

# **A Tentative Classification Scheme for General Narratology**

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# **Call for a General Narratology**

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# The Need of a General Narratology

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- ❑ There has not been a classification scheme embracing all narrative genres, perhaps because there has not yet been a general narratology to call for it.
  - ❑ Narratology has always concentrated on the novel, with only casual glances beyond.
  - ❑ In recent decades, there have been some attempts at a classification, though not a general one.
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# Narrative, essential for man

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- ❑ In face of the huge mass of empirical data, there are two ways to tackle it, to abstract in order to form a statement, or to narrativize in order to build a plot that connects the events.
  - ❑ Without them, experience will fragment, making itself unfit for memorizing, for communicating, or for understanding.
  - ❑ Our very existence will fall apart without narrative.
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# “food-telling-sex-shelter”

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- ---the basic human needs for survival in an for quite long.
  - Human society can't survive without communication, and once one tells, it must be either a statement or a narrative.
  - order of importance.
  - Individuals can survive without the last two
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# Narrative: half of human knowledge

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- Lyotard: all human knowledge is either “scientific knowledge” or “narrative knowledge”.
  - Rorty’s division of the field of philosophy into “analytical philosophy” and “narrative philosophy”
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# “Narratology is a misnomer”

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- A general narratology is a study of what is common of all narratives.
  - Barthes argues: “narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society”.
  - In 1990, Genette criticized Barthes (and himself as well) for hardly going beyond the novel.
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# Thirty years later

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- The 2003 Hamberg Conference of “Narratology Beyond Literary Criticism” failed to break through literary narratology
  - In 2009, Wolf Schmid also conceded, “An independent development of categories hardly exists outside literary study ... The mother discipline of narratology is still literary study”.
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**Semionarratology,  
a path toward a general  
narratology**

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# Semionarratology as general narratology

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- A sign is a perception that is understood to be carrying meaning.
  - Semionarratology is, then, a study of all texts used for telling stories.
  - Both semioticians and narratologists have been working towards it since long.
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# Semioticians & Others

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- Greimas used semiotique narrative in 1976.
  - Ricouer's Vol 2 of *Time and Narrative* devoted a chapter to Propp, Bremond and Greimas, and the title of the chapter is "Semiotics of Narrative";
  - Culler: "The analysis of narrative is an important branch of semiotics".
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# Narratologists' Words

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- ❑ Bal (in 1978): There are two kinds of narratology. “Literary narratology belongs to poetics, whereas non-literary narratology belongs to textology”.
  - ❑ Rimmon-Kenan agreed with her but trying to correct her wording that non-literary narratology belongs to semiotics.
  - ❑ Chatman asked, “Is Narrative a Semiotic Structure?” and his answer is positive.
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# Deliver!

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- What this paper suggests is not what the narratological & semiotic circles have not thought of, but what they have failed to deliver.
  - This discipline, though called for repeatedly, has not coming into being.
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# Recent development

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- ❑ Scholars have made fresh efforts to approach this ideal.
  - ❑ Marie-Laure Ryan suggested a transmediac narratology;
  - ❑ The debate over "natural" narratives has spilled over from literary narratives to non-literary ones, touching on the very nature of narratives.
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# Chinese contributions

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- Fu Xiuyan and his team have been writing on “marginal” narratives such as bronze vessel inscriptions, chastity arches, ancient divinations, and tea ceremonies
  - Zhang Shijun on narrative in Chinese architecture,
  - Qiao Guoqiang on narrative in literary history.
  - Long Diyong on dream narrative.
  - Whether within China or without, a general narratology has been gradually taking shape.
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# **A Classification Scheme of All Narratives**

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# First step

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- The first step in any attempt at a general narratology is to come up with a classification scheme for all narrative genres.
  - A viable classification scheme is the foundation.
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# Genette on factual vs fictional

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- ❑ Genette wrote in 1990 a long essay on the distinction between factual and fictional narratives
  - ❑ He dealt only with narratives in writing.
  - ❑ Once the distinction is pushed beyond written texts, the situation is totally different.
  - ❑ The opposition has to be re-established on more general and abstract terms.
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# Marie-Laure Ryan: transmediac

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- In a essay of 2004, Ryan put forward a transmediac classification:
  - **Diegetic**: Novels, oral storytelling;
  - **Mimetic** : Drama, movies.
  - **Participatory**: Children's games of make-believe, theater with audience participation.
  - **Simulative** mode: Story-generating systems.
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Temporality- modality	media	factual	fictional
<b>Past (declarative)</b>	recording : writing, picture, sculpture	history, biography, journalism, diary, wax-figure	novel, epic, comics
past-present	recording- performing: Filmic, digital	documentary film, video-audio -recording	fiction film, recording of performance
<b>Present (interrogative)</b>	performing: corporeal, objects, speech	live TV & radio broadcast, legal speech	theatre, games, oral storytelling
quasi-present	quasi- Performing, mental- image	telepathy	dream, hallucination
<b>Future (imperative)</b>	conative (on any medium)	Promise, advertise ment, divination, prediction, oath	

# 9 categories

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- The table extends on two axes. Crossing the two axes we arrive at 9 categories.
  - Every narrative genre could fall into one category, that is, it must be either factual or fictional, and containing one temporality-modality.
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# Two Axes

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# Ontological Axis

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- ❑ factual narratives: the author identifies with the narrator. He is, therefore, capable of being held answerable for the factuality (which is not facts but the quality of relating to the referential “reality”).
  - ❑ In a fictional narrative, the author commissions the narration to a surrogate narrator (of person-frame duality), making him or it answerable for the factuality.
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# Fictional: surrogate narration

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- ❑ Nabokov is not responsible for the factuality of *Lolita*, but Humphrey is.
  - ❑ In a play, the rise and fall of the curtain form a narratorial frame that lets the fictional text push in and pop out.
  - ❑ When one says, “let me tell you a joke”, he lets his subjectivity split, to address a split personality of the listener.
  - ❑ Thus the sender evades the answerability for the factuality,
  - ❑ whereas the factual narrative, with no surrogate-narrator, the text is transparent to referentiality.
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# Temporality-modality axis

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- The combined standard evolves from the concepts of modality, developed by semioticians like Jakobson and Benveniste.
  - The concept of force developed by analytical philosophers starting from Gottlob Frege but mainly expounded by John R Searle
  - That's why it is called Frege-Searle hypothesis.
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# Benveniste's proposal

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- In any language there are three discursive modes:
  - declarative: to tell an event that has happened
  - interrogative: to solicit a response
  - Imperative: to achieve an effect
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# Applications

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- Catherine Belsey applied it to stylistics, identifying three types of literary narratives:
    - classical realism is more declarative,
    - avant-garde literature is interrogative,
    - propaganda imperative.
  - Scholars of advertisement first pointed out that the imperative text has a temporal directionality towards the future.
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# Association with Media

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- Uri Margolin considered the possible application of Searle's modality theory to the analysis of different fiction works.
  - Though he didn't try to make a generic classification, he mentioned that Live TV is in association with the present progressive tense.
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# Propositions & Sentences

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- The scheme remains more or less the same if we have to classify propositions or sentences.
  - Most texts comprises of mixed types of sentences.
  - Any historiography contains some fictional sentences,
  - In any novel there are factual sentences.
  - There could be writing in a performing narrative (score board in a game, for instance), or vice versa.
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# The Dominant

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- Genres are decided by cultural convention, established on what Roman Jakobson called the “dominant”.
  - In a novel, there are commentary, descriptive, and narrative sentences, but the narrative must be the dominant in order to make the whole text narrative.
  - Advertisements are counted as conative, which is a sub-genre of the factual (as it eventually has to highlight the commodity, an actual object), but there could be quite a large part of it fictional.
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# Fuzzy Set

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- ❑ In many genres, the narrative elements abound but not necessarily dominant.
  - ❑ There are narrative elements, say, in songs or even in untitled music,
  - ❑ but neither music nor lyrics are regarded as narrative genres in our scheme, which does not mean that individual narrative texts of those genres can't be classified within this scheme.
  - ❑ Ryan said “The set of all narratives is a fuzzy set”.
  - ❑ The reason not to include those “mixed genres” in the scheme is not to blur the perimeters of the white area.
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