

Exploring the Connection Between Peter Barry's Narratology and Reprogrammed Ai Writing.

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Abstract

This paper investigates the conceptual and structural links between Peter Barry's Introduction of Narratology in *Beginning Theory* and Contemporary Reprogrammed AI writing systems, particularly big language model-based text generators in today time. Barry integrates classical structuralist narratology into a systematic framework for analysing storytelling as a structure governed by rules, drawing on Propp's functional morphology, Genette's temporal theory, and the distinctions between narrative and discourse. This article argues that the operational logic of narrative generated by artificial intelligence is both hinted at and clarified by these structuralist concepts.

The research demonstrates that AI writing systems include narratological notions in algorithmic formats by analysing computational narratology, neural language models, and symbolic story-generation systems from an interdisciplinary viewpoint. Like structuralist narrative schemas, early rule-based narrative engines explicitly included act roles and plot grammars. Modern transformer-based models, however statistically driven rather than governed by strict rules, employ probabilistic sequence modelling and attention processes to intricately emulate story elements like as focalization, temporal sequencing, and discourse stratification.

Research indicates that reprogrammed AI writing represents a transition from emergent probabilistic narrativity to deterministic structural narratology. This alteration both substantiates narratology's claim that storytelling operates as a system independent of human authorial awareness and challenges traditional notions of authorship, intentionality, and narrative coherence. This work presents a technique for evaluating AI-generated texts using conventional narratological categories, framing AI narrative generation as a computational embodiment and reinterpretation of structuralist narratology. Ultimately, it argues that Barry's narratological framework offers an essential viewpoint for understanding the potential and epistemological limits of narratives facilitated by AI.

Keywords: Peter Barry, Narratology, Narrative Temporality, Gerard Genette, Vladimir Propp, Artificial Intelligence Writing.

Introduction

The goal of narrative theory has always been to identify the structural rules that underpin storytelling. In keeping with this tradition, *Beginning Theory*, written by Peter Barry, provides one of the most theoretically rigorous yet approachable syntheses of structuralist narrative analysis. Barry defines narratology as the methodical study of narrative structures as opposed to the interpretation of thematic substance, drawing on the seminal work of Tzvetan Todorov, Gérard Genette, Roland Barthes, and Vladimir Propp. According to Barry, narrative is a rule-governed system made up of distinguishable elements such as tale and discourse, fabula, focalization, temporal order, length, frequency, and narrative levels. It is not only a means of conveying meaning. His explanation highlights how formal procedures

that are evaluated apart from authorial purpose are how narrative functions. In this way, narratology turns the focus from the content of stories to their structure.

Barry's discussion emphasizes many structural characteristics that are fundamental to narratological research. The distinction between tale (the chronological sequence of events) and discourse (the method in which those events are portrayed) emphasizes the concept that narrative meaning is created via organization rather than bare material. Similarly, Genette's categories of temporal order, length, and frequency show how tales use time to produce coherence and emphasis. Propp's morphology of the folktale, with its repeated functions and character roles, demonstrates that storytelling frequently follows predictable sequences that extend beyond particular texts. Barry brings these theoretical elements together into a cohesive framework, offering narratology as a descriptive science of story systems.

Furthermore, these structural concepts align with the operational mechanisms of contemporary AI writing systems. Early computer storytelling models, especially symbolic AI systems created in the late twentieth century, explicitly integrated plot grammars with character functions, utilizing Proppian morphology and structuralist philosophy. These systems perceived tales as a series of regulated processes, embodying the tenets of structural determinism in traditional narratology. The advent of interactive theatrical research incorporated narratological principles into computer systems, framing narrative as a dynamic construct defined by constraints and event logic.

The introduction of large language models (LLMs) based on transformer architectures represents a significant advancement in AI writing. Unlike rule-based systems, LLMs create text probabilistically by predicting token sequences using patterns learnt from large corpora. Despite their statistical roots, these models frequently recreate familiar story forms. They implicitly discriminate between story-level events and discourse-level presentation, manage temporal sequencing, maintain focalization, and keep character roles consistent over long sections. LLMs replicate coherence and narrative continuity via attention processes that represent contextual relationships, which corresponds to structuralist explanations of storytelling mechanics.

This confluence necessitates a profound re-evaluation of narratology's relevance in the era of AI. If structuralist theory posits that narratives are governed by underlying systems, then AI writing might be perceived as the computational realization of these systems, albeit modified by probabilistic modelling. At the same time, stories made by AI challenge the ideas that traditional literary analysis has about authorship, purpose, and meaning. Narratology's focus on structural autonomy gains significance when the production of narratives is dissociated from human consciousness.

This study examines the potential of classical narrative theory to elucidate the dynamics of machine-generated storytelling by contrasting Peter Barry's interpretation of narratology with reprogrammed AI writing. It asserts that narratology functions as a diagnostic framework for analysing AI-generated texts and as a conceptual bridge between literary theory and computer architecture. In doing so, it shows that structuralist ideas are still needed to understand how stories are made, whether by people or computers.

1. Structural Narratology as System: Barry's Framework

Peter Barry characterizes narratology as a structural examination of story mechanics rather than its thematic significance. In *Beginning Theory*, he emphasizes that narratology "provides a framework for analysing the mechanics of narratives" (Barry 214). His approach centres on the separation between narrative (the chronological order of events) and discourse (the method of presentation), rooted in Russian Formalism and examined by Gérard Genette. This difference demonstrates that narrative meaning arises

not just from the events themselves but also from their sequence and interpretation.

Barry used Genette's classifications of order, length, and frequency to illustrate the structural manipulation of narrative time (Barry 222–25). Analepsis (flashback) and prolepsis (flashforward) demonstrate that narrative coherence relies on organized temporal variation rather than linear chronology. Propp's functional morphology similarly recognizes repeating narrative units such as interdiction, violation, and return that work independently of particular characters or locations (Propp 25–65). Barry integrates these theoretical elements to depict narrative as a regulated system, so validating structuralism's assertion that storytelling adheres to recognizable formal patterns.

Significantly, Barry contextualizes narratology within post-structural discussions around authorship. In alignment with Roland Barthes' concept of the "death of the author," narratology redirects focus from authorial purpose to textual composition (Barthes 148). Barry conceptualizes story as an independent system whose structural principles may be analysed. This structural autonomy is especially pertinent in the realm of machine-generated writing.

2. Transitioning from Plot Functions to Computational Story Grammars

The structuralist focus on narrative as a system foreshadowed first advancements in computational storytelling. Symbolic AI versions of narrative, particularly in the late twentieth century, conceptualized storytelling as a programmable sequence of functions akin to Propp's morphology. Scholars in interactive theatre and expressive AI aimed to embed character roles, narrative arcs, and event logic into computer frameworks (Mateas 20–25). These systems depended on rule-based planning structures that reflected structuralist assumptions: narrative coherence arose from predetermined functional sequences.

Marie-Laure Ryan contends that digital narratives broaden structural narratology within computer contexts by converting narrative frameworks into algorithmic processes (Ryan 8–12). Narratology becomes functional rather than only interpretative in this scenario. Narrative functions are both delineated and implemented by software systems. Wardrip-Fruin asserts that computer processes inherently provide meaning, indicating that storytelling may emerge from procedural logic rather than human purpose (Wardrip-Fruin 42).

These advancements illustrate that structural narratology offered a conceptual framework for initial AI storytelling systems. By encoding actants, plot points, and temporal restrictions into programmable frameworks, AI researchers successfully converted narratological theory into operational models.

3. Neural Language Models and Emergent Narrativity

The advent of transformer-based large language models (LLMs) signifies a substantial transition from symbolic determinism to probabilistic production. In contrast to rule-based systems, LLMs produce text by forecasting sequences of tokens derived on statistical patterns acquired from extensive corpora. Nevertheless, despite this probabilistic basis, AI-generated tales often have structural characteristics identifiable within narratological theory.

For example, LLMs inherently preserve differences between narrative events and discourse-level representation. They manage narrative temporality via flashbacks and anticipatory references, illustrating functional parallels to Genette's temporal categories (Genette 40–85). Furthermore, they maintain focalization narrative perspective throughout extensive sections, consistent with Genette's differentiation between the observer and the narrator (Genette 186).

This process can be seen as emergent narrativity: structural coherence emerges not from the intentional

encoding of narrative rules but via extensive pattern recognition. Pianzola et al. contend that computer systems are progressively emulating story patterns using abstract relational representations instead of deterministic scripts. In this regard, AI writing signifies a shift in structural narratology: narrative structure is statistically derived rather than formally dictated.

4. Authorship, Structure, and the Question of Agency

The convergence of narratology and AI writing reignites discussions over authorship and agency. Structuralist narratology, as articulated by Barry, prioritizes systemic textual activities over the individual author (Barry 233). AI-generated writing exacerbates this stance by completely severing story creation from human cognition.

Nonetheless, AI writing both challenges and corroborates the assumptions of narratology. While structuralism asserts the existence of fixed underlying systems, LLMs dynamically produce narratives, frequently modifying structure in reaction to suggestions. This adaptability implies a hybrid model: narrative retains a structural framework but arises from probabilistic computing instead of rigid morphology.

Consequently, AI writing might be perceived as a post-structural extension of narratology. It validates the structuralist perspective that story is governed by systems, while confounding concepts of intentionality and meaning. This situates Barry's narratological paradigm within current discussions in digital humanities and artificial intelligence.

Conclusion

The convergence of Peter Barry's narratological framework with contemporary AI writing systems reveals an unexpected link between structuralist literary theory and computational text generation. Barry's synthesis of narratology in *Beginning Theory* underscores that narrative is governed by formal structures, including the distinctions between story and discourse, patterned functions, temporal manipulation, and focalization, which operate irrespective of authorial purpose (Barry). Narratology emphasizes the systematic structure of tales rather than thematic components, depicting storytelling as a controlled framework suitable for analytical scrutiny. This understanding of structure gives us a strong way to look at the design and consequences of text created by AI. This connection was obvious in the first computational storytelling systems. Rule-based story engines directly employed Proppian functions and roles, transforming structuralist morphology into programmable logic (Propp). Research in interactive theatre has further incorporated narrative constraints inside computational frameworks, underscoring the notion that narratives may be generated through formal systems rather than only through individual creative consciousness (Mateas). In these systems, narratology evolved from interpretive theory to operational design principle. The emergence of extensive language models complicates, although does not eliminate, this structural continuity. Even while LLMs use probabilistic prediction instead of deterministic narrative grammars, their outputs typically include narratological traits including temporal variations, sustained focalization, and coherent event sequencing. Genette's temporal categories say that the significance of a story comes from how order and duration are changed in a systematic way. Transformer designs employ attention mechanisms and contextual weighting to reproduce these structural modifications on a substantial scale. Instead of directly registering Proppian processes, brain systems learn how to recognize patterns in narrative structure by reading a lot of big texts. This change shows a shift from deterministic structural narratology to what may be called emergent narrativity. In symbolic systems,

structure is obligatory; in neural systems, structure is inferred statistically. Both models validate the structuralist premise that story is dependent on systematic interrelations among events, agents, and perspectives. In this sense, AI writing does not make narratology unimportant. Instead, it puts information in a new perspective by putting it in a computational framework. At the same time, stories made by AI make long-standing theoretical questions about authorship and textual agency even worse. The structuralist theory, influenced by Barthes' notion of the "death of the author," has already contested the supremacy of individual intention in meaning formation (Barthes). AI writing makes this position worse by creating stories that make sense without a deliberate author. The narrative system operates independently, governed by computational processes instead of human experience. This change challenges human-centered creative paradigms and reinforces narratology's emphasis on textual structure above individual expression. In the end, looking at reprogrammed AI writing via Barry's narratology shows that classical structuralist theory is still very important in the digital age. Narratology offers a framework for evaluating the coherence, temporality, and focalization of machine-generated texts, while AI systems provide as a laboratory for testing structuralist claims on the autonomy of narrative form. The relationship between the two is not only analogous but also transformative: AI writing represents both the computational realization and the theoretical advancement of narratological principles. This dispute shows that stories, whether they are made by people or computers, are always ordered, have patterns, and can be analysed.

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