, speculative: the analysis itself, although it was carried out on a contingent text, was already theoretical, in the sense that it observed (that was its aim) a language in the process of formation. That is to say - or to recall - that we have not carried out an explication of the text: we have simply tried to grasp the narrative as it was in the process of self-construction (which implies at once structure and movement, system and infinity). Our structuration does not go beyond that spontaneously accomplished by reading. In concluding, then, it is not a question of delivering the 'structure' of Poe's story, and even less that of all narratives, but simply of returning more freely, and with less attachment to the progressive unfolding of the text, to the principal codes which we have located.

The word 'code' itself should not be taken here in the rigorous, scientific, sense of the term. The codes are simply associative fields, a supra-textual organization of notations which impose a certain idea of structure; the instance of the code is, for us, essentially cultural: the codes are certain types of 'déjà-lu', of 'déjà-fait': the code is the form of this 'déjà', constitutive of all the writing in the world.

Although all the codes are in fact cultural, there is yet one, among those we have met with, which we shall privilege by calling it the cultural code: it is the code of knowledge, or rather of human knowledges, of public opinions, of culture as it is transmitted by the book, by education, and in a more general and diffuse form, by the whole of sociality. We met several of these cultural codes (or several sub-codes of the general cultural code): the scientific code, which (in our story) is supported at once by the principles of experimentation and by the principles of medical deontology; the rhetorical code, which gathers up all the social rules of what is said: coded forms of narrative, coded forms of discourse (the announcement, the résumé, etc.); metalinguistic enunciation (discourse talking about itself) forms part of this code; the chronological code: 'dating', which seems natural and objective to us today, is in fact a highly cultural practice - which is to be expected since it implies a certain ideology of time ('historical' time is not the same as 'mythical' time); the set of chronological reference-points thus constitute a strong cultural code (a historical way of cutting up time for purposes of dramatisation, of scientific appearance, of reality-effect); the socio-historical code allows the mobilisation in the enunciation, of all the inbred knowledge that we have about our time, our society, our country (the fact of saying 'M. Valdemar' and not 'Valdemar', it will be remembered, finds its place here). We must not be worried by the fact that we can constitute extremely banal notations into code: it is on the contrary their banality, their apparent insignificance that predisposes them to codification, given our definition
of code: a corpus of rules that are so worn we take them to be marks of nature; but if the narrative departed from them, it would very rapidly become unreadable.

The code of communication could also be called the code of destination. Communication should be understood in a restricted sense; it does not cover the whole of the signification which is in a text, and still less its 'significance'; it simply designates every relationship in the text which is stated as an address (this is the case of the 'phatic' code, charged with the accentuation of the relationship between narrator and reader), or as an exchange (the narrative is exchanged for truth, for life). In short, communication should here be understood in an economic sense (communication, circulation of goods).

The symbolic field (here 'field' is less inflexible than 'code') is to be etiomatic; the more so in that here we are taking the word 'symbol' in the most general possible sense, without being bothered by any of its usual connotations; the sense to which we are referring is close to that of psychoanalysis: the symbol is broadly that feature of language which displaces the body and allows a 'glimpse' of a scene other than that of the enunciation, such as we think we read it; the symbolic framework in Poe's story is evidently the transgression of the taboo of death, the disorder of classification, that Baudelaire has translated (very well) by the 'empiètement' ('encroachment') of life on death (and not, banally, of death on life); the subtlety of the story comes in part from the fact that the enunciation seems to come from an asymbolic narrator, who has taken on the role of the objective scientist, attached to the fact alone, a stranger to the symbol (which does not fail to come back in force in the story).

What we have called the code of actions supports the anecdotal framework of the narrative; the actions, or the enunciations which denote them, are organized in sequences; the sequence has an approximate identity (its contour cannot be determined rigorously, nor unchallengeably); it is justified in two ways: first because one is led spontaneously to give it a generic name (for example a certain number of notations, ill-health, deterioration, agony, the mortification of the body, its liquefaction, group naturally under a stereotyped idea, that of 'medical death'); and, second, because the terms of the actional sequence are interlinked (from one to the next, since they follow one another throughout the narrative) by an apparent logic; we mean by that the logic which institutes the actional sequence is very impure from a scientific point of view; it is only an apparent logic which comes not from the laws of formal reasoning, but from our habits of reasoning and observing: it is an endoxal, cultural logic (it seems 'logical' to us that a severe diagnosis should follow the observation of a poor state of health); and what is more this logic becomes confused with chronology: what comes 'after' seems to us to be 'caused by'. Although in narrative they are never pure, temporality and causality seem to us to found a sort of naturality, intelligibility, readability for the anecdote: for example, they allow us to resume
it (what the ancients called the argument, a word which is at once logical and narrative).

One last code has traversed our story from its beginning: that of the enigma. We have not had the chance to see it at work, because we have only analysed a very small part of Poe's story. The code of the enigma gathers those terms through the stringing-together of which (like a narrative sentence) an enigma is posed, and which, after some 'delays', make up the piquancy of the narrative, the solution unveiled. The terms of the enigmatic (or hermeneutic) code are well differentiated: for example, we have to distinguish the positing of the enigma (every notation whose meaning is 'there is an enigma') from the formulation of the enigma (the question is exposed in its contingency); in our story, the enigma is posed in the [French] title itself (the 'truth' is announced, but we don't yet know about what question), formulated from the start (the scientific account of the problems linked to the planned experiment), and even, from the very start, delayed: obviously it is in the interests of every narrative to delay the solution of the enigma it poses, since that solution will toll its death-knell as a narrative: we have seen that the narrator uses a whole paragraph to delay the account of the case, under cover of scientific precautions. As for the solution of the enigma, it is not here of a mathematical order; it is in sum the whole narrative which replies to the question posed at the beginning, the question of the truth (this truth can however be condensed into two points: the proffering of 'I am dead', and the sudden liquefaction of the dead man when he awakes from hypnosis); the truth here is not the object of a revelation, but of a revulsion.

These are the codes which traverse the fragments we have analysed. We deliberately don’t structure them further, nor do we try to distribute the terms within each code according to a logical or semiological schema: this is because for us the codes are only departures of 'déjà-lu', beginnings of intertextuality: the frayed nature of the codes does not contradict structure (as, it is thought, life, imagination, intuition, disorder, contradict system and rationality), but on the contrary (this is the fundamental affirmation of textual analysis) is an integral part of structuration. It is this 'fraying' of the text which distinguishes structure – the object of structural analysis, strictly speaking – from structuration – the object of the textual analysis we have attempted to practise here.

The textile metaphor we have just used is not fortuitous. Textual analysis indeed requires us to represent the text as a tissue (this is moreover the etymological sense), as a skein of different voices and multiple codes which are at once interwoven and unfinished. A narrative is not a tabular space, a flat structure, it is a volume, a stereophony (Eisenstein placed great insistence on the counter-point of his directions, thus initiating an identity of film and text): there is a field of listening for written narrative; the mode of presence of meaning (except perhaps for actional sequences) is not development, but 'explosion' [éclat]: call for contact, com-
munication, the positing of contracts, exchange, flashes [éclats] of references, glimmerings of knowledge, heavier, more penetrating blows, coming from the 'other scene', that of the symbolic, a discontinuity of actions which are attached to the same sequence but in a loose, ceaselessly interrupted way.

All this 'volume' is pulled forward (towards the end of the narrative), thus provoking the impatience of reading, under the effect of two structural dispositions: (a) distortion: the terms of a sequence or a code are separated, threaded with heterogeneous elements: a sequence seems to have been abandoned (for example, the degradation of Valdemar's health), but it is taken up again further on, sometimes much later; an expectation is created; we can now even define the sequence: it is the floating micro-structure which constructs not a logical object, but an expectation and its resolution; (b) irreversibility: despite the floating character of structuration, in the classical, readable narrative (such as Poe's story), there are two codes which maintain a directional order; the actional code (based on a logico-temporal order) and the code of the enigma (the question is capped by its solution); and in this way an irreversibility of narrative is created. It is clearly on this point that modern subversion will operate: the avant-garde (to keep a convenient word) attempts to make the text thoroughly reversible, to expel the logico-temporal residue, to attack empiricism (the logic of behaviour, the actional code) and truth (the code of the enigma).

We must not, however, exaggerate the distance separating the modern text from the classical narrative. We have seen, in Poe's story, that one sentence very often refers to two codes simultaneously, without one's being able to choose which is the 'true' one (for example, the scientific code and the symbolic code): what is specific to the text, once it attains the quality of a text, is to constrain us to the undecidability of the codes. In the name of what could we decide? In the author's name? But the narrative gives us only an enunciator, a performer caught up in his own production. In the name of such and such a criticism? All are challengeable, carried off by history (which is not to say that they are useless: each one participates, but only as one voice, in the text's volume). Undecidability is not a weakness, but a structural condition of narration: there is no unequivocal determination of the enunciation: in an utterance, several codes and several voices are there, without priority. Writing is precisely this loss of origin, this loss of 'motives' to the profit of a volume of indeterminations or overdeterminations: this volume is, precisely, 'signifiance'. Writing [écriture] comes along very precisely at the point where speech stops, that is from the moment one can no longer locate who is speaking and one simply notes that speaking has started.

Translated by Geoff Bennington
NOTES


2 For a tighter analysis of the notion of the lexia, and moreover of the operating procedures to follow, I am obliged to refer to 'S/Z' [pp. 13ff].

3 'Histoires extraordinaires', trans. Charles Baudelaire, Paris, N.R.F.; Livre de poche, 1969, pp. 329-345 ['The Collected Works', 3 vols. ed T.O. Mabbott, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1978, III, 1233-43. Translator's note: The fact that Barthes is working on the translation of a text originally in English evidently causes some extra problems of translation. Naturally I have used Poe's text; the quality of Baudelaire's translation is such that most of Barthes's comments apply equally to the original. The notable exception to this is the title, and Barthes in fact explicitly comments on this, continuing, however, to use the word 'vérité' in the French title in support of his analysis. I have specified by notes in square brackets wherever this might lead to confusion.]

4 [Cf Shoshana Felman's discussion of James's comparable statement that The Turn of the Screw is a 'trap', in Turning the Screw of Interpretation, 'Yale French Studies', 55/6, 1977, pp. 101ff.]

5 [Barthes is here making use of Derrida's description of the supplementary structure of the sign. See Chapter 1, pp. 17-18, above.]

6 [According to Barthes, it was the inability to read the plurality of texts ('asymbolism') that was precisely the failure of his critical adversary Raymond Picard. See 'Critique et vérité' Paris, Seuil, 1966, pp. 35-42.]


8 [In Jakobson's definition (Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb, in 'Selected Writings', 5 vols, The Hague, Mouton, 1962–, II, pp. 130-2) 'shifters' are the units in language which create the difference between the 'message' per se and the 'meaning' of a communication. Specifically, they refer to those units which refer to the mode of utterance or context, such as 'I', 'you', 'him', etc. But, typically, Barthes elsewhere modifies this to see 'shifting' as characteristic of all writing; see The Shifter as Utopia, in 'Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes', trans. Richard Howard, London, Macmillan, 1977, pp. 165-6.]

9 [Xavier Forneret (1809-84), poet. His 'Vapeurs, ni vers ni prose' passed unnoticed when it was published in 1838, but was reissued in 1952 by André Breton, who situated him
in the tradition of Lautréamont and the Surrealists.]

10 [In French this metaphorical usage corresponds to the English expression 'I'm dead tired.'][


FURTHER READING


GROSS, RUTH V., Rich Text/Poor Text: A Kafkan Confusion,
Roland Barthes

in 'PMLA', 95:2, March 1980, pp. 188-82.


