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Arsen Avetisov

APPLIED NARRATOLOGY

Theory, Methods, and Analysis of Social and Political
Narratives: How Stories Shape Power, Identity, and
Reality



Arsen Avetisov

**Applied narratology. Theory,
Methods, and Analysis
of Social and Political
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Аннотация

«Applied Narratology» is a book about how stories shape thought, power, and social reality. It moves from narrative theory to the practices of political, cultural, and everyday storytelling. The book demonstrates how narratives construct identities, legitimise decisions, and define the boundaries of the possible – in politics, society, and human life. The next volumes in the series are «French Narratives» and «Political Narratology.»

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Applied narratology Theory, Methods, and Analysis of Social and Political Narratives: How Stories Shape Power, Identity, and Reality

Arsen Avetisov

Translator Gregory Attaryan

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FROM THE AUTHOR

(A Very Personal Note)

When I was beginning these books, I was far from certain I would be able to see them through. Not for a lack of knowledge or material – there was plenty of that, sometimes even too much. But rather because the narrative I was writing about also lived within me. And at times, it resisted.

Every time I sat down to write a new chapter, it felt as though I was explaining things to myself. I was searching for words that might help me understand my own decisions, my own doubts, my own reactions just a little better. Sometimes I felt again like a surgeon learning to operate by making the incision in my own skin.

At some point, I realised: you cannot write about narratives while staying on the sidelines. You cannot explain how stories change if you are afraid to change your own. You cannot speak of meaning while remaining indifferent. You cannot write about attention if you yourself are constantly turning away from what truly matters.

And so these books became both a study and a journey – an internal journey, not always comfortable, but always honest.

I discovered that my own stories also demanded transformation; that some convictions had lived on in me for too

long merely by inertia; that some fears had long since become voices that no longer felt like my own; that I uttered certain words automatically, without ever stopping to think where they had come from.

And I realised: we are all far more alike than we appear. Yes, each of us has our own dates, our own people, our own geographies, but the mechanisms are universal. We make mistakes in the same ways. We love in the same ways. We defend ourselves in the same ways. Our sincere desire to be ourselves – that, too, is the same.

I wrote these books hoping they would help you discover something new about yourself and the world around you. But I did not expect just how much they would reveal to me. For that, I am grateful to you, the reader. Because writing is always a dialogue, and you are its most essential participant.

I do not know where you are in your own story right now. At a turning point? At a moment of choice, or a moment of exhaustion? At the beginning of something big, or the close of something important?

But I do know this: no story is ever final. It yields to the movements of the soul, it responds to attention, it changes when a person decides to look at themselves through the lens of possibility, that very possibility which is always near, yet not always in focus.

If you manage, even just a little, to draw closer to the place where you can hear your own voice more clearly than the

noise of external expectations; if you allow yourself one new interpretation that lifts an unnecessary burden; if you sense that your story might be open to a new continuation, then none of this will have been in vain.

Thank you for being willing to walk this path with me. Thank you for your trust, your attention, and the inner stillness with which you will read. Thank you for allowing these books to become a part of your story, if only for a short while.

And as for your own story, keep going. With more gentleness. More courage. More honesty. And in a way no one has done before you.

Because no one can live it better than you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These books emerged from years of observing how people explain the world to themselves and how those explanations come to govern their decisions, their fears, their hopes, and the forms of their life together.

I am grateful to those authors, thinkers, and researchers whose work – from philosophy and anthropology to political theory and the cognitive sciences – has made it possible to speak of narrative as a real social mechanism. Their ideas have provided the background, the foundation, and a constant point of dialogue throughout the work on these books.

Special thanks are due to those practitioners in politics, management, media, and culture who, whether consciously or not, demonstrate the power of narrative every day. Their decisions, their speeches, their pauses, their formulations, and their silences have provided essential empirical material for analysis.

I am also indebted to the readers, interlocutors, and critics whose questions, doubts, and disagreements helped sharpen the formulations and maintain a necessary distance between analysis and conviction.

None of this work would have been possible without the space for observation, reflection, and doubt – and without the people who reminded me that every story deserves not only belief, but

also attention.

PREFACE

*Humans think in stories, and we try to make sense
of the world by telling stories.*

Yuval Noah Harari

Relevance, or The Era of New Specialisms

We live in an age of rapid transformation – artificial intelligence, neural networks, biotechnologies, and the metaverse are changing not only the economy but the very nature of human work. And with work, the entire fabric of people's lives is changing.

Automation is taking over everything that can be formalised. But the more tasks algorithms assume, the greater the value of what remains irreducibly human: sensation, feeling, imagination, the ability to see connections and create meaning. There is no doubt that the future will belong to hybrid professions at the intersection of technology, psychology, art, and communication. These roles demand not just new tools – they demand a new way of thinking. Consider a few: creators of spaces that unite logical and emotional principles; architects who design digital cities, environments for learning and interaction where people want to *live*, not merely exist online; specialists who interpret biodata through neural interfaces, helping us understand why we act as we do. The list could

go on...

But perhaps the most crucial are the specialists who shape the direction of thinking for communities, media, and companies. They help us see what matters, build context, connect facts, ideas, and values – data, language, and emotion – into meaningful narratives. Those who control attention, control civilisation. These are narratologists – creators of meaningful narratives capable of guiding the behaviour of thousands within a company or millions across entire nations.

Their core value lies in being guides, helping society hold its course by forging meaning from chaos through simple stories.

The future of work is not about technology. Technology is a tool, not a goal. The real future belongs to those who can connect the rational with the human, code with meaning, intelligence with imagination.

It is these people – the creators of meaningful narratives – who will shape the face and behaviour of society ten years from now. Because they do not compete with machines, they make machines part of human evolution.

True success lies not in repetition or in stubbornly chasing change. True success lies in anticipating change, in being ready for it, or in *becoming* that change.

Why Narrative Is Not a Story, But a Form of Life

We live in an age of unprecedented information, yet also in an age of meaning scarcity. Never before have people known

so many facts, received so much data, yet never before have they been so disoriented by the question: which of this actually matters *to me*?

We are accustomed to explaining what happens to us by external causes: economics, politics, technology, biology, chance. We speak of crises, trends, epochs, markets, algorithms. But behind all these words lies something far more fundamental – the way a person connects events into a coherent picture of the world. This process is rarely conscious, yet it determines how we make decisions, what we consider possible, what we fear, what we will fight for, and what we live for.

This process is called narrative.

For a long time, narratology remained an academic discipline, concerned with literature, texts, and the structures of storytelling. But in reality, narrative long ago escaped the confines of the library. It lives in politics, economics, media, education, marketing, in personal decisions and collective fears. It has become the universal mechanism for organising human experience.

Narrative is the internal logic that transforms scattered facts and events into a story with a beginning, a direction, and an anticipated end. It is the structure through which the past explains the present, and the present justifies or denies the imagined future. A person may be unable to articulate their story in words, but they always live inside one.

We do not act because things are ‘objectively so,’ but because

that is how they appear *to us*.

We choose not from reality, but from its interpretation.

We react not to events, but to the meanings we have assigned to them or found in them, often long before those events have even occurred.

This is the key problem of our time: the world has become more complex, faster, and more uncertain, yet our internal stories have become more inertial, simpler, and often already obsolete. We live in the twenty-first century while relying on narratives formed in childhood, in a different cultural reality, under different conditions of survival. We use new technologies, but explain ourselves and the world in the language of the past.

Hence, chronic anxiety, a sense of pointless strain, disorientation, social conflict, polarisation, the manipulability of the masses, and the inner feeling that life is somehow ‘passing us by,’ even when outwardly everything looks fine.

It is remarkable how attached a person is to their own story. Even when that story hinders them, they cling to it tightly, because it is close and familiar. And strangely, it is precisely in this attachment (and this contradiction) that the possibility of change arises. If a story influences behaviour, then by changing the story, we can change behaviour. This is not magic, not self-persuasion, not an attempt to invent a new biography or alter the past; it is a precise and careful working with the meanings a person invests in their life and their surroundings.

These books are about that kind of work. About how to see the plot and meaning that govern decisions and life. How to hear the familiar phrases behind which lie limitations or potential. How to change the elements of a story so that they begin to lead forward, not backward. And, crucially, how to do this safely, honestly, and effectively.

We approach narrative as a tool. It is a technical approach. An applied one. It does not dismiss emotion or ignore biography. It provides a way to act.

What These Books Are For

These books continue a line of inquiry begun in the works *The Power of Narrative Intelligence* and *Homo Narrare*. Those works laid down the basic thesis: the human being is not merely a rational subject, but a creature that organises experience, decisions, and identity through storytelling. The present books develop this approach, moving from a general understanding of the role of narrative intelligence to its *applied* use – in life, in management, and in culture. From *Theoretical Narratology* and *Applied Narratology* to *French Narratives*.

The next step in this series is a book entitled *Political Narratology*, in which these same mechanisms will be examined at the level of collective stories, power, and social systems. Thus, all the works form a single conceptual framework: from the individual narrative to the cultural, and onwards to the political. These are not separate books, but successive levels of a single

investigation into how stories shape reality and how we can work with this consciously.

They are for those who want to remain relevant now and in ten years' time. For those who feel they are playing someone else's role. For those who sense that recurring problems are not a matter of chance. For those seeking a way to restructure their life and environment not through force and strain, but through logic and meaning. For those who work with people – leaders and managers, coaches, teachers and parents, PR professionals and communicators. For those who want to learn to create the future as confidently as they plan their week. Plots are the primary internal interface. Change the interface, and you change the system.

What the Books Will Contain

The first book, *Theoretical Narratology*, is the foundation. It lays the groundwork: what is a life narrative, why does it arise, what are its basic elements? We will analyse the mechanisms by which meaning is formed, and examine the interplay of personal, familial, and cultural plots. This knowledge is the anchor. Without it, the practical part becomes a jumble of random techniques.

The second book, *Applied Narratology*, is the practical one. Here are the tools. Methods of analysis and diagnosis: how to hear hidden stories, how to work with recurring episodes, how to separate facts from meanings. Techniques of transformation:

how to change the angle of vision, how to adjust roles, how to restructure the line of the future. The exercises provided will be step-by-step, clear, and immediately applicable.

The third book, *French Narratives*, is a practical case study. The history of France and the French way of life as a model of narrative balance. France is a country where plots develop contrastingly and distinctly: freedom, equality, style, resistance. French culture is an excellent space for seeing how narratives shape behaviour and how historical lines can become a metaphor for everyone's life.

The book *Political Narratology* is about the moment when someone else's story becomes mandatory. It is about what happens when a narrative ceases to be personal or cultural and becomes political. When the story begins to speak on behalf of millions and turns into an instrument of power.

Why We Compare Different Schools

To work effectively with a story, one must understand three existing scholarly perspectives.

Classical narratology studies the structure of the text. It explains the mechanics of plot, the roles, the order of events.

Cognitive narratology studies how the brain constructs stories, why a person sees connections where none exist, how memory links facts.

Applied narratology, which forms the basis of this book, takes both these perspectives and turns them into a tool for action.

Its task is not to explain a story, but to provide the means to change it.

We will draw on all three approaches. But the primary one is applied, connecting elements of narrative theory with strategic thinking.

What These Books Are Definitely Not About

We are not creating fictional versions of the past; we work with reality. We do not erase, but reinterpret; we do not force life into a beautiful plot, but select a story that supports real forward movement.

The books do not promise instant transformations. Narrative is a complex mechanism. It needs to be analysed and unfolded over time, gradually. But if you work methodically, the effect accumulates. The narrative approach is not therapy, not trauma treatment – it is working with meaning.

Why France?

France is a fortunate example of a country where narratives do not merely exist, but dominate. Here, culture lives through plots, politics lives through plots, individuals live through plots. A French person can argue about food as if it were philosophy, defend style as a political stance, live as if every episode were part of a grand film.

French history itself offers four particularly powerful narratives, easily seen and transferable to personal life: *freedom*

as the right to be oneself; *community and equality* as the striving for justice; *style* as a form of self-expression; *resistance* as the inner engine that lifts a person after every defeat.

These four narratives we will use as a model for life balance.

How to Work with the Books

Best to read them in order. But you can also do the reverse: first find inspiration in the French journey of the third book, and then return to the theory and practice. The books can be read quickly, but you need to work with them slowly. Do the exercises, write down your answers, and compare them after a week. Repeat the methods and techniques on several different situations, adapting them to your environment and circumstances.

What You Will Gain

By studying this book, you will be able to:

- understand why some ideas captivate millions while others die;
- grasp why facts no longer persuade and how identities are formed;
- perceive your own story and the stories of those around you as a system;
- analyse and diagnose the narratives imposed upon you;
- recognise the stories that hold you back and prevent you from developing;

- identify the stories that have become centres of distortion;
- transform story elements without inventing a ‘new life’, and shape a future plot as a strategy;
- maintain a balance between key life narratives.

These books are about how meanings are born. About how they govern us, and how we can learn to work with them consciously – to act in such a way that a new story becomes reality.

BOOK I. THEORETICAL NARRATOLOGY

PART ONE

CHAPTER 1. THE RELEVANCE OF THE PROBLEM

The doer is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything.
Friedrich Nietzsche

In their book *Story Intelligence*, Richard Stone and Scott Livengood cite research data indicating that four out of ten people in the United States do not find a full-fledged purpose in life, and a quarter have no clear idea of what makes life meaningful.

The celebrated French neurologist and psychiatrist Boris Cyrulnik, also known as the ‘father of resilience’, argues that the capacity to make life meaningful stems from the ability to sublimate the pain of experience through creativity, including artistic creativity. The primary effective tool in Cyrulnik’s professional practice was narrative. In other words: one who does not know how to be the author of their own story loses life’s meaning.

The ability to make one’s own life and the lives of those around us meaningful, to set compelling goals, to uncover

meanings and initiate actions – all these are functions of **narrative intelligence**, and the field that studies this subject is **narratology**.

According to the Sapir – Whorf hypothesis, the system of concepts existing in a person's mind, and consequently their thinking, is determined by their language. On average, men and women utter around sixteen thousand words a day. When thinking, they articulate roughly five times more words internally.

Human behaviour, ultimately, is the result of these internal conversations, judgments, representations, and ideas. They are, in a sense, **stories** – programs that people follow depending on circumstances. They determine how people perceive, imagine, and act. They lend clarity to life's meaning and help them move forward, into the future. It is clear that the relevance of studying this language of narrative – the language that programmes human behaviour – can hardly be overstated.

The ability to learn effectively, to influence, to manage, and to survive in the twenty-first century depends on knowledge of narratology. People must be prepared to unlearn and relearn as technologies and living conditions on the planet change. As teachers of themselves, they are either living proof that their narratives are capable of change, or they remain ignorant, unable to change themselves or their surroundings, simply because they do not know how.

Buckminster Fuller once said, 'You never change things

by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.' Narratives are precisely the 'assembly point' for this model of a new reality – a model of how a person perceives the world and their own behaviour within it. Ultimately, a person themselves is a collection of their stories, moving through space and time. Although this movement itself is also a story, one that we call life.

Narratives determine almost everything a person 'consciously' perceives, feels, and does. What they did yesterday, what they are doing right now, and what they will do tomorrow. They are the living tissue of their worldview: what they believe, how they see their future, who they interact with, whom they love, and how they engage with the world around them. Narratives determine where and how they work, why they are there, whether they like their situation or not. And even what they believe will happen when they die.

In effect, narratives govern, explain, and plan a person's life. The execution of these explanatory and governing programmes is carried out through their internal interpretation in the mind. People remember such interpretations and accept them as possible or necessary responses under given circumstances. Each time they internally recount to themselves a sequence of actions and their meaning, they reinforce them to the point where they follow them without noticing. At the same time, people can equally follow their own programmes and carry out both their own and those that their environment has interpreted for them.

And here lies that ‘subtle’ and dangerous moment: the brain, following its unwavering strategy of conserving energy, is more inclined to use ready-made stories than to create new ones. Due to the incredible density of information, there are now as many of these ready-made programmes around a person as there are foreign interests. Choosing from among them the ones that are appropriate and essential for life has become a genuine problem. Today, technology is capable of transforming a choice that is dubious for a person’s own life into an obvious choice for their consciousness.

This is the greatest problem for any individual and the greatest window of opportunity for those around them.

CHAPTER 2. WHY WE NEED THREE NARRATOLOGIES

And Why It's Impossible to Understand the Applied Work With Meaning Without Them

We tell ourselves stories in order to live.
Joan Didion

When we utter the word ‘narrative’, different images arise in people’s minds. Some think of literature, some of politics, some of psychology. And all of them would be only partially right. Narrative is not a single object. It is several parallel worlds that describe the same phenomenon in different languages. To understand how it works, one must see all three systems: classical, cognitive, and applied.

Each of them was formed in a different era, from different tasks, and within different professional environments. Together, they provide a holistic understanding of how a person creates meaning, how they live within their own story, and how this story can be changed.

This chapter is about why we need three approaches, why without them it is impossible to work with meaning, and to understand the place each occupies in contemporary

narratology.

Story as an Instrument of Orientation

Narrative is, first and foremost, a way of ordering life. A person cannot live in chaos; they need an explanation, even for chaos itself. They constantly ask themselves: ‘What is happening?’ ‘Why?’ ‘What does this mean?’ ‘What should I do now?’ The answers to these questions coalesce into a system – a structure of perception that transforms the stream of events into a coherent narrative for the consciousness.

When we call something ‘my story,’ we are actually describing a kind of internal map. This map is not always accurate and not always up to date. It may contain old borders, vanished dangers, distorted proportions. But the paradox is that a person navigates precisely by this map.

To help someone update their map, it is important to understand not only what they are telling, but also how the very mechanism of constructing this story works. And here, the three narratologies provide three levels of sight.

Why a Single Theory Is Insufficient

- Classical narratology explains: **‘How is a story structured as a text?’**
- Cognitive narratology answers the question: **‘How does the brain understand and create a story?’**
- Applied narratology answers the question: **‘How does**

a story influence action, and how can it be changed?’

If we limit ourselves to only one of them, our view will be incomplete. The classical school provides an excellent language for analysis but says nothing about the internal dynamics of the person. The cognitive school explains mental processes but offers no tools for change. Applied narratology works with change but needs the precision and structure of the first two schools.

In applied narratology, it is crucial to see all three levels simultaneously: structure, perception, and action. Then the story transforms from an abstraction into a living tool.

Narrative as the Intersection of Three Worlds

To visualise the interaction of these three approaches, it is helpful to think of narrative as a three-layered construction.

– Form (Classical Level)

– Every story has a structure: a beginning, development, climax, resolution. It has a perspective, a rhythm, a treatment of time, an internal logic. Even life stories have a form: not as precise as literary ones, but still discernible.

– Understanding (Cognitive Level)

– A story works through the mechanisms of the brain. We connect facts, fill in gaps, simplify complexity, seek causality. The brain creates meaning, even when a person is not consciously aware of it.

– Action (Applied Level)

– A story becomes behaviour. It turns into beliefs, reactions,

boundaries of the possible. It determines what a person considers success, what they perceive as a threat, and what future they allow for themselves.

Only the combination of all three levels makes it possible to work with meaning in a way that changes are real, not merely cosmetic.

The Person as a Carrier of Multiple Plots

It is important to understand: a person does not have a single narrative. They have a system of stories about themselves, about the world, about people, about the future, about the past. These stories intertwine, sometimes contradicting each other, sometimes reinforcing, sometimes neutralising. Someone lives in the story ‘I must be strong.’ Someone else lives in the story ‘The world is dangerous’. Someone lives in the story ‘If I show myself, I won’t be accepted.’ Someone lives in the story ‘Value is determined by usefulness.’ Someone lives in the story ‘I have a right to my own.’

Each of these stories has a structure, a cognitive mechanism, and practical consequences.

In applied narratology, we must be able to discern which level is dominant: form, interpretation, or action. Sometimes a story sounds like a text – long, emotional, rich in detail. Sometimes it manifests as a short phrase that repeats again and again. Sometimes it is not spoken at all, it lives in reaction and action.

To work with a story, a specialist must see it as a system: as

a plot, as a thought process, and as a behavioural strategy. It is this triple lens that the three narratologies provide.

Transition from Theory to Practice

The purpose of this part of the book is to introduce you to the three schools and show their practical significance. Each subsequent school expands upon the previous ones, adds a layer, makes the narrative more multidimensional.

The classical school helps to see the structure of a story. Cognitive mechanisms help to understand the interpretations on which a world-view rests. Applied tools help to change the story so that it becomes a resource.

This combination makes applied narratology a powerful tool – not artistic, not academic, but a life tool – allowing one to see how a story has governed choices in the past and to understand how it continues to operate in the present. It is from this point that theory ceases to be mere observation and becomes action.

We will now examine each of these approaches separately, beginning with classical narratology, the language of form and structure, without which neither understanding a story nor its transformation is possible.

CHAPTER 3. CLASSICAL NARRATOLOGY

How the Discipline Emerged, What It Studies, and Why Its Language Still Defines the Work With Meaning

*Narrative is not a sequence of events, but a way
of presenting them.*

Gérard Genette

*Stories seem like magic only to those who have never
seen their blueprints.*

Contemporary Storytelling Theory

Classical narratology arose from the desire to understand **why stories work**. It was born in the realm of text, form, and structure, where meaning was first considered not as inspiration, but as the result of precise architecture.

This chapter returns us to the origins of the discipline that provided the language for all subsequent approaches. Without it, neither the cognitive explanation of narrative nor the applied work of changing a story is possible, because one cannot change what has not been recognised in its form.

To understand how modern narratology arrived at its ideas, we must return to where it was born. And it emerged not

in psychology or sociology, but in the literary theory of the twentieth century. This is important: the discipline grew out of a focus on text, on form, on how a person creates meaning through structured narration.

Classical narratology is the discipline that first asserted: a story is not inspiration, not a flow of emotion, not ‘talent’, it is architecture. A story has constructive elements, and if we study them, we can understand why some texts work and remain in memory, while others fall apart by the second paragraph. Classical narratology was born from a simple but revolutionary idea: **a story is constructed according to rules, and these rules can be dismantled like a mechanism.**

At first glance, this seems extremely rational and cold. As if narratologists want to strip the text of its magic. But in reality, it is the opposite. When you understand the structure of a story, respect for creativity only grows. As in music: the more you understand the theory, the more vividly you hear the nuances. Classical narratology turns story from magic into craft.

This discovery became possible thanks to an almost century-long intellectual movement that led to the idea of structure. Classical narratology was formed at the intersection of two powerful intellectual traditions – structuralism and textual analysis. Its task was clear: to learn to describe the workings of narrative as precisely as physics describes motion, and linguistics describes grammar. And although its interests, seemingly, lay far from practical work with people, it was this

school that created the language without which neither cognitive nor applied narratology can be understood.

Classical narratology did not appear suddenly. It was not the discovery of a single person or a single school. It is the result of a long process involving philologists, philosophers, folklorists, critics, and linguists. To understand its power and its limitations, it is important to trace its development step by step, from the first insights to its modern institutional form.

Origins: Structuralism and the Search for a Universal Language of Story

Thinking about how a narrative is constructed began long before the twentieth century. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, described beginning, middle, end, catharsis, turning points, and connections between events. This was not yet narratology, but it was the first step towards the idea that a story is a structure.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, comparativists, novelists, and folklore researchers began to look for recurring patterns, motifs, typical plots, and archetypes. The French were already setting the direction then: Rousseau, Diderot, the Enlightenment era – all pushed towards the idea that art could be explained rationally. But a systematic theory did not yet exist.

The early twentieth century. The first wave of formalising plot came from Russia and later moved to France. The Russian Formalists, such as Viktor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynyanov, Boris Eikhenbaum, and **Vladimir Propp**, made two breakthroughs:

they separated ‘plot’ (*syuzhet*) from ‘story’ (*fabula*) and showed that a literary text is built on **methods**, not just on ‘**content**’ and reflection of reality. These ideas would influence the French structuralists, who would later say: ‘Propp was the first architect of plot.’

Propp, analysing Russian folktales, demonstrated that despite their diversity, all stories operate according to fixed patterns, and in effect invented the first ‘grammatical’ approach to plot. This was not yet narratology, but it was the foundation of the future discipline. Although the French school became the heart of classical narratology, it was Vladimir Propp’s work that provided the initial powerful impetus. Propp was not interested in the psychology of characters; his attention was focused on the **structure of action**. He was the first to say that a narrative can be broken down into elementary steps. This became the foundation for all subsequent research.

In the mid-twentieth century, European humanities sought order where previously they had seen chaos. Literature was viewed as a system, language as a structure, culture as a set of sign codes. Narrative began to be seen as a construction subject to specific rules. The idea emerged: **if a story has an internal logic, it can be described precisely**. This faith in structure defined the approach of the entire classical school.

The French School – Formation of the Discipline

Before the structuralists, stories were analysed differently:

one discussed authorial inspiration, sought morality, admired writing style; compared eras and movements. But no one tried to understand why some plots survive for centuries while others disappear. Why some stories seem monumental while others are clearly weak?

In the mid-twentieth century, French intellectuals proposed a radical idea: **a story lives not because it is beautiful, but because it is structurally stable**. That is, plots have an internal organisation, akin to architecture or anatomy. Structuralism became the ideological soil, preparing the general turn of the humanities towards the idea that behind any cultural phenomena lie structures. If previously researchers studied authors, eras, and influences, the structuralists said: what matters is not *who* and *when*, but ***how it is constructed***. For narratology, this was a decisive shift: the story ceased to be a 'work of genius' and became **an analysable system**.

The basic principle: 'function is more important than content'. This is the main law of classical narratology. It doesn't matter who the character is; what matters is what they do within the structure. For example: a father could be a tyrant or a mentor; a hero could be weak or strong, but their function is to move the plot forward; an antagonist could be a person, nature, the state, an idea. What makes a story a story is not its ornamentation, but the role of each element. In this approach, the hero is not a person, but a function of movement; analysis is not about psychology, but about mechanics.

***'The Count of Monte Cristo'* as Mechanical Perfection**

Although the novel was written not by a French structuralist but by Alexandre Dumas, it fits perfectly into the logic of classical narratology. Why? Because it works like a perfect machine: *exposition*: Edmond Dantès, honest, talented; *disruption of equilibrium*: betrayal; *exile*: prison; *new identity*: Monte Cristo; *goal*: restoration of justice; *resolution*: balance restored. The functions are arranged with clockwork precision. Each character is not just a person but a part of the mechanism: *Fernand*: the initiator of the disruption; *Abbé Faria*: catalyst for the hero's development; *Mercédès*: the emotional axis; *Villefort*: symbol of institutional injustice.

The story reads like a legend because its structure is perfect.

In the 1950s—1970s, French structuralism became the centre of classical narratology, and narratology itself received its definitive formulation. It was here that scholars emerged who created the language still spoken by any school working with stories.

This is a key period. It was here, at the intersection of literary criticism and semiotics (Barthes, Genette, Greimas, Todorov), linguistics (Ferdinand de Saussure), and anthropology (Claude Lévi-Strauss), that classical narratology in its modern sense was born.

Roland Barthes: Narrative as a Play of Codes

Barthes viewed the text as a system of signs that affects the reader through codes: cultural, symbolic, semantic. He spoke of the multi-layered nature of narrative, of how a story is simultaneously simple (as a chain of events) and complex (as a network of interpretations).

By analysing the myths of society as texts and calling for an interdisciplinary study of narrative, Barthes made two conclusions especially important for cognitive narratology.

- **‘Narrative is everywhere’**: the story is seen as a universal form of organising experience, not just a property of literature. This is a direct bridge to the idea that the brain structures the world through narrative.

- **The confusion of sequence and causality**: Barthes describes the ‘main mechanism of narrative’ as the mixing of succession and cause (later reinterpreted as the cognitive bias towards *‘post hoc ergo propter hoc’*).

From Barthes, applied narratology inherited the idea: **a story is not only what is said, but also how it allows the reader to think.**

Gérard Genette: The Architect of Narratology

Genette effectively created the ‘anatomy of story’. The text is autonomous and can be analysed independently of the author and reader. This is the classical structuralist view. Genette’s approach structured narrative so that it could be viewed as a coordinate system. This is why he became the central figure of the entire

discipline.

Gérard Genette gave narratology a fundamental tool: **the analysis of time**. He showed that in a story there is:

- order (the sequence in which events are told);
- duration (how much text is devoted to a scene);
- frequency (how many times an event is repeated);
- levels of narration (who is telling the story: the hero, a main voice, or a second-level character).

Genette proved that narrative is not just a chain of events, but a play with the perception of time.

The nineteenth-century French novel was a laboratory for these techniques. Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, each manipulated time, creating a particular sense of the density of the world. For Balzac, for example, time contracts and expands as he reveals a social mechanism.

For Flaubert, time stretches when Emma Bovary experiences an emotional crisis.

For Zola, time becomes the rhythm of the milieu. Classical narratology helps us see these movements as an engineer would: precise, functional, perfectly calculated.

Genette introduces the concept of ‘focalisation’ – who exactly sees and knows the events. This is a key tool. Telling a story is always a choice of point of view. French novels are proof of this.

In *Madame Bovary*: if the story were told from Emma’s perspective, it would be a novel about a dream. If from

the doctor's perspective, a novel about bewilderment. If from society's perspective, a novel about a scandal.

But Flaubert chose the position of an outside observer, who coldly and precisely records her destruction. And it is this position that makes the novel so powerful.

Genette's '*Narrative Discourse*' became the benchmark of structural narratology, without which cognitive analysis would be blurred.

A. J. Greimas: The Actantial Model

Greimas introduced the idea that any character is not a person but an 'actant' – a function of the plot. Such actants can be: *Subject* (hero), *Object* (the hero's goal), *Sender* (who gives the goal), *Receiver* (who needs the result), *Helper*, *Opponent*.

Any story can be reassembled through these roles.

For example, *Little Red Riding Hood*: *Subject*: Riding Hood. *Object*: to get to grandmother's. *Sender*: mother. *Receiver*: grandmother. *Helpers*: woodcutters. *Opponent*: wolf.

And the same can be done with any novel: For example, *Les Misérables*: *Subject*: Jean Valjean. *Object*: to atone for the past. *Sender*: Bishop Myriel. *Receiver*: society, Cosette. *Helper*: inner morality. *Opponent*: Javert, the system.

This transforms even a vast novel into a simple schema, where each part works as an element of a motive system.

And finally, **Tzvetan Todorov** introduced the term

‘**narratology**’ itself and worked with types of narratives, genres, and the grammar of storytelling.

Classical Narratology Today: What Remains, What Has Changed

Today, this school is no longer limited to the analysis of literary texts. Its tools are applied in the analysis of political speeches, in journalism, in cinema, in brand communications, and in strategic consulting.

But the main thing is that classical narratology gave us a **language** without which it is impossible to describe a story in any field. When an applied narratologist says, ‘Your story has a shifted focalisation,’ or ‘The plot is built around the same rhythm of obstacles,’ or ‘You are using a linear structure, although the situation calls for a branching one’ – this is all the legacy of the classical school.

Why Must an Applied Narratologist Know the Classical School?

Because it allows one to see **form**. Form is what remains stable even when content changes. For example, a person retells the same story but changes the facts – the form remains the same. An *employee* explains the complexity of their work to themselves using the same structure of conflict. An *organisation* builds its corporate narrative based on a recurring dramaturgy: hero, enemy, victory. A *family* lives within a story with rigidly

distributed roles: the strong one, the weak one, and the rescuer. Form is what a specialist must see before moving on to changes. You cannot transform what has not been recognised.

Classical narratology provides the ability to hear structure as clearly as a musician hears rhythm. Without it, a person swims in emotions and images, not understanding that a story can be taken apart. It teaches us to see structure, functions, roles, turning points, and the logic of events. And once you master this language, you will be able to analyse your own life as clearly as narratologists analysed the texts of Balzac.

Limitations of the Classical School

Classical narratology taught us to see what usually remains invisible: the form of a story, its rhythm, functions, and points of tension. It provided a language through which narrative ceased to be a vague concept and became a construction that can be disassembled.

But this precision has its limits. The classical school answers the question of *how* a story is constructed, but it does not explain *why* this particular story takes hold in the mind, why a person gets stuck in certain plots and ignores others, or how form translates into choice and action.

To answer these questions, one must go beyond the text and look at how a story is created, maintained, and distorted within the mind. This is where cognitive narratology begins – the next step in understanding how meaning becomes reality.

CHAPTER 4. NARRATIVE, LOGIC, AND PERSUASIVENESS

*A person acts not on the basis of what is proven, but
on the basis of what may be.
after Aristotle*

*Logic says what is true. Narrative says what is
possible. Truth obliges the mind. Plausibility guides
action.*

From Truth to Plausibility

The majority of human decisions are made outside the conditions of strict proof – in situations of incomplete information, an open future, and conflicting grounds. In these conditions, logic in the classical sense proves insufficient. Its place is taken by another form of rationality: narrative.

Logic answers the question: **‘What is true?’** The narrative answers the question: **‘What does it make sense to do?’**

This distinction is fundamental. Narrative represents an independent mode of rationality, oriented not towards proof, but towards the possibility of choice and action. **Narrative is the rationality of action, not the rationality of truth.**

Truth, Belief, and Choice: Different Modes of Rationality

Classical logic operates with necessary connections: if the

premises are true and the form of reasoning is correct, the conclusion is obligatory. But human life almost never conforms to this scheme. Most decisions are made where there is no complete information, the future is open and undefined, consequences are probabilistic, and values conflict.

In these conditions, the question shifts from ‘what is proven’ to ‘what allows one to act meaningfully.’

Narrative structures precisely this space. It does not prove, it makes choice psychologically and culturally possible. Therefore, the persuasiveness of a narrative cannot be measured by the categories of formal truth. It is measured by **plausibility**, internal logic, and correspondence with the subject’s expectations.

Plato’s Distrust of Myth: Story as a Threat to Truth

Philosophical suspicion of narrative has deep roots. In **Plato**, myth and poetry occupy an ambiguous position. On one hand, they affect the soul. On the other, they do so bypassing rational control.

For the Platonic tradition, the danger of a story lies in its ability to form beliefs without proof, substituting plausibility for truth.

Hence the fundamental opposition: *logos* as the path to truth, *mythos* as seduction and distortion.

This opposition long entrenched the view of narrative as something secondary, artistic, or manipulative. However, this

line does not exhaust ancient thought.

Aristotle: Narrative as the Logic of the Possible

A turning point comes with the position of Aristotle, who for the first time clearly distinguishes different types of rationality.

For Aristotle, logic deals with the necessary, mathematics with the unchanging, rhetoric with the probable, and poetics with the possible.

History and narrative, for Aristotle, belong to the realm of the possible, and therefore are not opposed to truth as falsehood. They do not work with what must always be true, but with what *may* be as told, and thus deserve credence.

Aristotle introduces the key concept of plausibility. A story is persuasive not because it is factually accurate, but because it is internally consistent, psychologically recognisable, causally coherent, and proportionate to human experience.

Thus, narrative acquires its own rationality, not secondary to logic, but **differently structured. Narrative is the logic of the possible, not the logic of proof.**

Enthymeme: The Hidden Logic of Any Story

The central mechanism of a narrative's persuasiveness is the enthymeme. In Aristotle's rhetoric, the enthymeme is a truncated syllogism in which one or more premises are not articulated and remain implicit. This is precisely how stories are structured.

Narrative relies on cultural assumptions, value premises,

implicit ideas about the world, and shared expectations.

It does not prove them, it **assumes they are shared**. Therefore, a story ‘works’ faster than an argument: it activates already existing structures of meaning.

An important conclusion follows: analysis of narrative is the reconstruction of hidden enthymemes; manipulation is the substitution or distortion of these hidden premises; the ethics of narratology begins precisely here.

Plausibility Instead of Truth: Why Stories Govern Behaviour

Stories govern behaviour not because they are true, but because they are **plausible enough** to become a basis for action.

Plausibility includes:

- *causal coherence* (‘This didn’t happen by chance’),
- *psychological motivation* (‘People act like this’),
- *cultural acceptability* (‘Such things happen’),
- *moral consistency* (‘This is justified’).

Even a factually false narrative can be effective if it: explains what is happening, reduces uncertainty, gives the subject a role, and offers a direction for the future.

This is narrative rationality – a rationality oriented not towards truth, but towards the **possibility of continuing to live and act**.

Persuasiveness, Manipulation, and the Responsibility of Interpretation

If narrative possesses its own rationality, it inevitably becomes a form of power. The one who controls plausibility influences choice, even without resorting to coercion.

From this follows a key risk: narrative can accompany freedom, or it can imperceptibly supplant it.

The distinction runs not through form, but through position: is the interpretation imposed, is doubt permitted, and is the subjectivity of the listener preserved?

Narratology as a discipline is impossible without awareness of this risk. Working with stories is always working with the boundaries of influence.

Conclusion: The Logic of Narrative as an Independent Form of Thought

Narrative is not the antipode of logic. It represents a different form of rationality, adapted to human existence under conditions of uncertainty.

It has a structure and obeys its own criteria, relies on enthymemes, shapes choice, and carries an ethical burden.

Without an understanding of the logic of narrative, a cognitive explanation remains methodologically incomplete, and an applied one remains ethically vulnerable. We have established: narrative is not an error of thinking and not a form of rhetorical deception, but a special type of rationality that works with the possible. However, this assertion remains incomplete until it is shown **how this rationality is rooted in the human cognitive**

system.

The next chapter answers the question: ‘What cognitive mechanisms make narrative the basic form of understanding, memory, and choice?’ From this point, philosophy gives way to the cognitive architecture of narrative.

CHAPTER 5. COGNITIVE NARRATOLOGY

How the Brain Creates Meaning and Why We Think In Stories

The brain is constantly forming hypotheses about the world and testing them against experience.
Stanislas Dehaene

Consciousness does not reflect the world – it constructs it on the basis of bodily experience.
Antonio Damasio

If classical narratology studied the story as a construction, cognitive narratology focused on *who* perceives this construction. It shifted attention from the text to the person. To what happens in their consciousness when they listen to, read, or tell a story.

The world of cognitive narratology was born from a simple but revolutionary idea: **humans are wired such that they cannot perceive reality as a set of unconnected facts. They need a plot.** The brain strives to turn chaos into sequence, to find patterns, to construct causality – even where none exists. And it does this automatically.

This chapter is devoted to how this process works, why narrative is a natural form of thinking, and what happens inside

a person when they explain events to themselves.

Story as a Way of Thinking

Cognitive narratology is the science of how the brain turns the world into a story. If classical narratology looks at the text, cognitive narratology looks at the person who creates, reads, remembers, and interprets that text. It answers questions: ‘Why do humans think in plots at all? Why, without a story, do they lose orientation? Why, by changing a story, do we change feelings, decisions, and life?’

Classical narratology provided a precise language for describing the structure of a story, but its interest was the ‘text as object.’ Cognitivists became interested in ‘reading’ and ‘thinking.’ Why does a reader feel for a character? Why do two people understand the same plot differently? Why do they see causality where there is none? Why do some stories become beliefs?

These questions could not be resolved through structural analysis alone. A science was needed of how consciousness, memory, and imagination work. Cognitive narratology was born when researchers realised that a story is not a property of the text, but a property of the brain. And this changes everything.

To grasp the power of cognitive narratology, one must see how it emerged, what problems it solves, how memory works, why we are so dependent on causality, and how the brain turns disparate events into a coherent line.

Formation of the Discipline

Cognitive narratology did not appear instantly. Its birth was a long journey from the structural analysis of texts to an attempt to understand how a living person creates meaning. It grew out of three directions: structuralism, the psychology of perception, and linguistics.

After the rise of structuralism in the 1950s—1970s, researchers first noticed: formal structures are not only properties of the text, but also properties of thinking. Barthes said that narrative logic permeates culture. Lévi-Strauss showed that myths work as cognitive matrices. Genette demonstrated how consciousness processes the time of a narrative. But the structuralists did not study consciousness directly. They studied the text. The question of how the brain ‘reads’ and ‘creates’ a story remained open.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a shift began in the humanities: ‘We need to study not only the story, but also the human capacity to construct a story.’ Thus, the ground was prepared for cognitive narratology.

With the arrival of cognitivists in narratology, the approach changed. They did not reject Genette’s achievements, but ‘transferred’ his analytical apparatus inside the reader’s psyche, asking: how exactly are formal manipulations of time and point of view processed by consciousness, memory, and attention?

The 1980s and 1990s saw the birth of the cognitive turn in narratology. During this time, literary scholars began asking:

what happens in the reader's head, how does consciousness grasp the author's point of view, what schemas are activated when we interpret a text, why does a story evoke an emotional response?

Concurrently, revolutions were occurring in other scientific fields. Research emerged on human attention, memory function, cognitive biases, and the formation of cause-and-effect relationships. These ideas mapped perfectly onto questions about how a person understands a story.

Works appeared on how language shapes thinking. If language is a code, then narrative is a refined, higher form of this code. And when brain research showed that meaning is a product of neural models, literary scholars saw an opportunity: to unite the structure of the text with the mechanism of perception.

In the late 1990s, the discipline was finally formed. The approach became an independent field thanks to several research movements. Studies in cognitive narratology in the 1990s and 2000s often began with the phrase: 'We continue, but also reassemble, the structuralist tradition.'

Cognitive Poetics

In their work, Richard Gerrig, Peter Stockwell, and Raymond Gibbs attempt to understand how a literary text triggers mental processes: imagination, associations, experience simulation, empathy, and prediction. Researchers prove that reading is a form of 'cognitive modelling'.

The theory of mental models and 'immersion' emerges.

Researchers begin to study how a reader constructs a mental image of a scene, how they maintain sequence, how they create causality, how they model the world of the text. A key idea appears: reading is the creation of an 'internal world' that operates according to the laws of cognitive models. This line leads directly to cognitive narratology.

Working with Narrative as a 'Way of Processing Experience'

Psychologists Bruner, Schank, and Abelson study how a person creates stories to explain events, make decisions, and maintain identity. Bruner formulates a crucial phrase: 'We live in the narrative nature of reality.' This idea became one of the cornerstones of cognitive narratology.

In the 2000s, cognitive narratology finally gets its name – the very term 'cognitive narratology' appears. It is associated primarily with the work of David Herman.

David Herman is one of the main theorists of cognitive narratology, editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, and one of the creators of the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. Herman unites psychology, linguistics, cognitive science, and narrative theory. He formulates: 'Narrative is the way people organise experience into an understandable structure.' It was Herman who built the bridge between the classical structure of Barthes and Genette and the cognitive models of perception.

Next came expansion and institutionalisation. Cognitive narratology ceased to be a niche field. Schools and research platforms formed around it. The most important figures of this period:

Monika Fludernik – author of the concept of ‘natural narratology,’ which views narrative through the lens of everyday experience and perceptual schemas. Her idea is that narrative thinking is formed prior to literature, and the text merely uses natural cognitive structures.

Marie-Laure Ryan works with possible worlds, modal structures, and digital narratives, narrative space, actively integrating cognitive models into the analysis of narratives and digital stories. Her contribution: showing how the brain switches between ‘possible versions of reality’.

Manfred Jahn – one of the first to consistently connect formal analysis with cognitive models of reading. And Lennard Davis, Keesen Faulkner, and Ruben Zunder explore narrative and attention, narrative and emotion, narrative and embodied cognition. Kate Hamburger and participants in Project Narrative (OSU) develop the branch of cognitive narratology at an institutional level, including narrative rhetoric, neural models of plot perception, and media narratives.

But the turning point came in the digital age. After 2010, cognitive narratology expanded dramatically due to the rise of new media. Games, VR, interactive films, social networks, storytelling in apps, and multi-layered digital plots appeared.

Researchers began to study how the brain processes non-linear plots, how a person navigates a story without a single line, how they perceive ruptures, branching, and multiple perspectives, and why Stories trigger ancient narrative mechanisms of memory. Cognitive narratology became a necessity for analysing 21st-century culture.

Today, cognitive narratology is not one school, but three branches.

The ‘soft’ cognitive narratology, which works with attention, interpretations, schemas, and narrative logic, is close to literary studies.

The ‘hard’ cognitive narratology is based on psychology, linguistics, and neuroscience. It studies how the brain reacts to plot, which areas are activated during the perception of a character’s emotions, how memory encodes a story, and why a person so readily accepts causality.

And the direction that views narrative as a model of consciousness. This is a more philosophical line, associated with Merleau-Ponty, Ricœur, and Dennett. The idea is that the ‘I’ is a narrative construction and we are the stories we tell about ourselves. This branch is closest to applied narratology.

The power of cognitive narratology lies in its explanation of the mechanisms: why a person creates stories, how they maintain them, how memory rewrites the past, how language fixes a plot, why emotions shape a story more strongly than facts, why a person sees causality even in chaos, why we live for years

in destructive plots, and why changing a story means changing a life. Cognitive narratologists study precisely how the brain turns ‘*after this*’ into ‘*because of this*.’

It was the understanding of these mechanisms that prepared the transition to the main focus – to applied narratology, which uses this knowledge not only to understand a person’s story, but also to teach them to rewrite it.

CHAPTER 6. THE BRAIN AS A MEANING FACTORY

Why Humans Inevitably Live by Stories

Interpretation is the work by which meaning becomes possible.

Paul Ricœur

Perception is a controlled hallucination constrained by sensory data.

Karl Friston

The brain prefers a bad explanation to no explanation at all.

Stanislas Dehaene

A person often thinks they live in a world of facts, but in reality they live in a world of explanations, and it is these that govern their feelings, decisions, and life trajectories.

Understanding narrative begins with one fundamental property of the human brain: **it cannot leave events unexplained**. The brain creates meaning automatically, as naturally as the heart pumps blood. A story emerges not because a person loves to tell tales. It emerges because the psyche needs order, sequence, and the ability to predict the future.

This chapter explains how the natural mechanism of meaning-

making works, why it always takes the form of a narrative, and why this makes the story the central structure of human life.

A person lives in a world that changes faster than they can process it. There is too much information, the context is too complex, uncertainty is excessive. To avoid drowning in this flow, the brain reduces complexity. It connects disparate facts into a chain.

Thus a story appears. Not in a literary sense, but in a functional sense, as a mechanism for transforming experience into meaning. For the brain, a story is an economical way of understanding. It allows one to gather heterogeneous information, identify the main points, connect events into a causal line, predict the future, and choose a behaviour.

Why the Brain Needs Causality

No one sees reality in its entirety. The brain is limited in perception: too many stimuli, too high a speed of change, too complex a context. To avoid overload, the psyche reduces the world to a manageable form. It does this through processes of:

- *selection* (what to consider important),
- *linking* (how to connect disparate elements),
- *generalisation* (how to turn a single episode into a pattern),
- *causality* (which event explains another),
- *inference* (what this means for me).

All these processes are not ‘stories’ in the literary sense. They are *mind programs* that turn chaos into order. But the result

is precisely a story: a structured narrative where events have a beginning, development, meaning, and consequences.

Without this mechanism, a person could not navigate. Even a simple task – how to respond in a conversation – requires instantaneous meaning analysis: what is happening, who is in front of me, what strategy should I choose. And the brain constructs a story that corresponds to past experience and expectations.

Interpretation Appears Before Analysis

One of the key findings of cognitive science is that **emotions and interpretations arise faster than a person can consciously register them.** The amygdala works first, forming an emotional response: danger, interest, disgust, anxiety, excitement. Only then does the prefrontal cortex engage, trying to explain what is happening.

This creates the illusion that we ‘decided to feel’ one way or another. In reality, we explained what we had already felt. And we explained it in accordance with the story we already have.

Hence the phenomenon of persistent narratives. If a person is accustomed to perceiving the world as a dangerous place, their nervous system will react faster than logic. And logic will merely confirm the reaction.

A person cannot bear meaninglessness. Uncertainty causes anxiety. When something happens, the brain seeks to understand ‘Why?’ and ‘What now?’ These questions are not mere curiosity,

they are survival tools. Therefore, even in random events, a person seeks logic. Even in chaos – order. Even in complexity – an explanation.

And if logic is absent, they create it. Thus interpretations are born. And interpretations become part of a narrative.

A person cannot live in a pure stream of facts. They need order, cause and effect, coherence, direction. Without these, anxiety arises, and our psyche strives for ordering because chaos is unbearable. Therefore, if events occur haphazardly, the brain ‘fills them in’; if a person does not understand another’s motive, they ‘invent’ reasons; if faced with uncertainty, they ‘create’ a story to reduce tension. An important focus of what cognitive narratology studies is precisely this ability of the brain to create meaning where there are only fragments.

For example, a child once told ‘Don’t bother us, we’re busy’ might construct a story: ‘I am not worthy of attention.’ An adult who has made a mistake might create a story: ‘I am not capable of taking risks.’ A person who grew up in an unstable environment forms a story: ‘Safety does not exist.’

Facts are merely an entry point. Narrative is born at the moment of interpretation.

How Memory Turns Life into Plot

We are accustomed to thinking that memory is a storehouse. However, memory works not like an archivist, but like an editor. It does not store everything indiscriminately, but only

what matches the central story a person has created about themselves. Each time an event is recalled, it is rewritten, simplified, emotions are amplified, extraneous details are removed, emphases are shifted. Everything else disappears, softens, or is restructured. And ten years later, a person lives not with the events that actually occurred, but with the stories they have formed.

Memory is selective and does three things: it reinforces episodes that support the core narrative; it weakens or completely erases episodes that do not align with it; it reassembles meaning if necessary to maintain the integrity of one's internal picture.

A person convinced that 'I am always being found lacking' will ignore praise a hundred times but retain two critical remarks. In this way, the brain maintains the stability of the story. The narrative becomes a framework that determines what a person allows themselves to see.

Within this mechanism is born what applied narratology calls *tunnel vision* – a narrow corridor of interpretations along which we move, unaware of alternatives.

Emotional Encoding

Stories live through emotions. If an event evoked no emotion, it disappears. If it did, it is remembered as part of a personal plot. This is why traumatic stories persist, why successes rarely become anchors, why one negative comment can spoil a mood for an entire week. Emotion fixes the plot.

Emotions give a story its power. An event that caused a strong experience becomes embedded in memory, becomes a supporting element of the plot.

For example, shame forms a narrative of inadequacy; fear forms a narrative of danger; success forms a narrative of capability; support forms a narrative of worth.

Emotions turn a story from mere telling into an internal instruction. We begin to act in accordance with it – avoiding risk, seeking confirmation, repeating familiar scenarios.

Emotion is the ‘binding emulsion’ of narrative. It connects event and interpretation so tightly that they begin to seem like a single whole. And it becomes difficult to separate them without deliberate work.

Narrative as a Tool for Prediction

Cognitive narratology has shown that a story is not only an explanation of the past but also a model of the future. The brain uses past stories as a matrix for prediction.

If a person once decided that ‘In this world, you have to be careful,’ their brain will seek confirmation of this, highlight dangers, analyse risks. If a person has adopted the story ‘I always manage,’ they will see more opportunities.

Narrative is a filter of probabilities. It determines which actions a person considers realistic and which they consider impossible.

The Brain Fills in What Is Missing

One of the key ideas of cognitive narratology is that a person always fills in gaps. If something is missing in a story, the brain adds it automatically. For example, if a client says, 'No one supports me,' they are not listing all the people who have ever been there for them. They are constructing a generalisation because it aligns with their internal plot.

This characteristic makes the narrative very stable. But also vulnerable to change. If the central construct is altered, the brain will begin to assemble reality differently.

Linking Events into a Chain – An Automatic Process

If two events occur one after another, the brain links them. 'He was late and didn't warn me, so he doesn't care.' 'She didn't reply to the message – she's probably angry.' 'I wasn't promoted because I'm not good enough.' Between 'after' and 'because of,' the brain places an equals sign. Yes, this is a cognitive error, but it is also the foundation of narrative thinking.

Searching for Causes Where There Are Only Coincidences

The brain, like nature itself, abhors a vacuum. If a cause is absent, it creates one. On a rainy day, your mood drops, and you decide that 'the weather ruined the day.' But this is a construct – emotional and cognitive. The same happens in relationships, work, and self-esteem.

Simplifying Complex Systems

The world is complex, and the brain cannot hold thousands of variables in its head. It creates stories to manage complexity. ‘I’m an introvert’ is a story that simplifies billions of interactions of emotions, social conditions, and habits. ‘I’m unlucky’ is another story, not a fact, but a schema. Simplification is not an error; it is a survival strategy.

And undoubtedly, the role of language in creating narrative can hardly be overstated. Cognitive narratologists believe that language is a tool for assembling meaning. This is also confirmed by French philosophy. Lacan said, ‘The unconscious is structured like a language.’ That is, even our emotions are formed in the form of a narrative.

If a person says: ‘It’s always like this with me,’ ‘I don’t know how to love,’ ‘I’ll never be successful’, they are not stating a fact, but a ‘story.’ Language is the framework of narrative. Change the language, and you can change the story.

The brain will always create stories – this is not a defect or a weakness, but a condition of human life. Danger begins when a person mistakes their interpretations for facts, and their narratives for reality. An unconscious story becomes fate. A conscious one becomes a tool.

Understanding how the brain constructs meaning leads us to the main question: **Can we learn to change a story before it once again begins to govern our lives?**

The answer to this question is the territory of applied narratology.

PART TWO

CHAPTER 1. WHY APPLIED NARRATOLOGY NEEDS THE COGNITIVE SCHOOL

*People do not react to reality – they react to their
interpretation of it.*
Albert Ellis

If classical narratology answers the question of how a story is structured, cognitive narratology explains why a person accepts *this particular story* as reality, and why it governs their feelings and actions.

Cognitive narratology is preparation for change because, in order to rewrite a story, one must see one's own plot, understand its mechanisms, acknowledge its distortions, and identify its focal points. This is the knowledge necessary for the transition to the applied level.

Cognitive narratology also studies how schemas influence the creation of plot and govern our narrative. For example, the 'hero schema', where everyone sees themselves as a particular type of hero: the hero-saviour, the hero-martyr, the hero-rebel, the

hero-learner, the hero-victor, the hero-victim. This internal role determines the interpretation of events, choices and expectations, and reactions to stress. If a person lives in the role of ‘victim’, then any event will be confirmation that they are being ‘treated badly’.

Or the ‘antagonist schema’. Because the brain loves to simplify, it needs some kind of ‘enemy’ to structure experience. This could be a boss, fate, a crisis, the system, past mistakes. The list is endless. This is cognitive support for the plot, not reality.

The ‘conflict schema’ – the brain is constantly searching for a centre of tension. It must decide what the main problem is. Therefore, a person sometimes lives in a conflict they have invented themselves.

Cognitive distortions that turn into personal stories also do not escape attention. For example, ‘*filtering*’ – only remembering what confirms one’s own story. Or ‘*generalisation*’ – when a single failure or mistake turns into ‘I’m always like this.’ Or ‘*mind reading*’ – ‘He doesn’t respect me,’ even though he’s just tired today. Or familiar ‘*emotional reasoning*’ – ‘I feel anxious, so everything must be bad.’ These distortions, step by step, cement the parts of a life narrative.

Cognitive narratology pays great attention to imagination – the author of future stories. It is imagination that creates preliminary plots: ‘Everything will be terrible,’ ‘I’ll manage,’ ‘I’ll mess up again.’ And then these stories become decisions, as the brain

accepts them as forecasts.

Why is cognitive narratology important for practical work? Because it explains that a person lives not by facts, but by the stories the brain creates *about* those facts. Consequently, to change behaviour, you need to change the story. To change the story, you need to change the interpretations. Cognitive narratology provides an understanding of the mechanisms, describing *how* the brain creates a story. But it does not provide a method for changing it or creating a new one. That is the work of applied narratology.

But why do people cling so tightly to their story? Because a story creates predictability, provides a sense of control, protects self-esteem, explains defeats, and ultimately reduces the fear of the future.

Even a harmful story provides stability. This is why a person rarely changes it on their own. Cognitive narratology explains why a story arises and persists, and applied narratology teaches how to work with that story, not by destroying the person, but by returning choice to them.

Applied narratology stands on the foundation of cognitive narratology: it uses its ideas but transforms them into tools. An applied narratologist works with questions like ‘Why does a person choose this particular interpretation? Why does it persist for years? Why do two people see the same situation differently? Why does changing a narrative change emotions and behaviour? How can a new interpretation be made sustainable?’

Before moving on to this exposition, it is worth presenting a few studies and discoveries that explain how this works. In recent decades, there have been many discoveries in this field, but those we cite show why applied narratology is so effective.

CHAPTER 2. THE NEUROPHYSIOLOGY OF WORLD-VIEW

**How we perceive information,
how we imagine the world, and
how we reproduce it in our minds**

A person becomes what they believe.
William James

A person lives not in a world of facts, but in a world of images, emotions, and interpretations that their brain assembles into a coherent picture of reality. Over the last half-century, numerous studies and discoveries have explained how and in what way narratives influence human behaviour. We will present a few of the simplest and most accessible.

Canadian psychologist Allan Paivio, working on the psychology of memory, proposed the idea of a so-called dual-coding system. Humans have two primary systems for perceiving information – visual and verbal. Working in parallel, these systems create independent representations of what is seen and heard. At the final stage – the level of long-term memory – the information received through them either assigns a name

to a seen image or, conversely, selects an image, a mental picture, for a name.

But there is a peculiarity: the surrounding reality created and remembered in consciousness in this way can, with equal probability, belong either to the real world or to the imagined one. And this entire system together represents what is commonly called a *world-view*. Core life positions, beliefs, ideals, and behaviour depend on it. A world-view gives human activity a meaningful and purposeful character, and it is within this presented system that a person tries to find their place.

Over time, with the reproduction of accumulated information in memory, various changes occur. Information becomes distorted, can be interpreted in different ways, and can ultimately be transformed into something else. And it is important to know this if we consider two concepts. The first concept is *perception of the world*. Perception of the world is expressed in moods, feelings, and actions; that is, it has an emotional-psychological basis. The second concept is *understanding of the world* – a cognitive-intellectual conception, the level at which a doctrine of the surrounding world is represented. At the moment a person visualises their representation of the surrounding world, their perception of the world (emotional-psychological) transitions to a level where it becomes their understanding of the world (cognitive-intellectual doctrine). That is, by changing the perception of the world, by influencing the main channels of information – auditory and visual – we can change the

understanding of the world of any person.

In the not-so-distant past, all sense organs participated in forming this picture of the world in relatively equal measure. But the world has changed. The main information channels today are sight and hearing. And sometimes only sight or only hearing. The information received through them can relate either to the past or to the future. A gap has emerged between the information received and the time of its event-based relevance. Looking at the screens or listening to the radio, people are unable to realistically assess the prospects, depth, or detail of the plot being described or shown. A person sees a world based on the perception permitted to them or the information presented to them. This is the peculiarity of today's process of perception of the world, influencing the understanding of the world of millions of people.

The picture of the world is constructed on a directive basis. Today, in the human brain, there are digitised and edited images. The danger is that it is often impossible to verify their authenticity in real time, and, by and large, the brain does not care about all these limitations and verifications created by civilisation. In order to remain relevant and concerned exclusively with its own safety, the brain is content with what a person sees and hears right now.

The next study concerns the ability to persuade people. How is it that an emotion, which is not always logical, becomes a more compelling argument for trust and persuasiveness than logic in cause-and-effect explanations? What is going on? How does

this happen? It's all about hormones.

Along with sex hormones, oxytocin is one of the main hormones regulating social life. It helps maintain and strengthen bonds, and helps people feel others' emotions. If oxytocin is administered nasally, people begin to better understand the moods of those around them, become highly receptive to signals and stimuli for establishing good relationships, and become more trusting. Participants in an experiment more often found the people shown to them to be trustworthy enough to share personal information with them. Oxytocin is also released when people experience care and trust, which motivates interaction and strengthens the capacity for empathy. If you need to convince someone of something, it is enough to evoke sympathy, and by modelling this emotional impact, you can motivate people to perform certain actions.

Scientist Paul Zak studied ways to 'hack' the oxytocin production system without using medication, in order to get people to engage in specific cooperative actions. He conducted a simple experiment: at a charity event aimed at raising donations, two groups of participants were shown two different videos. The first video contained footage forming a formalised narrative, facts, and messages. In the second video, the same facts and images were assembled into the form of a dramatic narrative and accompanied by emotional text. After watching the second video, the audience donated significantly more money, even though the information in both videos was identical. That is,

you can guide people to perform certain, even irrational, actions by modelling their emotions.

Thus, if attention requires emotion, then to believe requires empathy. To the common aphorism ‘You can’t trust anyone,’ one might add the comment ‘... including yourself.’

With the introduction of functional MRI, research into brain activity reached a completely new level. Neuroscientist Uri Hasson from Princeton University measured a woman’s brain activity using fMRI. The measurements were taken while the subject told a personal story that moved her to five other people. It was discovered that in these subjects, the same brain areas were activated and responded in the same way and at the same moments as in the storyteller herself. Based on this, Hasson concluded that when people remember something, dream, or are struck by ideas, specific neural patterns begin to work in the brain. And for the brain, in this sense, there is no difference whether it happened to the person themselves, they read about it somewhere, or someone told them about it.

Very often in their behaviour, people act as they have been told, accepting the storyteller’s experience as their own. When a group of test subjects with no special military experience is asked to disarm a simulated explosive device, everyone looks for the blue and red wire because they have seen it in movies hundreds of times. Seeing a luminous oval object moving across the night sky, most people think of aliens, because that is the only thing they have been told about luminous oval objects

moving across the sky. By understanding how the brain creates a world-view, we gain, for the first time, the opportunity not only to manage the attention of others, but also to reclaim power over our own stories.

CHAPTER 3. THE ENERGY CONCEPTION OF THE BRAIN

*Laziness and misunderstanding do far more harm
in the world than malice and treachery.
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

What really matters is what happens *in* us, not *to* us.

A person rarely realises that most of their life is governed not by decisions, but by economy. Not economy of money, but economy of energy. The brain is structured so that its main task is not to seek truth, but to expend as few resources as possible while maintaining the ability to survive and navigate.

This is precisely why a person so often lives by ready-made stories. Narrative is not an error of thinking, but its energetically advantageous form. A story allows the brain not to think anew, not to recalculate the world each time, but to use an already assembled model of reality.

Marcus Raichle, the founder of the so-called default mode network theory, explains that the brain is continuously engaged in constructing an internal model of the surrounding world. The model the brain creates, as a prediction, helps it anticipate and prepare for events. As long as predictions come true, the brain does not engage attention. Attention is always costly and energy-intensive. But if something happens that does not match the

prediction, a person will inevitably pay attention to it.

And so it is with everything. In ordinary life, a person implements existing behavioural programs and uses them to construct their world-view. When necessary, we are more willing to adjust existing forms and scenarios or accept ready-made ones than to create new ones. It is this energy conception that the brain follows, persistently yet imperceptibly.

For the brain, its functioning is a kind of business. And business is the art of working with limited resources. In the brain's case, the limited resource is energy. A person constantly needs energy for the 'production' of life. In the animal world, and indeed in the human world, their own 'food chains' are constructed to solve the energy problem.

People, without noticing it themselves, approach new thoughts cautiously and, moreover, are very, very frugal with their imagination and brain function in general. A person, in a certain sense, protects it, but in a peculiar way. For example, they make greater use of so-called worldly wisdom or habits born of past experience or the teachings of the older generation.

Or, for example, a person might sincerely say that they are too lazy, that they are satisfied, and offer a multitude of various explanations and arguments for the complexity of a problem. The difficulties a person perceives are, in themselves, the best justification for their inaction. People are not willing to pay for change, but they cannot admit this to themselves. Because it's not even that *they* don't want change, but that their brain doesn't

want it. It may seem incredible, but the visual centres of the brain consume such a colossal amount of energy that it is difficult to imagine.

Depending on their readiness to think and act, and in decreasing order of this readiness, people can be conditionally divided into three groups: those who actively manage what is happening, those who observe and understand what is happening, and those who are surprised by what is happening. That is, if you meet someone who is constantly surprised by events, you can confidently assume that they are not ready to change anything, even in what surprises them. Patient observation requires more energy, while creation and management are the pinnacle of energetic extravagance. But it is precisely this energetic extravagance that is the condition and source for human development.

Development begins where you decide to take an energetically disadvantageous step – to think, to doubt, to reassemble meaning. It is at this point that narrative ceases to be an automatic program and becomes a tool of choice. This is where applied narratology begins.

CHAPTER 4. APPLIED NARRATOLOGY: HOW THE PRACTICE OF WORKING WITH MEANING EMERGED AND WHAT IT MAKES POSSIBLE

*A person understands themselves only through the
story they tell about themselves.*

Paul Ricœur

Applied narratology emerged at the moment it became clear: understanding a story does not liberate a person if they continue to live inside it. It was necessary not only to see and explain narrative, but also to learn how to work with it: to change it, reassemble it, make it fit for life.

This chapter is devoted to how applied narratology arose, how it differs from the other two approaches, and why it is becoming one of the key disciplines of the twenty-first century.

The History of Development and Formation of Applied Narratology: From Analysis to Action

Applied narratology is the youngest and most dynamic branch of narrative disciplines. It works not with texts, and not only with perception, but with life stories that shape behaviour, decisions,

relationships, and identity.

It is a discipline that says: if life is a story, then it can be reassembled, transformed. If a story creates decisions, then decisions can be changed by changing the story. If a person feels stuck in a situation, then it is not life that is stuck, but the plot.

To understand the power of applied narratology, one must trace the path from its philosophical roots to modern methods. Its history is not a single line, but a confluence of three powerful streams that long existed separately: philosophical, psychological, and cultural-linguistic. It was only at the end of the twentieth century that they converged, giving birth to the approach now used by leaders, psychologists, coaches, managers, educators, social strategists, and individuals seeking to reshape their own lives.

Philosophical Roots of Applied Narratology (1940s—1970s)

When Western thought first recognised that a person lives within stories, mid-twentieth-century philosophers began to ask a new type of question: ‘What is the ‘I’? Is the ‘I’ truly immutable, or can it be created through narrative? Can a person change by changing the story about themselves? What happens when a person loses their plot?’

These questions were radical for an era in which a person was still understood through fixed essences (‘character’, ‘nature’, ‘temperament’). Key figures emerged without whom applied

narratology would not exist.

Paul Ricœur laid the foundation for the future discipline. He asserted: ‘A person understands themselves only through a story, and identity is a process of constant retelling.’ That is, the ‘I’ is not static, not fixed, not given once and for all; it changes along with the interpretation of experience. This is the very root of the applied approach: if identity is a story, it can be reconstructed.

For **Jean-Paul Sartre**, freedom is the necessity of writing one’s own plot. He put it differently: ‘Man is condemned to be free,’ and freedom is the duty to create one’s own story, even if it is frightening. In his philosophy, there is no ready-made plot. There is choice. And choice is the point where a story is created. This idea would become the basis of applied narratology: a person should not wait for permission for a new story. They must decide upon it.

Albert Camus: the absurd as the rupture between the need for a story and the absence of meaning. Camus describes a state that in applied narratology is called ‘narrative collapse’. When a story no longer explains life, the existing plot ceases to function, a person feels a loss of meaning, the previous developmental plan crumbles; a new one has not yet been created. Camus wrote about this through the metaphor of Sisyphus. Today, applied narratology works precisely with such states, when the old plot is exhausted.

Psychotherapeutic Origins (1950s—1980s)

Therapists long thought that a client came to them with feelings or behaviours. But by the 1970s, it became obvious: the client comes with a story that makes those feelings and behaviours inevitable. For example: 'It's always like this with me'; 'I'm guilty because...'; 'If I speak up, I'll be rejected'; 'I'm strong, so I have no right to cry'; 'I must save others.' These stories are stronger than facts. And almost always they lie deeper than the pain.

Virginia Satir. The family as a factory of stories. Satir saw that people do not live in isolation. They live within 'family narratives' passed down like programs: 'In our family, we don't complain'; 'We must be resilient'; 'Love must be earned'; 'All the men in our family are like that'; 'Our women always endure'; 'Success breeds envy – better not to stand out.'

These lines became life scripts that a person later accepted as their own. Satir was the first to suggest: 'to change your life, you need to change the family story within yourself.' This idea would later be incorporated into applied narratology.

Carl Rogers and the Humanistic Tradition. A story as a way to hear oneself. Rogers showed that a person changes when they first tell 'a story in which they are allowed to be themselves.' Not to be right. Not to be convenient. Not to be defensive. But to be honest.

This is the moment when the old story first cracks. Applied narratology would later use this effect: a new story begins where a person first speaks the truth.

Jacob Levy Moreno and Psychodrama. A story brought to the stage. Moreno did something brilliant: he allowed a person to ‘act out their story.’ When a person sees their story from the outside, they understand that it was created, and that it can be changed. This was the first prototype of a future method: the story is not fate, but a construction.

Linguistics and Cultural Studies (1950s—1980s)

While psychotherapists worked with personal stories, cultural scholars studied large collective plots: myths, ideologies, symbols, rituals, political narratives, mass culture. And they made important discoveries: Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* showed that advertising and politics are stories that create an emotional truth. Michel Foucault analysed discourses – ‘stories of power’ within which a person lives, often without noticing. Claude Lévi-Strauss showed that myths are universal cognitive structures.

All of them pointed towards one idea: a story is not a personal, but a social phenomenon. And if a society has a story, it can be changed. This idea would later give rise to applied social narratology. Applied narratology did not appear as a new theory, but as a response to a human necessity – the necessity of escaping a story that no longer works.

It became possible at the moment when philosophy provided a language for identity, psychotherapy provided access to personal experience, and cultural studies provided an

understanding of the power of collective plots.

From that point on, narratology ceased to be mere description. It became a practice. It is from this moment that the conversation begins, not about *what* a narrative is, but about *how to live with it and what to do with it*.

CHAPTER 5. APPLIED NARRATOLOGY TODAY

*People do not resist change – they resist stories
in which they no longer have a place.*
Otto Scharmer

In the twenty-first century, it became obvious: change no longer begins with instructions, strategies, or skills. Specialists in organisational change encountered the same problem: classical tools could not explain why people remain for years in the same plot, even when circumstances and facts have long since changed. But this primarily concerned business.

For example: an employee considers themselves ‘insufficiently competent’, although objectively they are successful. A manager is convinced they must ‘control everything’, even though this has long ceased to work. A person in their personal life repeats the same scenario, even as relationships change. An organisation clings to an outdated image of itself that hinders progress.

This is precisely why applied narratology ceased to be a narrow specialised approach and became a practice without which it is impossible to work with development, leadership, and social processes. Specialists began to understand that the problem is not in knowledge or skills, but *in the story that a person or system tells about itself*. Thus emerged the idea of working not

only with behaviour, but also with what precedes behaviour – with narrative.

Thus, at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries, applied narratology ceased to be a set of ideas and turned into a discipline used by educators, marketers, politicians, coaches, leaders, HR specialists, psychologists, and social designers.

The Influence of Narrative Psychotherapy: The Transition to a New Discipline

When the question ‘Why does a story work?’ turns into ‘How can it be rewritten?’, a critical moment arrives: structuralists explained how texts are constructed; cognitivists explained how the brain creates stories; psychotherapists explained how a story affects feelings. But no one explained the main thing: ‘How do you purposefully create a new story that one can live by going forward?’

And here a revolution occurs.

The Narrative Therapy of White and Epston (1980s—1990s)

The first formal method of rewriting a story. Michael White and David Epston uttered a phrase that changed everything: ‘The problem is not the person. The problem is the story that governs the person.’ They proposed a method: externalise the problem, give it a name, see what it does, gather alternative stories, begin

to live a new version.

This was truly a revolution. The tasks this approach addresses are reducing the influence of destructive stories and replacing them with sustainable ones; stabilising the emotional field; providing a language for one's own identity; restoring a sense of authorship over one's life. This is the most humanistic of all approaches, working with what is too frightening to voice. Therapy, for the first time, began to see in the individual an 'author', not just a patient.

But there was a key limitation: narrative therapy works with pain, not with development, leadership, or life strategy. Nevertheless, this is where the 'applied understanding of story' begins.

However, applied narratology went further, into coaching, where it began to be applied as a strategy for personal growth. The modern world presupposes not a 'standard biography', but a 'project of one's own life'. And in coaching, narrative became a full-fledged tool for choosing a role; defining a future version of oneself; creating a development scenario; shaping directed behaviour; transitioning from chaos to a clear line.

Applied narratology then carried these ideas beyond therapy and coaching – into business, culture, education, leadership, strategy, and public communication.

Leaders and Corporations: Narrative as a Tool for Influence and Transformation

Companies and corporations understood something important: people are motivated not by salary, but by meaning. A team is held together not by KPIs, but by a shared plot. Change happens not through instructions, but through a story explaining why it is necessary. Companies create mission narratives, change narratives, culture narratives, leadership narratives, team role narratives. Narrative became the 'fuel' of corporate identity.

In this area, applied narratology became a tool for strategic communications, change management, culture building, conflict resolution, and team formation. A leader without a clear narrative is a manager around whom there is no direction.

In organisations, specialists saw the same mechanisms: every company lives within a story about itself. This story answers the questions: who are we as a team; what matters to us; what do we avoid; how do we explain our successes and failures; what goals do we aspire to.

If the corporate narrative is outdated, organisations stall in their development, even if strategies are correctly formulated. If the narrative is renewed, change proceeds more easily and quickly.

A leader who masters narrative technology influences not only people's actions, but also the meaning within which those actions are performed.

Applied Narratology in Education: Learning Through Meaning and Plot

Modern pedagogy has shifted from the transmission of information to the creation of educational stories, developmental trajectories, game-based learning scenarios, project cycles, and ‘student journeys’. Because what is remembered is the ‘story’, not the ‘data’. If a course or lesson is a plot, the brain itself constructs causality and motivation. The student receives not information, but a scenario along which they move. This sharply increases motivation and understanding.

Media and Digital Identity: Story as Self-Presentation and a Tool for Influence

In essence, social networks have already made every person the editor, director, author, and hero of their own story. This has amplified the narrativity of the digital world, where stories are micro-plots, a blog is a long-term story, a post is a claim for interpretation, an avatar is a symbolic version of the ‘I’, a comment is part of a speech plot, and any likes are social support for the story. Applied narratology in this area studies how digital versions of the self are formed, how story affects self-esteem, how algorithms reinforce certain plots, how digital traumas are created through interpretations, and how a social image begins to govern the real.

Social and Political Narratology: A Tool for Managing Society and the New Role of Meaning Architects

Narrative is not only about individuals; it is about countries.

Every state lives within a story of freedom and justice, prosperity and struggle, pain and rebirth. Political movements are narratives, protest movements are other narratives, social conflicts are clashes of plots. And applied narratology works here as a powerful tool. It analyses collective myths, predicts societal reactions, designs new symbols and meanings, reduces tensions, and creates unifying stories. This is already the level of state strategy.

Social processes today require specialists capable of working with collective stories as precisely as engineers work with structures. Politicians, state communicators, cultural institutions – all of them create, adjust, and transmit narratives. For example, how does society perceive the idea of justice; what image of the future is offered to it; how are crises interpreted; what values become shared; how are success, responsibility, and freedom explained?

Applied narratology provides tools that allow working with these large meanings without manipulation and without pressure – through the honest management of perceptual frameworks.

The Main Task of Applied Narratology

Despite its many directions, the discipline rests on four fundamental principles.

– **Story governs behaviour.** People do not act in reality; they act in their versions of reality. For example, two people receive

a promotion. One says: ‘They appreciated me’; the second says: ‘They want to burden me even more because I’m convenient.’ One is happy. The other is disappointed. The event is the same, the stories are different, the behaviour is opposite.

– **A story can be changed.** This is the most revolutionary idea. A story is not a given, but a construction. And since it was created, it can be created anew. But not through fantasy, through structural work.

– **A new story requires actions.** This is the main filter of applied narratology. If a person says, ‘I’m starting a new life,’ but takes no steps, this is not a story. It is a wish. A story is what is confirmed by actions.

– **A story must be sustainable.** A new story must correspond to resources, align with values, be realistic, take the environment into account, be stable, and rest on inner truth. Applied narratology does not create heroic fantasies. It creates workable life plots. Hence the high standard of ethical work for narratologists.

An applied narratologist is not an observer. They are a specialist who helps an employee or a company move from one internal construction to another – more accurate, more realistic, more alive.

Why is Applied Narratology a Discipline of the Future?

There are three reasons why it is becoming a key practice of the twenty-first century.

– **We live in a world of rapid change.** Individual biographies have become less linear: a person changes profession, lifestyle, and field of activity several times. Every change is preceded by a transformation of the story: ‘Who am I now? What matters to me? Where am I going?’ The narratologist helps navigate these transitions consciously.

– **Strategies cease to work without meaning.** Organisations can no longer rely on old management models. Teams need a shared language, a shared explanation of what is happening. This is narrative – a clear and honest story that unites people.

– **Society needs clear interpretations.** In an era of information overload, narrative becomes not a tool of propaganda, but a tool of navigation. People need to understand how to interpret the reality in which they find themselves.

How Does Applied Narratology Work in Practice?

Applied narratology works at the intersection of three things: understanding, meaning, and action. It does not offer simple solutions. It creates a space where a person can transform their internal logic so that their life becomes more meaningful and manageable. Applied narratology is a discipline that works not with illusions, but with possibilities.

It does not promise easy changes, but it gives individuals and systems the main thing: the right and the tools to be the authors of their own story. In a world where facts change faster than

a person can comprehend them, narrative becomes the primary navigational tool.

And the one who knows how to work with it gains not control over reality, but the ability to navigate within it.

PART THREE

CHAPTER 1. WHAT IS NARRATIVE

*Narrative is not a form of storytelling, but a form
of thinking.*
David Herman

A person rarely realises that for most of their life, they act based on their interpretation of reality. We react not to facts, but to the meanings we have assigned to those facts. Facts happen quickly, stories remain for a long time – and it is they that shape destiny. The French historian Jacques Le Goff wrote that a country's history is not only its documents, but also the collective myths that society passes from generation to generation. In exactly the same way, a person lives within the mythology of their own experience.

When we say 'narrative', we mean not a literary device, but a hidden structure of consciousness, a mechanism that connects past, present, and future into a unified story.

In France, for example, this mechanism is particularly evident, because the country itself lives within powerful historical narratives:

- the narrative of freedom (the Great Revolution),

- the narrative of dignity (de Gaulle and the Resistance movement),
- the narrative of style and uniqueness (culture, fashion, philosophy),
- the narrative of trauma (occupation, defeats, wars),
- the narrative of rationality (the Enlightenment),
- the narrative of revolt (May 1968).

These plots have shaped the behaviour of society for centuries. And the same thing happens at the level of the individual. To understand a person, you need to understand the story they tell about themselves. To change them, you need to change that story.

A person thinks they live in events. But they live in stories. Events are short, stories are long. Events are chaotic, stories are coherent. Events are neutral, stories are meaningful. And most importantly: events affect us less than the stories we tell about them. Narrative is the way a person explains everything. It is the structure in which they seek meaning. It is the framework of identity. It is the reality that everyone chooses – consciously or not. If until now we have examined the three schools of narratology, we now descend a level further – to the phenomenon itself and its mechanism.

The History of the Term

The term ‘narrative’ (from the Latin *narrare* – to tell) is generally used to denote a recounting of interconnected events

in the form of a sequence of words or images, or both. The difference between narrative and story is that a story is a sequence of events based on the actions of its characters, possessing a plot, a storyline, and characters. Narrative, on the other hand, is a particular way of presenting that story and includes the story itself.

The term 'narrative' was introduced from historiography and, in particular, from the concept of so-called 'narrative history'. According to this concept, historical events are viewed not as the result of the regularities of some processes, but in the context of their description, in direct connection with their interpretation. Contexts and interpretations are the foundation of this approach to exposition, because through them one can introduce subjective meaning into history without distorting facts and actions, and include in the narrative that which changes their perception and the consequences of their telling. Consequences are ideas, actions, conclusions. Thanks to interpretations in a narrative, the entire multitude of interwoven events, facts, and actions are subordinated to the goal, the causality of the narrative – to what is called meaning.

People tell stories in the form of sequences of words, which they construct into operative images and processes. This sequence can be viewed not only as a succession of the events themselves, which are the result of certain processes, but also as the context for describing these events. In other words, to present their interpretation: how a person relates to this story, how they

tell it, and for what purpose.

Recently, under the influence of English-language political science, in many languages and media, the term ‘narrative’ has acquired an additional meaning – ‘an utterance that contains a world-view stance or a prescription.’ This is actually a rather candid formulation. Especially the term ‘prescription’.

But what is narrative if we give it not an academic, but a generally accessible definition? Narrative is a way of organising experience into a story with causality, emotion, and meaning. It is a way of connecting events into a story that explains to a person who they are, what is happening to them, and why their life has its particular form. It is not decoration – it is the structure through which the brain understands what is happening. The formula for narrative is simple: *narrative = events + interpretation + meaning and purpose*.

A fact in itself does not become part of a person. It becomes part of a person only when they explain it thus: ‘This happened because I am like that,’ ‘This always happens to me,’ ‘This is no accident,’ ‘This is about me.’

– Narrative is not what we experienced. It is what we decided about our experience. The fact is brief. The interpretation is enduring. It is this that becomes a support or a trap.

– The same experience can give rise to different lives: a poor childhood can become a story of being unwanted, a story of survival, or a story of constantly proving one’s own worth. The fact is one – the narratives are different.

- It is also important to distinguish between close but different concepts:
 - **tale/account** – the verbalisation of experience;
 - **plot** – the sequence of events;
 - **memory** – the storage of data;
 - **narrative** – the emotional-meaning structure through which a person explains life to themselves.

For example, a job rejection: *fact* – rejection; *plot* – preparation, interview, result; *narrative* – ‘I’m always rejected because I’m not good enough.’ The event does not change – life changes. Narratives exist in all spheres of activity.

Event: a person moves to a new city. *Account*: ‘I changed my place of residence.’ *Plot*: ‘I quit my job, packed my things, left.’ *Narrative*: ‘I’m running from the past’ or ‘I’m seeking freedom,’ or ‘I finally chose myself.’ One event – different lives.

Why Does a Person Need Narrative?

There are four fundamental needs that narrative satisfies better than any other method of thinking.

- The need for **meaning**. If life does not form a story, a person feels emptiness. Narrative answers: why I live, why everything happens this way, why my path is this particular one, what makes my experience meaningful. Meaning is always the result of a story. Meaning is the connective tissue with which consciousness binds experience.
- The need for causality. The brain cannot tolerate chaos.

A person cannot live in chaos. They must know, 'Why did this happen to me?' Even a false explanation is better than no explanation – it still reduces anxiety.

– The need for **identity**. 'Who am I?' is not a philosophical question. 'Who am I?' is not a biological fact. It is a story. The French writer Marguerite Duras observed: 'Personality is the version of events that a person has chosen to keep.' This is a matter of narrative. A person is not a set of qualities. They are the story they tell about themselves. This story already determines what I can do, what I cannot do, what I am worthy of, how others treat me, what I am permitted, and what my limit of possibilities is.

– The need for **predictability**. Narrative creates a system of expectations: 'If I tell the truth, I'll be judged,' 'If I show weakness, I'll be rejected,' 'If I work hard, I'll be noticed.' The story sets expectations: can I be loved? can I be successful? can I be free? does failure await me? A person builds their life to fit their own story.

Narratology, in turn, has made it possible to unify narratives and, in the most general terms, systematise the rules for their creation. As we already know, a text in narratology is studied from two perspectives: on one hand, it is the story itself in the form of its content and events; on the other, it is the form of the narrative, its plane of expression.

But within the narrative itself, there is also a third plane, a plane based on the first two: on content and form. This

plane determines the direction of the story, its targeted communication, as well as the correspondence of the form to the images and words used in the narrative, to its goals and meanings.

The creation of stories has always been a kind of ‘creation of yet another reality’, another permissible model of the world. A narrative is not a description of this model, but rather an instruction that explains this reality and shows how to act within it.

By studying and analysing narratives, one comes to understand that events, characters, and their actions may not be the root cause of what is happening, and that the entire story is built on an idea introduced into it, on its meaning. The irony is that ‘narrative bias’ is an integral part of narrative thought.

Examples of well-constructed narratives are the promises of presidential candidates and Andersen’s fairy tales, the parables of Solomon and the history of a state in a school textbook. And what can teach a person better than their own life and its stories? Only other, professionally crafted stories.

We can say that narrative is the way a person gives form and meaning to experience. But this definition is insufficient to understand exactly how it works, *which particular story is currently governing their perception, decisions, and actions.*

Any living story is not structured chaotically. It has an internal logic, roles, tensions, a rhythm, and anchor points. To see why some stories hold a person for years while others fall apart, it is necessary to analyse narrative not as an abstraction, but as

a structure.

This is precisely what we now turn to.

CHAPTER 2. THE LAYERS OF NARRATIVE: PERSONAL, FAMILIAL, SOCIAL, CULTURAL

*The brain is not an instrument of truth, but an
instrument of survival.*

Donald Hoffman

A person does not live within a single narrative. They live within a system of stories that overlay each other, intertwine, sometimes reinforcing and sometimes contradicting each other. These stories shape not only how they understand themselves, but also how they perceive the world, make choices, and act.

When a person says, ‘It’s just my life,’ they rarely realise that their life has already been interpreted. It has already been assembled into a narrative. And this narrative consists of several layers.

Four Layers of Narrative

A personal narrative is the story about oneself. Who am I? What am I entitled to? What is forbidden to me? What am I afraid of? What do I want and aspire to? This is the most emotionally charged layer. Here live shame and pride, confidence and doubt, a sense of worth and a feeling of one’s own ‘inadequacy’. It is the personal narrative that determines which

possibilities a person considers permissible for themselves, and which they consider impossible. The personal layer seems the most ‘mine’, but in reality it is rarely completely autonomous.

Familial narrative comprises the stories transmitted not so much through words as through intonations, reactions, and prohibitions. These are phrases a person has heard since childhood: ‘In our family, it’s not done...’, ‘In our family, everyone is...’, ‘Be more modest,’ ‘Don’t stick out,’ ‘People can’t be trusted,’ ‘Love must be earned.’

The family is a mini-state with its own ideology. And even if a person rationally disagrees with it, their reactions often continue to follow precisely this script.

Familial narratives shape automatic strategies: endurance, conflict avoidance, hyper-responsibility, readiness to help, wariness, workaholism. A person can live for years with these reactions, unaware that they are not their ‘character’, but an inherited story.

Social layer comprises the stories of one’s environment, profession, generation, city, social circle. It is the story of ‘how things are for people.’ How one is supposed to build a career. What ‘normal’ relationships look like. What is considered success. What one should be ashamed of.

The social layer creates the frame of the permissible. It imperceptibly answers the question: ‘Is it even possible to live like that?’

Often a person is internally ready for change, but the social

narrative holds them in the old story: ‘That’s not how it’s done,’ ‘That’s not serious,’ ‘You’re too old for that.’

Cultural layer is the broadest and most elusive.

This is the historical plot of a country or civilisation. It sets the basic model of the relationship between a person and the world: the world as opportunity or threat, the world as a field of freedom or a field of duty, the world as a space for creativity or survival.

The cultural layer manifests itself quietly but powerfully. It is rarely conscious, but it is this layer that forms the deep sense of ‘how life is generally structured.’

Working with narrative is impossible without recognising all levels.

Changing only the personal plot is rarely sustainable if the familial or cultural layer remains unchanged.

How a Personal Narrative is Formed: Three Sources

A person does not invent a story from a vacuum. They inherit it, absorb it, and construct it.

– **Biographical experience.** Biography is the most obvious source, but not the most direct. Facts themselves do not become a story. They pass through filters of emotion, self-esteem, family scenarios, and cultural expectations. The same event can give rise to different lives. A teenage rejection can become the story: ‘I’m uninteresting’ or ‘I’ll learn to be strong.’ Unfair criticism can turn into ‘I’m not good enough’ or ‘I’ll be more careful about who I trust.’ Events are neutral. Interpretation is not.

We are born without a story. But by the age of twenty, most people already have a fundamental narrative that is perceived as ‘objective reality’.

– **Family stories.** Family narratives are rarely spoken directly. They live in reactions, intonations, prohibitions, and expectations. Parents’ phrases become the inner voice of the adult. Even if they disagree with them, they often continue to act as if they are true.

– **Cultural and national narratives.** Culture is a factory of stories. France lives within narratives of freedom, dignity, intellectual authorship, style, and civic responsibility. The unspoken demand is: ‘Be yourself – and do it beautifully.’ An American grows up in a story of opportunity: ‘anything is possible.’ A Japanese person grows up in a story of duty: ‘do not let others down.’ A Russian person grows up in a story of survival and overcoming. These plots take root in the personality more deeply than school or books.

Narrative as a Mechanism for Action

The most important thing: a person does not act in accordance with reality, but in accordance with the story they *believe* to be reality. Behaviour always confirms the narrative. And until this story is recognised in its layers, it will reproduce itself – even contrary to facts.

CHAPTER 3. INTERNAL STRUCTURE AND MEANING CORES

The problem is not that a person makes mistakes, but that they make mistakes systematically – according to the same pattern.

Daniel Kahneman

A person rarely realises that their life is governed not by events, but by the structure into which those events are embedded. This structure is narrative – the internal architecture of meaning by which one navigates reality. Having examined *why* the human brain inevitably thinks in stories, it is now important to understand exactly *how a story is constructed internally*. Not a literary one, but the internal one – the one each of us uses to navigate our own lives.

Narrative is often perceived as a chaotic stream of words: a person talks about themselves as best they can, from time to time. But beneath this stream, a structure is always hidden. It has its own constant elements: roles, meaning centres, plot lines, triggers, emotional nodes, and predictable developmental mechanisms. A narrative may sound free, lively, disjointed, but it is never random.

The task of this chapter is to reveal the internal architecture of narrative: what it consists of, how its centre of gravity is

formed, and why some stories persist for decades.

Narrative as a System: Structure, Not Chaos

On the surface, a story may seem awkward; the narrator jumps from topic to topic, includes unnecessary details, forgets the sequence, mixes feelings with facts. But in depth, this story rests on several stable elements that make it a narrative. A narrative always has:

- a **frame** – a set of beliefs that sets the logic of perception;
- a **configuration of meanings** – what is considered important, what unimportant;
- a **role** – the person's position within the story;
- a **plot** – a line of development that connects events;
- **emotions** – feelings that hold the story together;
- a **rhythm** – a recurring way of responding.

Even if a person says, 'I'm just telling it like it was,' this is merely a form of presentation. In reality, they are reconstructing their model of the world.

The Frame of Narrative: The Invisible Structure of Perception

The frame is a set of internal laws that a person takes for granted. They are so habitual that they are rarely articulated, but it is they that determine how information is selected and what meaning is assigned to it.

For example: 'People are generally benevolent' is one frame;

‘People want to take advantage’ is another; ‘Mistakes are part of development’ is one frame; ‘A mistake is a threat to status’ – another; ‘The world is unstable’ – one; ‘I can handle change’ – another.

The frame is a filter. Through it, only what matches the logic of this filter is visible. Everything else is discarded or attenuated. When an applied narratologist listens to a person, they listen first for the *frame*, because it is this that determines the limitation or resourcefulness of the entire story.

The Plot: How Events Are Gathered into a Line

Narrative turns disparate episodes into a story. Even if the drama is not explicitly stated, the plot still exists. It manifests through a typical sequence:

- an expectation or intention arises;
- an obstacle appears;
- a response strategy is chosen;
- this response has consequences;
- a conclusion is drawn (‘So, I am such-and-such’ or ‘So, the world is such-and-such’).

This cycle repeats again and again. Its repeatability is what makes the story stable. Some plots develop as a **struggle**: constant overcoming of difficulties. Some as a **quest**: moving towards something unattainable. Some as **preservation**: striving to maintain stability. Some as **avoidance**: the desire not to encounter something troubling.

A plot is not a sequence of facts, but a way of organising experience.

The Role of the Subject: Who Are You in Your Own Story

The central element of any internal story is the position the person occupies within it. They may be a hero moving forward; a witness observing their own life; a student needing to prove their worth; a saviour always helping others; a guilty one believing they must earn forgiveness; a victim of circumstances; 'lucky' or 'unlucky'; an expert who understands everything but doesn't always act; and so on.

The role creates a *vector* – the direction in which a person interprets events. If they perceive themselves as a hero, they seek challenges. As a victim, they seek threats. As an observer, they distance themselves. As a saviour, they overload themselves. The narratologist begins work not with an analysis of events, but with an analysis of the *role* – for changing the role changes the entire story.

Meaning Cores: The Internal Logic of the Story

In every narrative, there are cores – ideas around which a person's life is built. They determine what is important; what is dangerous; what is possible; what is forbidden; what is obligatory; what is valuable.

For example: 'Freedom is more important than comfort'; 'Stability is the main thing in relationships'; 'Success means

recognition'; 'Everything must be under control'; 'Precision is valued in my work'; 'Feelings are unpredictable.'

Meaning cores are like the laws of physics applied to the inner world. They set constant gravitational forces that shape a person's choices.

Emotional Nodes: What Holds the Story Together

Every stable narrative is firmly linked to a strong emotion. It may be old, unconscious, tied to a specific episode, or distributed across many small situations. Typical emotions that hold a story together: shame – 'I am inadequate'; guilt – 'I must compensate for the damage done'; fear – 'danger is all around'; resentment – 'I am undervalued'; pride – 'I must prove myself'; joy – 'I have the right to move forward.'

Emotion creates a force of attraction that returns one to the same story because it is emotionally anchored. Without working with this node, it is impossible to change the narrative sustainably.

Rhythm: Recurring Cycles

Every person's story has a rhythm – a predictable sequence of steps: how they enter a situation, what they consider a threat, how they react, where they accelerate, where they slow down, where they give up, where, conversely, they become activated.

Rhythm is the part of the narrative that manifests before words. Sometimes a specialist hears it in the timbre of the voice,

in pauses, in recurring formulations. Rhythm is the dynamics of the story. And a change in rhythm often occurs before a change in content.

Why Internal Structure Matters

If a specialist does not distinguish between roles, cores, rhythms, frames, and plot, they see only the surface. And working with the surface leads to weak changes. A person may rewrite the story in words, but if the core remains the same, the story will return. They may change the rhythm, but if the role has not changed, behaviour will not be renewed. They may tell the story differently, but if the emotion has not been processed, the old plot will resurface.

The anatomy of narrative allows for deep and precise work. Therefore, it is the foundation of all applied narratology. As long as narrative is perceived as a mere telling, it seems subjective and elusive. But as soon as its structure becomes visible – frame, role, core, rhythm – it becomes clear: a story can not only be understood, but also taken apart.

Until a narrative is broken down into its elements, a person will continue to reproduce it, even when consciously wanting to live differently.

CHAPTER 4. THE ANATOMY OF NARRATIVE

It is impossible to change a story without taking it apart. Narrative is not a stream of words, but an internal dramaturgy, where every element has a function, even if the person has never been aware of it.

For a narrative to be changeable, one must understand how it is constructed. Every narrative has six elements.

1. The Hero

The hero is the 'I'. But not an objective 'I', a chosen one. It can be a strong 'I', a fragile one, a guilty one, a stubborn one, an unnoticed one, a survivor, a shameful one, a devalued one, etc. The hero is not a fact, but a position that the acting subject occupies within the story.

This can be a person, a living being, an object, an idea, a concept – anything at all. The hero must have a goal and must have an obstacle in their path to it in order to fulfil their role. If there is no obstacle, the very process of the hero achieving their goal becomes a mere act of contemplation, devoid of interest.

2. The Hero's Role

The hero's role is their style of existence. A person can be a victim, a saviour, a controller, an observer, a rebel, a sufferer,

a follower, a leader, a pioneer, an executor. A role is not innate, but chosen. It can be changed, but most people never do so. A role is a way of behaving. It determines the style of reaction. For example: the role of ‘saviour’ – saves everyone except themselves; the role of ‘soldier’ – bears responsibility for everyone; the role of ‘strength’ – never shows weakness; the role of ‘victim’ – seeks confirmation of their insignificance; the role of ‘pioneer’ – does what no one has done before.

Historical figures perfectly demonstrate the hero’s role. For example: Joan of Arc – the role of ‘the envoy’ (mission above fear). Robespierre – the role of ‘the judge’ (truth above human cost). De Gaulle – the role of ‘father of the nation’ (he is the bearer of France’s dignity). Simone de Beauvoir – the role of ‘observer-philosopher’ and simultaneously ‘rebel’.

3. Conflict

A narrative rests on conflict. Without conflict, a story falls apart. Without conflict, there is no story. These can be typical conflicts: I want, but I’m afraid; I can, but I have no right; I deserve, but it’s shameful to take; I am talented, but I fear recognition; I strive for intimacy, but I avoid it. Humans have a millennia-old algorithm for perceiving and understanding conflict. Knowing the laws of dramatic development, one can predict and pre-establish how it will be constructed in a person’s perception. And if we also consider that people love scenes, not dialogues, and that the audience is always more ready

to feel than to think, and add a few more elementary narrative techniques to this, then the success of the story being constructed is guaranteed. In life, there is only one set of rules – and these are the rules of drama.

Conflict is the source of a narrative's development, its emotional fullness, its dynamics, and its ending. Conflict is a problem that must be solved. Conflict is an environment that opposes, and circumstances that are inconvenient. Conflict is a disturbance of peace and balance; it is the necessity to explain something, to go through something, and to achieve something. The spectacle of conflict should not obscure the main thing – meaning. Conflict is the central tension that shapes the plot of behaviour.

4. The Antagonist

The antagonist is always internal. But often a person projects it outward: 'my mother is to blame,' 'society blocked my path,' 'they won't let me rise.' But the real antagonists are fear, shame, trauma, prohibition, false belief, the inner judge.

Understanding the antagonist means understanding what holds the story in the past. The antagonist is what the internal struggle is waged against. History provides vivid examples.

Joan of Arc's antagonist was the fear of betrayal. Voltaire's antagonist was the dogmatism and stupidity of society. Balzac's antagonist was poverty and his own perfectionism. Camus's antagonist was the absurdity and emptiness of the world. Piaf's

antagonist was loneliness.

5. The Logic of Causality

A narrative always explains: 'Why am I like this?' These explanations are the core of the plot. Typical formulas: 'It's always like this with me'; 'That's how it's done in our family'; 'I don't fit into this world'; 'I have to be strong'; 'I must not make mistakes'; 'I will only be noticed if I am perfect,' 'Why is my life exactly like this?' This is a set of beliefs. Causality is logic, not truth. But a person perceives it as reality.

6. The Goal of the Narrative

The goal of a narrative is to impel movement from reflection to action, and onwards to new meanings and new actions. Otherwise, even after recounting the most captivating plot, all that remains is an empty void scattered with words and gestures. Every narrative is not about truth. It is about protection. Its goal is to protect the person from humiliation, from pain, from uncertainty, from trauma, from repeating the past.

For example, the narrative 'I'm better off alone' protects a person from the fear of intimacy. The narrative 'success is dangerous' protects from the risk of disappointment. The narrative 'I must do more' protects from the fear of being unwanted.

Narrative is not evil; it is an attempt to survive. Every narrative protects someone: from shame, from pain, from failure,

from insecurity, from uncertainty. The key insight here is this: narrative is not truth, but protection. The brain constructs a story so that the person survives. And it constructs it according to its own logic.

A narrative seems personal and unique until we see its anatomy. But as soon as the hero, conflict, antagonist, causality, and goal become discernible, it becomes clear: the story is not only lived – it is reproduced. This means it can be not only destroyed, but reconfigured.

The next step is to understand exactly *how narrative becomes an algorithm of behaviour*.

CHAPTER 5. NARRATIVE AS AN ALGORITHM OF BEHAVIOUR

A person rarely chooses – more often, they perform. Their decisions look conscious, but in reality they are triggered by a story that has already determined what is possible and what is not.

If the anatomy of narrative explains what internal elements a story consists of, this part answers another fundamental question: how does a story turn into action?

Why does a person make certain decisions and avoid others? Why do they repeat familiar strategies even when they no longer work? Why does the situation change, but the reaction does not?

To understand this, it is important to view narrative not as a description of life, but as an algorithm of behaviour that is triggered automatically. This algorithm determines what is considered possible, reasonable, dangerous, or permissible. It works faster than logic, deeper than beliefs, and is more stable than motivation.

This chapter is about how narrative becomes an internal program that governs choice, interaction with people, attitude towards the future, and the capacity for change.

A person does not act in reality. They act in the story about reality. This principle explains everything: recurring mistakes, inexplicable fears, strange decisions, unexpected successes,

burnout, inspiration, love, loneliness. If you tell yourself, 'I am unworthy,' 'I am weak,' 'No one needs me,' 'I'll be abandoned anyway,' you create a scenario that inevitably comes to life. If the story sounds like 'I must not make mistakes' – the person checks everything ten times over, avoids new tasks, works themselves to exhaustion. If it's 'I'm not interesting' – they don't go on dates, don't join conversations, don't offer ideas. If it's 'I'm always abandoned' – they keep their distance, test their partner, prepare in advance for failure. A story is an algorithm.

Narrative is stronger than logic. A person can understand intellectually: 'I am worthy.' But act as if they are unworthy. Logic is weaker than emotion. Emotion is weaker than story. Story is stronger than everything.

Narrative shapes self-esteem. Narrative is not a conclusion drawn from experience. It is the cause of self-esteem. The narrative 'I can' stimulates success. The narrative 'I am unworthy' leads to avoiding emerging opportunities.

Narrative determines the type of relationships. For example: the narrative 'I must be convenient' leads a person to choose partners who take advantage of this; the narrative 'I'll be abandoned' leads to either merging or coldness; the narrative 'saviour' leads to codependency.

Narrative determines the kind of love. For example: 'I must save' → life with dependent partners. 'I'll be abandoned' → constant tension and jealousy. 'No one needs me' → relationships where cold partners are chosen.

Narrative determines the style of success. For example: 'Success is dangerous' → the person avoids opportunities. 'I need to prove myself' → works to exhaustion. 'I can' → grows faster than others.

Narrative determines the limits of life. A person's story constrains them more than money, status, country, or circumstances. No one will try to live a story they do not believe in.

If you repeatedly explain something to yourself in the same way, this story turns into a *behavioural strategy*. They act not because it is 'right', but because their personal story suggests precisely this path.

Examples. *Story*: 'To be respected, I have to be useful.' *Behaviour*: constant overload, refusal to rest. *Story*: 'If I show emotion, I'll be rejected.' *Behaviour*: distance, rationalisation, withdrawal from intimacy. *Story*: 'Success is always unreliable.' *Behaviour*: fear of growth, self-sabotage of advancement.

The story begins to live its own life. It dictates what a person considers possible and what forbidden. It determines what surprises them and what seems natural. It governs what they see in themselves and in others. Therefore, narrative is not an 'explanation', but an *internal algorithm*. And that is precisely why working with narrative has such a powerful effect on changing behaviour.

Narrative is not just an explanation. It is an internal code

Many think that narrative is the story told out loud. But the real story is what is never spoken. It is the **internal code** that connects events, emotions, and conclusions into a single logic. This code determines:

- what to expect from others and what to expect from oneself;
- what can be tolerated, what can be asked for;
- when to show strength, when to step back;
- what success means, what failure means;
- what a ‘correct’ action looks like.

A person acts according to this code, even if they think they are making rational decisions. Therefore, when we say ‘narrative limits’ or ‘narrative supports,’ we are talking about an *operating system*, not a ‘bad thinking habit’.

How an Algorithm of Behaviour is Formed

An algorithm of behaviour is formed gradually, through the repetition of the same cycle:

- *Event*. Something happens – external or internal.
- *Interpretation*. The brain explains what happened through an already existing story.
- *Emotion*. The interpretation evokes an emotional reaction that reinforces the meaning.
- *Action*. The person reacts according to the interpretation and emotion.
- *Consequences*. The action leads to a result that confirms or strengthens the story.

After several such cycles, the narrative becomes automatic. The person no longer chooses – they live out the embedded program.

For example:

- Event: a project is criticised.
- Interpretation: ‘I am being judged as a specialist.’
- Emotion: shame.
- Action: I shut down.
- Consequences: I don’t defend the project, it gets rejected → the story is confirmed.

Or:

- Event: a new opportunity is offered.
- Interpretation: ‘I can handle this.’
- Emotion: inspiration.
- Action: I accept the challenge.
- Consequences: I grow → the story is confirmed.
- The algorithm is the same, but the story is different.

Limiting Narratives: How They Create a Narrow Space of the Possible

Why does narrative both limit and support simultaneously? Every story performs two functions:

- *It orders chaos.* Even a limiting story creates a sense of control: the world may be dangerous, but at least it’s understandable.
- *It restricts movement.* The story holds a person within

familiar boundaries: if the world is dangerous, it's better not to take risks; if I'm 'not like that', then I shouldn't aspire.

Hence the main paradox of narrative: *it simultaneously provides a feeling of stability and prevents one from becoming free*. This is not an error or a defect of thinking. It is a natural tool of the psyche.

Limiting narratives are stories that shrink the space of choice. They are formed as a result of early experience, social norms, or traumatic episodes.

Their structure typically includes:

- **the idea of danger** ('if I show myself, I'll be rejected');
- **the idea of inadequacy** ('I need to prove myself to have the right');
- **the idea of powerlessness** ('I have no influence on the outcome anyway');
- **the idea of duty** ('others first, then me');
- **the idea of predetermination** ('no one in our family has ever been successful').

A limiting narrative determines what is not even considered as an option. It doesn't just forbid an action – it excludes it from the field of possibilities. The person does not think: 'I could try, but I don't want to.' They think, 'That's not my reality.' This is precisely why limiting stories are so powerful.

Supporting Narratives: How They Shape Resilience and Growth

Supporting stories are also formed in early experience, but their structure is different. They contain:

- a sense of influence ('I can change the situation');
- a sense of worth ('I have a right to what is mine');
- a sense of resilience ('I have coped before');
- a sense of meaning ('what I do is important').

Such narratives expand the field of choice. They allow one to see alternatives, to withstand failures without destroying self-esteem, and to move forward in uncertainty.

A supporting narrative creates *flexibility*. A person does not get stuck in one scenario – they are able to adapt, rethink, and change strategies.

The Hidden Logic of Choice: How Narrative Determines Reaction Before Decision

Decisions are rarely made rationally. Much more often, *explanations are chosen to fit the reaction already triggered by the story.*

For example, a person says they 'don't want to take risks,' but the hidden logic lies in the story 'mistakes are dangerous'; 'I value stability,' but underneath is the story 'I have no right to more'; 'relationships don't work out,' but the hidden logic is 'feelings are unsafe'; 'it's better to work alone,' because the story 'I'm not needed if I'm not useful' makes cooperation anxiety-inducing.

These explanations sound plausible because everyone believes their own story. But narrative analysis allows us to see: the

decision was born before the explanation.

How Narrative Shapes Attitude Towards the Future

One of the key elements of an internal story is the *image of the future* that a person allows themselves. A narrative not only explains the past – it determines what future seems possible.

People with a limiting narrative form a *compressed future*: short-term, one-dimensional, predictable, without sharp turns. People with a supporting narrative create an *open future*: multidimensional, multi-variant, allowing for growth and unexpected opportunities. The image of the future is an indicator of how free a person is within their own story. And it is one of the first things to undergo transformation.

Why It Is Impossible to Change Behaviour Without Changing the Narrative

Attempts to change behaviour without working with the story often lead to disappointment. Because behaviour is a consequence of interpretation; interpretation is part of the story; the story is part of a complex, emotionally anchored structure.

If you change only external steps while leaving the narrative the same, the person will constantly revert to old reactions. They will ‘explain’ new attempts within the logic of the old story, thereby nullifying the results.

For example, a person might try to say ‘no’, but if their internal

story is 'I must be convenient,' new attempts will be accompanied by shame, anxiety, and retreat.

Therefore, applied narratology works not with behaviour, but with the algorithm that creates it.

Narrative governs behaviour not because it is true, but because it is automatic. It triggers faster than thought, deeper than beliefs, and is more stable than motivation.

The next step is not to change actions and not to seek new explanations, but to learn to see exactly *where in the story choice arises and how it can be rewritten*.

CHAPTER 6. THE FILTER OF PERCEPTION: SELF-LIMITATIONS

We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.
Anaïs Nin

*Your brain doesn't look for truth – it looks for
confirmation of the story you're living in.*
Robert Sapolsky

A person is convinced they see reality. But in fact, they see only that part of it which their story permits. In the previous chapter, we saw that narrative is not just a tale, but an algorithm of behaviour. But there is another key aspect without which it is impossible to understand the depth of its influence. Narrative is a *filter of perception* that determines which parts of reality will be noticed, which will be ignored, and which will be interpreted in a distorted way.

This filter works constantly. It is embedded in memory, emotions, interpretations, bodily reactions, language, and social behaviour. This is why a person is often sure they 'see the situation objectively' when, in fact, they see it through the lens of their own story.

This chapter explains exactly how narrative shapes perception,

why two people look at the same thing but see something different, and how a story becomes both a limitation and a resource. This is the logical transition to the work of interpretation and narrative transformation, which is the subject of the next chapter.

Narrative Filters Reality Before Awareness

Filtering does not begin with thoughts – it begins with perception. When encountering a new event, the psyche first ‘chooses’ what to let into consciousness and what to screen out. This choice happens unconsciously, at the level of:

- attention,
- emotional sensitivity,
- past episodes,
- habitual interpretations,
- expectations,
- embedded beliefs.

If the story tells a person that ‘people are dangerous,’ their attention automatically searches for signs of threat, not support. If the story says ‘success requires struggle,’ the person underestimates easy paths. If the story says ‘I must be strong,’ they fail to recognise moments when allowing themselves to be weak would be beneficial.

The filter works before the meaning-making process. It determines what will become a fact and what will not even be noticed.

Interpretation is a Continuation of Perception

After attention has selected what aligns with the story, the next stage begins – interpretation. It turns an event not just into a fact, but into a *meaningful element of the plot*.

For example, a sharp remark from a colleague becomes proof of the story ‘I’m not good enough’; a delay in feedback becomes confirmation of ‘I’m not important’; a rejection becomes confirmation of ‘I have no right to aspire’; uncertainty becomes confirmation of ‘bad things always happen to me’; a conversationalist’s interest becomes confirmation of ‘I can inspire trust.’

From the outside, these reactions look emotional. Inside, they are part of the narrative.

Interpretation does not just explain an event. It *supports the central role of the subject*: strong, weak, unnoticed, significant, fearful – any role, but stable within their own story.

Why Two People See the Same Thing Differently

This is one of the most striking effects of narrative. Person A sees an ‘opportunity’. Person B sees a ‘risk’. Person A hears an ‘invitation’. Person B hears a ‘test’. Person A feels support. Person B feels pressure. They live in the same world, but in different stories.

Each perceives the situation *not directly*, but through a structure of:

- personal experience,
- family stories,
- cultural models,
- internal expectations,
- significant episodes,
- anchored emotions.

In this sense, narrative is closer to an operating system than to a story. It sets the rules for processing data. And a person rarely notices that their system differs from another's.

Narrative as a Source of Self-Limitation

Self-limiting stories do not always arise from trauma. More often, they come from tiny episodes: a critical phrase, a chance reaction, a failed experience, comparison with others.

Over time, a person stops asking questions: 'Why do I think this way?', 'Who first told me this?', 'Where did this belief come from?'

The story becomes an axiom. It is perceived not as an interpretation, but as reality.

Examples of typical self-limiting filters: 'I must not relax'; 'If I show weakness, I'll be rejected'; 'Success is constant tension'; 'People can't be trusted'; 'To be accepted, I must conform.'

Such a filter creates a *narrowed space of possibilities* – the person limits themselves before reality presents any limits.

Narrative as a Resource: Positive Filtering

But a filter can be not only limiting, but also supporting. Some people automatically notice opportunities, signals of sympathy, points of growth, moments when it's worth taking a risk, situations where it's good to show oneself, resources in other people.

This is not 'optimism' in the everyday sense. It is a narrative in which a person considers themselves a subject capable of influencing events.

Positive filtering allows one to maintain resilience in the face of failures, to notice more quickly when a situation becomes favourable, to see perspective where others see a dead end, to recognise people who are ready to support, and to feel the right to move forward.

In applied narratology, this is called an *expanding narrative* – a story that increases the range of possible actions.

The Filter as Part of Identity

At a certain stage, the filter ceases to be perceived as a mechanism. It becomes part of who the person is:

- 'I'm just cautious like that';
- 'I'm just demanding of myself like that';
- 'I'm just independent like that';
- 'I'm just the type who doesn't bother anyone';
- 'I'm just the type who stays in the shadows';
- 'I'm just the type who doesn't allow myself to rest.'

But all these definitions are not character traits. They are the

consequence of a story that has been reinforced over years. When a person begins to distinguish, ‘This is not me. This is my story,’ the first stage of transformation begins.

Why the Work with Meaning Begins Here

It is impossible to change a narrative at the level of behaviour. It is impossible to change it at the level of words. It must be changed at the level of the *filter*:

- what the person notices;
- what they consider important;
- what they consider a threat;
- what they consider possible;
- what role they take in a situation.

Transformation begins not with a new story, but with a new optic – the ability to see the world differently.

Interpretation is the place where the filter becomes meaning, and meaning becomes action. A narrative cannot be changed directly. *But what can be changed is the lens through which it looks at the world.*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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