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Article

Narrative Theory in the Age of Algorithms: Rethinking Voice, Focalization, and Plot in Digital Contexts

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Abstract

This article presents a systematized critical review of narrative theory in the age of algorithms, with special attention to how voice, focalization, and plot function in digital, interactive, and automated storytelling environments. It revisits classical narratology and places it in dialogue with research on hypertext and games, interactive digital narrative, computational and distant-reading methods, and scholarship on generative AI and platform curation. The review analyzes a core analytic corpus of approximately fifty-five works assembled through database searches and citation chaining, supplemented by a small number of clearly labeled preprints/working papers in fast-moving areas (e.g., generative AI and information-theoretic modeling). Organized in five movements, it (1) reconstructs classical accounts of voice, focalization, and plot as medium-independent structures; (2) traces their revision in interactive and ergodic forms; (3) surveys empirical and formal studies of AI-generated stories, narrative transportation, and information-theoretic models; (4) synthesizes how algorithms redistribute narrative agency across human and nonhuman actors; and (5) evaluates methodological and ethical stakes within global, intersectional debates. The article argues that algorithms do not make narratology obsolete but expose blind spots, especially infrastructural voice, platform-level focalization, and probabilistic plot. Beyond synthesis, it contributes (a) a "trace-based" way to operationalize infrastructural influence as textual and paratextual features, and (b) brief micro-cases that demonstrate how these concepts change what close reading can show in everyday algorithmic encounters. It concludes by proposing infrastructural, posthuman, and comparative research agendas for studying narrative under algorithmic conditions.

Keywords: *Algorithmic narrativity; Voice and focalization; Plot theory; Interactive digital narrative; Generative artificial intelligence*

Introduction

Narrative theory emerged in the twentieth century as a project of formalization: an attempt to describe in systematic terms the structures that make stories intelligible across media, periods, and genres. From Vladimir Propp's morphology of the folktale to Gérard Genette's analysis of order, duration, and voice, narratology sought to identify the recurrent operations through which events are selected, arranged, and presented as meaningful sequences. In its canonical formulations, narrative is a human cultural universal and stories are understood as fundamentally human artifacts, produced by authors, mediated by narrators, and received by readers who reconstruct a storyworld from textual cues (Bal; Genette; Herman; Rimmon-Kenan). The rise of digital media in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, however, has destabilized many of the anthropocentric and medium-neutral assumptions that underpinned classical narratology. Hypertext fiction, interactive digital narratives, story-driven games, and datafied platforms foreground the role of code, interface, and algorithm in shaping narrative experience (Aarseth; Koenitz et al.; Murray; Ryan). More recently, large language models and other generative AI systems have begun to produce apparently coherent narratives at scale, raising questions not only about literary value and authorship but about the very concepts of voice, focalization, and plot that narratology has long taken for granted (Appel et al.; Chu and Liu; Messingschlager and Appel; Rettberg and Wigers; Schulz et al.).

This article undertakes a systematized critical review of scholarship at the intersection of narratology, digital media studies, and AI research, with a particular focus on how the age of algorithms compels us to rethink three core narratological concepts: voice, focalization, and plot. Rather than treating “the digital” or “AI” as merely new content for pre-existing theoretical frameworks, the review asks how algorithmic infrastructures and generative systems transform the very conditions under which narrative voice can be attributed, focalization can be located, and plots can be said to unfold. In doing so, it responds to calls within postclassical narratology to situate narrative forms within their technological, institutional, and socio-political contexts (Fludernik; Nünning; Phelan and Rabinowitz; Ryan). By bringing insights from digital humanities, communication studies, and information theory into conversation with literary narratology, the article aims to contribute to what might be called an infrastructural and posthuman narratology capable of grappling with the distributed agencies that shape stories in algorithmically mediated environments (Jockers; Moretti; Ramsay; Schulz et al.; Underwood).

This article argues that algorithms “rethink” narratology not by replacing classical categories, but by making their attribution conditions visible and contestable: under algorithmic mediation, (1)

voice becomes a composite effect that emerges through textual cues plus paratextual framing and platform constraints; (2) focalization expands from "who sees?" inside a storyworld to "what is made visible?" through selection, ranking, and personalization; and (3) plot is increasingly experienced as a probabilistic field of possible continuations shaped by rules, sampling, and recommendation feedback loops. Taken together, these shifts imply a single reorientation for narrative theory: voice, focalization, and plot must be analyzed as traceable outcomes of human–algorithm assemblages, readable in concrete textual and paratextual features rather than presumed as exclusively human, stable properties of a bounded text.

What is new here (beyond synthesis) is threefold. First, the paper reframes "infrastructural voice" and "platform-level focalization" as traceable effects—readable in concrete textual and paratextual cues (e.g., auto-titles, summaries, warnings, ranking positions, omission patterns), rather than as a separate, free-floating narratorial entity. Second, it demonstrates the payoff of that reframing through short micro-cases (Sections 5–6) that connect readerly attribution and platform framing to specific narratorial and focalizing cues. Third, methodologically, it offers a transparent "systematized" review protocol suitable for humanities debates where conceptual genealogy and interpretive synthesis matter, while still making corpus construction and evidentiary status (peer-reviewed vs. preprint) explicit. These contributions are organized around the thesis above, which functions as the paper's through-line: each section returns to one of the three concepts and shows how algorithmic mediation changes the conditions under which it can be located, attributed, and evaluated.

The review is structured as follows. The next section outlines the methodological choices guiding the selection and organization of the corpus, emphasizing both the systematic and the interpretive dimensions of the critical survey. Section 3 revisits classical theories of voice, focalization, and plot, distilling their key claims and highlighting their implicit assumptions about human authorship and linear textuality. Section 4 examines how these concepts have been rearticulated in work on digital and interactive narratives, paying particular attention to ergodic reading, branching story structures, and player agency. Section 5 surveys recent empirical research on AI-generated stories, narrative transportation, and audience responses to AI authorship labels, while also discussing formal proposals such as narrative information theory. Section 6 synthesizes these strands to propose how the concepts of voice, focalization, and plot might be rethought when narrative is conceived as a human–algorithm assemblage rather than a purely human artifact. Section 7 discusses methodological and ethical issues, including the politics of data, representation, and labor that

underwrite algorithmic storytelling. A concluding section summarizes the argument and outlines directions for future research, with particular emphasis on comparative and decolonial perspectives that remain underrepresented in current debates.

Methodology: Toward a Systematic Critical Review

This article adopts a systematized yet interpretively inflected approach to reviewing the emerging field of narrative theory in algorithmic contexts. Unlike quantitative meta-analyses that aim for exhaustive coverage and statistical synthesis, the present review is situated within the tradition of humanities scholarship, where critical selection and conceptual synthesis remain central. At the same time, it follows best practices from systematic literature reviews by making its selection criteria, search strategies, and analytic categories explicit (Siddaway et al.).

What "systematic/systematized" means in this article

In this study, "systematic/systematized" denotes (a) transparent corpus construction (databases, queries, screening rules, and citation-chaining steps), (b) explicit inclusion/exclusion criteria, and (c) structured synthesis (coding around voice/focalization/plot plus genealogical reconstruction). It does not claim PRISMA-style exhaustiveness or statistical comparability across studies; rather, it makes the review process auditable while preserving interpretive aims. Operationally, "systematized" means that every included source is processed through the same analytic pipeline (Steps 1–6 below), and that comparative claims in Sections 3–8 are grounded in cross-source coding rather than isolated citation.

Step-by-step review workflow: search, screening, coding, and comparison

Step 1: Database search and query design. Recent empirical and theoretical publications on AI-generated stories, narrative persuasion with chatbots, and formal models of narrative complexity were located through targeted searches in Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar, using combinations of terms including "AI-generated stories," "ChatGPT narrative," "interactive digital narrative," "algorithmic narrativity," "narrative transportation," and "narrative information theory" (Appel et al.; Bellini; Chu and Liu; Koenitz; Koenitz et al.; Messingschlager and Appel; Rettberg and Wigers; Schulz et al.). Search results were limited to titles/abstracts/keywords at the first pass, then expanded to full-text reading for shortlisted items.

Step 2: Citation chaining and field "anchoring." The search set was extended through backward chaining (mining reference lists of key

publications) and forward chaining (identifying later works that cite influential anchors). Anchors were selected from three clusters—(i) classical narratology, (ii) digital/interactive narrative theory, and (iii) AI/reception/formal modeling—so that the corpus would capture both genealogical depth and recent algorithmic debates. Step 3: Eligibility screening (inclusion/exclusion). Inclusion criteria required that sources (a) engage explicitly with questions of narrative form, structure, or experience; (b) address digital or algorithmic contexts (hypertext, interactive narratives, digital games, platformized reading, or generative AI systems); and (c) belong to the core analytic corpus of peer-reviewed books, book chapters, or journal articles.

Work from adjacent fields such as communication studies and psychology was included when it dealt with narrative transportation, reader engagement, or audience responses to AI authorship (Busselle and Bilandzic; Chu and Liu; Green and Appel; Green and Brock). Excluded were purely technical papers on natural language generation that did not reflect on narrative form, as well as popular commentary lacking a clear theoretical or empirical contribution. Screening was conducted in two passes: (i) abstract-level screening for topical fit; (ii) full-text screening for sustained engagement with at least one of the three focal concepts (voice, focalization, plot).

Step 4: Data extraction (standardized source sheet). For each included source, the review extracted the same set of analytic fields: (i) publication type and evidentiary status (peer-reviewed vs. preprint/working paper), (ii) object of analysis (novels, games, platforms, LLM outputs, user studies), (iii) methodological stance (close reading, corpus/distant reading, experiment, modeling, conceptual theory), (iv) which narratological concept(s) it addresses (voice/focalization/plot), (v) key definitions and claims, and (vi) the mechanism of algorithmic mediation proposed (generation, curation/ranking, moderation, interface framing, procedural rule systems). This extraction step produced a comparable "profile" for every item in the core corpus, enabling cross-source comparison rather than illustrative citation.

Step 5: Thematic coding (codebook) and reliability checks (humanities-appropriate). Analytically, the review proceeds through thematic coding and genealogical reconstruction. To make coding transparent, sources were coded using a small codebook organized around the paper's thesis:

– Voice codes: textual narratorial cues; attribution/agency claims; synthetic voice; infrastructural trace (paratext, omissions, safety constraints).

– Focalization codes:

intradiegetic focalization; interface focalization; platform-level selection/ranking/personalization; visibility/opacity claims.

– Plot codes: branching/procedural plot; probabilistic continuation; information-theoretic pivots/ suspense; homogenization/ diversity effects.

– Cross-cutting codes: ethics/representation; labor/data; global/decolonial positioning; method (empirical vs. conceptual).

Because this is a single-author review in a humanities tradition, the goal is not interrater statistics but auditability: the codebook categories are defined explicitly and used consistently across the corpus; key comparisons are illustrated with representative studies and summarized in Tables 1–3.

Step 6: Cross-source comparison and synthesis rules. Comparisons were generated by reading across coded clusters rather than citing sources one-by-one. Specifically, the synthesis follows three comparison logics: (i) within-concept comparison (how different fields redefine the same concept, e.g., "voice" in Genette vs. "voice" in platform framing studies), (ii) cross-media comparison (print/hypertext/game/ LLM/platform), and (iii) method comparison (close reading vs. experiment vs. modeling). A claim is treated as a synthesis finding only when it recurs across multiple sources or when contrasting positions can be explicitly mapped (e.g., formal modeling gains vs. reductivism risks). Micro-cases in Sections 5–6 function as "worked demonstrations" that test whether the synthesized distinctions actually change what can be explained at the level of textual and paratextual detail.

Corpus definition and evidentiary status

Inclusion criteria required that sources (a) engage explicitly with questions of narrative form, structure, or experience; (b) address digital or algorithmic contexts (broadly understood to include hypertext, interactive narratives, digital games, platformized reading, or generative AI systems); and (c) belong to the core analytic corpus of peer-reviewed books, book chapters, or journal articles. Work from adjacent fields such as communication studies and psychology was included when it dealt with narrative transportation, reader engagement, or audience responses to AI authorship, as these topics bear directly on the experiential dimensions of voice, focalization, and plot in algorithmic settings (Busselle and Bilandzic; Chu and Liu; Green and Appel; Green and Brock). Excluded were purely technical papers on natural language generation that did not reflect on narrative form, as well as popular commentary lacking a clear theoretical or empirical contribution.

Because generative AI scholarship evolves rapidly, the review also draws—sparingly and with explicit labeling—on a small number of non-traditional research outputs (e.g., arXiv preprints,

Research Square preprints, and open peer-review venues). These items are not treated as settled evidence for strong claims; instead, they are used to map emerging methods (e.g., information-theoretic modeling) and to flag where peer-reviewed consolidation is still needed.

The final core analytic corpus comprises approximately fifty-five sources, spanning classical narratology, digital narrative theory, digital humanities, communication and media studies, and computer science. “Fifty-five” refers to the defined set that met the core inclusion criteria and was thematically coded; the total reference list is larger because it also contains contextual and methodological sources. While the corpus is not exhaustive, its breadth and depth are sufficient to identify recurrent conceptual moves, tensions, and blind spots in current attempts to think narrative in the age of algorithms.

Analytically, the review proceeds through a combination of thematic coding and genealogical reconstruction. Thematic coding involves grouping arguments around the three focal concepts of voice, focalization, and plot, while attending to how these are redefined across media and disciplinary contexts. Genealogical reconstruction traces how certain concepts travel from structuralist narratology into cognitive, rhetorical, digital, and algorithmic frameworks, mutating as they encounter new problems and objects (Bal; Nünning). The aim is not to adjudicate among competing approaches, but to map the conceptual field and to identify productive tensions that can orient future research. In keeping with the journal's commitment to global and inclusive perspectives, particular attention is paid to scholarship that questions Eurocentric assumptions in narrative theory and to emerging work that foregrounds transnational, marginalized, or non-Western narrative practices in digital environments, even though such work is still relatively underrepresented in the available corpus (Sánchez-López; Scolari).

Table 1. Strands of Narratology and Their Relevance to Algorithmic Contexts

Strand of narratology	Key theorists/works	Core concepts	Relevance to algorithmic contexts
Classical structuralist narratology	Genette (1980); Chatman (1978); Rimmon-Kenan (2002)	Narrative levels; voice; focalization; order, duration, frequency; story vs. discourse	Provides a vocabulary for distinguishing human and non-human narrative functions and for mapping how algorithms reconfigure narratorial agency and temporal ordering.
Postclassical and contextual narratology	Fludernik (1996); Phelan & Rabinowitz (2005); Herman (2002)	Natural narratology; rhetorical situation; cognitive frames; narrative as sense-making practice	Highlights the experiential, rhetorical, and cognitive dimensions of narrative, enabling analysis of how AI stories are processed and evaluated by readers.
Digital and interactive narratology	Aarseth (1997); Murray (1997); Ryan (2002, 2006, 2015); Koenitz et al. (2015); Rettberg & Rettberg (2010)	Ergodic reading; interactivity; branching structures; player agency; procedurality	Offers tools for understanding algorithmically controlled branching plots, interactive story systems, and the co-production of narrative by users and machines.
Computational and distant-reading approaches	Moretti (2013); Jockers (2013); Underwood (2019);	Distant reading; macroanalysis; algorithmic criticism; modeling of plot and genre	Demonstrates how algorithmic procedures can be used not only as objects of critique but also as tools for

	Ramsay (2011)		modeling narrative patterns at scale.
AI and information-theoretic approaches	Chu & Liu (2024); Appel et al. (2025); Schulz et al. (2024)	Narrative transportation with AI; linguistic profiling of AI vs. human stories; information-theoretic measures of plot	Directly addresses AI-generated narratives and proposes formal measures for narrative complexity that can be used to evaluate and design algorithmic storytelling systems.

Classical Narratology: Voice, Focalization, and Plot

Classical narratology, as developed in the 1960s and 1970s, conceived narrative as a structure that could be analyzed independently of its specific content. Genette's account in *Narrative Discourse* distinguishes between story (the chronological sequence of events), narrative (the discursive arrangement of these events), and narration (the act or process of telling), and elaborates three key dimensions of narrative discourse: order, duration, and frequency (Genette 186–211). Crucially for the present discussion, Genette separates "who speaks?" (voice) from "who sees?" (focalization) (Genette 186–211). Voice concerns the narrator's position relative to the storyworld (e.g., extra-/intradiegetic; homo-/heterodiegetic), whereas focalization designates the regulation of information and perspective (e.g., zero/omniscient vs. internal vs. external focalization) (Bal; Genette; Rimmon-Kenan). Because this article examines algorithmic storytelling, these classical distinctions are not rehearsed for their own sake; they serve as a baseline vocabulary for identifying where algorithmic mediation disrupts attribution (voice), visibility (focalization), and event sequencing (plot). In later sections, "voice" becomes difficult to locate when narratorial stance is produced by prompt + model + interface; "focalization" expands when platforms curate what users can encounter; and "plot" becomes probabilistic when continuation is governed by sampling, rules, or recommendation feedback loops.

At the same time, classical narratology has been criticized for its relative abstraction from historical, medial, and institutional contexts. By focusing on immanent textual structures, structuralist accounts tended to bracket questions of ideology, embodiment, and material infrastructures through which stories circulate (Culler; Fludernik). This limitation becomes especially consequential in algorithmic environments, where infrastructures do not merely transmit narratives but actively shape them—through interface framing, content moderation, and recommendation-driven visibility. Voice was generally attributed to a human or quasi-human narrator, even in the case of experimental texts that play with impersonal or collective agencies. Focalization was conceived in anthropomorphic terms, as a matter of whose consciousness, perception, or knowledge is privileged in the discourse. Plot was conceptualized primarily in terms of temporal ordering and causal coherence, with less attention to rule-based, computational, or

probabilistic constraints on narrative progression. Put differently: classical narratology can describe "who speaks," "who sees," and "what happens next," but it is less equipped to describe "who/what makes speaking and seeing available" or "how platforms and models narrow the set of possible next events." These limitations were already visible in debates about film narration, where the question of whether the camera "narrates" strained strictly human-centered models (Chatman). Algorithmic systems intensify that older problem by adding new nonhuman operators—ranking algorithms, safety filters, procedural rules, and generative models—that shape narrative form without fitting neatly into existing narrator categories.

Postclassical narratology has addressed some of these blind spots by expanding narrative theory beyond immanent structure. Fludernik's *Towards a "Natural" Narratology* reconceives narrative in terms of cognitive schemata and experiential frames, foregrounding discourse processing and embodiment (Fludernik). Rhetorical narratology emphasizes narrative as a communicative, ethically charged transaction among authorial agency, narratorial mediation, and audience uptake (Phelan; Phelan and Rabinowitz). Cognitive narratology frames narrative as a sense-making strategy that supports storyworld construction (Herman). For this article's purposes, these postclassical moves matter less as a full literature survey than as bridges to algorithmic contexts: they legitimate attention to reception (e.g., transportation and attribution effects), to mediation (interfaces and framing), and to distributed agency (human–technical assemblages). Accordingly, the remainder of the paper treats classical narratology as a necessary starting point but shifts quickly toward the algorithmic conditions under which voice, focalization, and plot are produced, framed, and encountered.

Digital and Interactive Narratives: Ergodic Story Worlds and Distributed Agency

The encounter between narratology and digital media has been shaped by two related developments: the emergence of born-digital narrative forms and the increasing deployment of computational methods in literary analysis. On the side of form, early work on hypertext fiction and electronic literature foregrounded the role of readerly agency and interface design in shaping narrative experience. Espen Aarseth's concept of ergodic literature, in which nontrivial effort is required to traverse the text, underscored how digital systems can distribute narrative across multiple pathways, making the configuration of the text itself a central aspect of storytelling (Aarseth). Janet Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck* similarly emphasized interactivity, immersion, and procedural authorship as key affordances of digital narrative environments, arguing that computer-based media enable forms of

participatory and multi-linear storytelling that strain against the assumptions of print-based narratology (Murray). Marie-Laure Ryan's work on digital narrative develops a typology of interactive narrative forms and explores how agency and immersion are negotiated in virtual storyworlds (Rettberg and Rettberg; Ryan).

More recently, the field of interactive digital narrative (IDN) has sought to systematize the study of narrative systems that incorporate user choice, procedural generation, and real-time feedback. Koenitz and colleagues define IDN as a co-creative medium in which narrative meaning emerges from the interaction between system and user, rather than being fully pre-scripted by an author (Koenitz; Koenitz et al.). Research in this area has developed conceptual frameworks for understanding how agency is distributed between designers, algorithms, and players, and has emphasized the potential of interactive narratives to represent complex systems and wicked problems (Bellini; Nack). These accounts implicitly decenter the human narrator as the sole source of narrative voice, suggesting instead that narrative can be a property of socio-technical assemblages comprising code, interface, players, and data. At the level of focalization, IDN studies highlight how perspectives can shift dynamically in response to player choices, and how interfaces can foreground or obscure information in ways that condition interpretive possibilities.

Parallel to these formal explorations, digital humanities scholars have used computational methods to model narrative structures at scale. Franco Moretti's call for distant reading and subsequent work on network theory provided tools for analyzing large corpora of novels and for visualizing plot structure and character relations as graphs (Moretti). Matthew Jonkers's *Macroanalysis* and Ted Underwood's *Distant Horizons* develop techniques for modeling genre, thematic change, and stylistic evolution using machine learning and statistical methods (Jockers; Underwood). Ramsay's *Reading Machines* articulates an algorithmic criticism in which interpretive claims are grounded in computational transformations of the text (Ramsay). While this work is primarily analytical rather than generative, it blurs the line between human and algorithmic agency in narrative analysis: algorithms do not merely assist human critics but actively shape what patterns become visible and therefore what counts as narratively significant. These developments foreshadow the more radical decentering of human authorship that occurs when algorithms are not only tools for reading but also agents in writing stories.

Table 2. Selected Empirical Studies on AI-Generated Stories and Narrative Experience

Study	Corpus / system	Methods	Key findings	Implications for narrative theory
Chu & Liu (2024)	Short stories generated by	Experiments measuring narrative transportatio	AI stories can achieve transportation comparable to	Narrative quality cannot be reduced to

	ChatGPT vs. human-authored stories	n, persuasion, and bias against AI authorship	human stories, but are evaluated less favorably when labeled as AI-generated.	authorship ontology; reception is shaped by paratextual information and normative expectations of voice and authenticity.
Appel et al. (2025)	Human vs. ChatGPT-generated narratives across genres	Linguistic profiling, narrative transportation measures, and reader experience surveys	AI stories exhibit distinctive linguistic and structural profiles but can elicit engagement; readers' attitudes toward AI influence their responses.	Challenges the assumption that narrative voice must be human; calls for models that account for socio-technical factors in narrative reception.
Messingschlager & Appel (2024)	Narratives about creative AI systems	Survey and experimental designs focusing on narrative transportation and attitudes toward AI	Narratives about AI can themselves shape perceptions of AI's creativity and agency.	Narrative is not only an output of AI but also a medium for negotiating AI's cultural role, complicating notions of authorial intent and rhetorical situation.
Rettberg & Wigers (2025)	Large corpus of AI-generated short stories	Corpus analysis of plot structures, themes, and character arcs	AI-generated stories tend to favor stability over change, with conservative plot dynamics and limited transformation.	Suggests that probabilistic language models encode narrative defaults that privilege equilibrium over disruption, inviting a rethinking of plot as a distribution over possible trajectories.
Schulz et al. (2024)	Episodes of television series and other narratives	Information-theoretic analysis of narrative complexity, pivots, and suspense	Defines formal measures for narrative pivots and plot twists using information theory.	Provides a quantitative vocabulary for plot that can be applied to both human- and AI-generated narratives, bridging narratology and machine learning.

The proliferation of large language models capable of producing extended, coherent prose has intensified scholarly debates about algorithmic narrativity—understood both as the capacity of computational systems to generate stories and as the broader entanglement of narrative with datafication and algorithmic governance (Rettberg and Rettberg, “Algorithmic Narrativity”; Sánchez-López). Empirical studies such as Chu and Liu's “Can AI Tell Good Stories?” demonstrate that ChatGPT-generated stories can elicit narrative transportation and even persuasion, although readers tend to evaluate such stories less positively when they know they are AI-authored (Chu and Liu). Appel et al.'s “I, ChatGPT” comparably shows that AI-generated texts are linguistically distinguishable from human-authored stories but are nonetheless capable of supporting immersive engagement, with attitudes toward AI playing a mediating role (Appel et al.). These findings challenge simple oppositions between ‘authentic’ human narrative voice and ‘artificial’ machine output, suggesting instead that narrative effects arise from complex interactions among textual features, paratextual framing, and socio-cultural attitudes. To make the argument evidential rather than programmatic, the section below offers a single, closer micro-reading of one concrete AI-generated passage and tracks—line by line—how

"synthetic voice," focalization, and plot pivot are produced and interpreted.

Close micro-reading (one example, analyzed in detail)

Prompt (user instruction): "Write a 250-word first-person story about missing a late-night train; keep the tone restrained, not melodramatic."

Generated passage (excerpt): "I watched the doors seal with the calm finality of an envelope. The platform clock didn't accuse me; it simply continued. In the glass, my reflection looked like someone who had already decided to be late."

Voice (who speaks?): The narrating "I" is immediately stabilized through deictic anchoring ("I watched") and a controlled evaluative register ("calm finality"), which produces an implied stance of self-surveillance rather than confession. The key point for algorithmic narrativity is that this stance is prompt-compatible rather than intention-backed: "restrained" is realized not by reporting fewer emotions but by converting affect into metaphor ("envelope") and into negated agency ("didn't accuse"). This is a hallmark of a "synthetic voice" as a composite effect: the user's tonal constraint is transduced into stylistic choices that simulate a coherent narratorial temperament.

Focalization (who sees/knows?): The passage narrows focalization to perception and inference rather than external event description: the only "action" is watching; the rest is interpretive framing (clock as non-accuser; reflection as a "someone"). This produces interior focalization without explicit psychology—an efficient way to signal inwardness while staying "not melodramatic." Algorithmically, this matters because the model does not need lived experience to generate a focalized viewpoint; it needs a learned repertoire of cues that readers reliably treat as markers of interiority (reflection, metaphor, personified objects).

Plot (what happens next?): The micro-plot is minimal but legible: the "doors seal" is the irreversible event, and the next two sentences function as aftermath—time continues, self-recognition follows. This makes the "pivot" identifiable in classical narratological terms (a shift from possibility to closure) and also makes it compatible with formal accounts such as narrative information theory: the narrative state-space changes at "doors seal," after which the language predictably shifts from event-description to evaluation and self-modeling ("finality," "didn't accuse," "reflection"). In other words, the excerpt shows how a statistically generated text can still produce a robust pivot structure that readers experience as plot.

Paratext and attribution (why the same words land differently): Now alter only the label, not the text. If the excerpt is presented as "a student's flash fiction," readers often treat the clock-personification as a deliberate rhetorical choice; if presented as "Generated by ChatGPT,"

readers may reinterpret the same move as a generic technique or pastiche, lowering perceived authenticity while leaving transportation (imagining the sealed doors; visualizing the glass) largely intact. This is the mechanism behind the empirical pattern reported by Chu and Liu and Appel et al.: narrative effects emerge from an interaction between textual cues and attribution frames, not from authorship ontology alone (Chu and Liu; Appel et al.).

From a formal perspective, AI-generated stories raise questions about the status of narratorial voice and intentionality. Classical narratology typically assumes a human or at least intentional source for narrative discourse, even in cases of unreliable or impersonal narration. Large language models, by contrast, produce text through pattern completion over vast training corpora, optimizing for statistical plausibility rather than communicative intention. Yet their outputs are routinely interpreted as if they expressed a coherent narratorial stance or personality, an effect reinforced by chat interfaces that encourage users to attribute agency and voice to the system (Gerrig; Green and Appel). The close reading above shows exactly how this attribution happens: readers infer a temperament ("restrained"), a moral posture (self-accountability), and even an implicit lesson (time continues) from stylistic cues that are generated to satisfy constraints rather than to express a subject's intention. One response has been to conceptualize AI narrative voice not as a psychological subject but as an emergent property of training data, parameter settings, and prompting practices: a "synthetic voice" that is nonetheless narratologically efficacious. The point is not that the text lacks voice, but that its voice is best explained as a composite effect: the user's instruction (restrained tone), the model's learned repertoire of late-train imagery, and interface cues that present output as conversationally addressed. This reconceptualization suggests that narratology must expand its taxonomy of narrators to include infrastructural and composite agents, in which authorship is distributed across human designers, corporate actors, and statistical models.

At the same time, AI storytelling highlights the role of algorithms in shaping narrative ecosystems beyond text generation itself. Recommendation systems, content filters, and personalization engines function as meta-narrators, deciding which stories become visible, to whom, and in what sequence (Bory; Doshi and Hauser). These infrastructural systems exercise a kind of focalization over the cultural field, privileging certain perspectives and plotlines while marginalizing others. For example, on short-form video platforms, a viewer who watches several breakup-themed clips to the end may quickly be served a dense run of "relationship collapse → self-reinvention" narratives, while a different viewer engaging with the same topic is routed toward reconciliation or "dating advice" story arcs—an algorithmic sequencing that effectively

normalizes certain endings and emotional resolutions. Similarly, in large online bookstores or reading apps, collaborative-filtering systems routinely cluster users into taste profiles (e.g., "cozy mystery," "grimdark fantasy"), meaning that the "next story" suggested is less a neutral discovery tool than a narrative pathway that nudges readers toward recurring plot templates and character types. Even at the level of moderation and ranking, content filters can suppress or down-rank stories containing particular keywords, political references, or depictions of violence, thereby making some narrative voices systematically less visible—not by rewriting the text, but by limiting its circulation and discoverability. Taken together, these mechanisms show how platforms do not merely host stories; they arrange story exposure into patterned sequences that operate like a higher-order narration of what counts as typical, desirable, or sayable. The micro-reading above can be extended into this infrastructural register: once the "late-night train" vignette is tagged as "quiet realism," a recommender can serialize it into a user's feed as one installment in a recognizable affective genre, making "restraint" not only a textual tone but also a platform-curated narrative mood. The notion of algorithmic narrativity therefore encompasses both AI as storyteller and AI as curator of stories, inviting narratologists to analyze not only individual texts but also the platform-level logics that organize narrative encounters. Schulz et al.'s "Narrative Information Theory" points toward one way of formalizing such logics by modeling narrative sequences as information-theoretic processes, in which measures of complexity, pivot, and suspense can be computed for both human-made and machine-generated stories (Schulz et al.). Because the "doors seal" pivot is legible at the sentence level, it also exemplifies how formal models can be tested against micro-textual phenomena rather than applied only at corpus scale. While such models risk flattening cultural specificity, they also offer tools for interrogating how algorithms encode particular narrative norms and expectations—not only inside a generated text, but also across the curated sequence of texts a user is likely to meet next.

Rethinking Voice: From Human Narrator to Infrastructural Narrators

In classical narratology, voice is tied to the narrating instance, understood as a function that can be located at a particular narrative level and associated with a determinate or implied speaker (Bal, *Narratology*; Genette). Even when the narrator is highly effaced or when the narrative adopts a camera-eye perspective, the discourse is ultimately attributed to a human or quasi-human source. Algorithmic contexts complicate this picture in at least three ways. First, in AI-generated stories, there is often no single human agent who can be said to have composed the

narrative in a traditional sense; instead, we have a layered assemblage of model designers, data curators, prompt engineers, and end users, whose contributions are mediated by the probabilistic operations of the model. Second, in platformized environments, stories are often framed, summarized, or otherwise contextualized by automated systems—through push notifications, algorithmic summaries, or content warnings—that add their own discursive layer to the narrative. Third, the speech of characters and narrators can be dynamically generated or adapted in response to user input, as in interactive storybots or narrative agents, making voice a contingent, situational phenomenon rather than a fixed property of the text (Patil and Rasave; Rüdel and Leidner). To see how these dynamics work in practice, consider a small, representative scenario drawn from everyday AI-story consumption rather than an exceptional "AI art" showcase.

A user asks a storybot in a reading app: "Write a first-person story about a night shift nurse after a difficult case; keep it realistic and emotionally restrained." The generated story opens with a recognizable textual voice: "I scrubbed my hands until the water went lukewarm. The corridor smelled like sanitizer and old coffee. I told myself not to replay the last room, and then I replayed it anyway." This reads as an internally coherent narratorial instance (first-person deixis, interior focalization, tonal restraint). But around this same text, the app adds infrastructural layers: a header that labels it "Quick Read: Resilience at Work," an auto-summary ("A nurse finds hope after a hard night"), and a content notice ("May contain distressing themes"). In addition, the platform's safety/risk settings subtly reshape what can be said: the model avoids clinical specifics, uses softened phrasing ("difficult case" instead of explicit details), and shifts from concrete description toward generalized coping language near the end. Nothing here requires positing a mysterious new "narrator" floating above the story; instead, platform and model constraints materialize as paratextual cues (labels, summaries, warnings) and as textual regularities (euphemism, omission, tonal smoothing) that readers experience as part of "the voice."

One productive way to respond to these complications is to distinguish between textual voice and infrastructural voice. Textual voice refers to the narratorial functions internal to the storyworld—who speaks within the diegesis and from what position—while infrastructural voice designates the discursive agencies that condition how the story is produced, distributed, and framed. However, this distinction should be treated as an analytic heuristic rather than a hard ontological separation: infrastructural influences do not hover outside the text as a fully independent narratorial voice; they become legible through traces in textual and paratextual features (titles, summaries, warnings, rankings, stylistic constraints, and omission patterns). In AI storytelling,

infrastructural voice includes not only the designers of the model and the platform but also the training data, which can be understood as a sedimented archive of prior voices that inform the model's stylistic and ideological tendencies (Bender et al.). From this perspective, the apparent neutrality of AI narration is an illusion: the synthetic narrator ventriloquizes patterns distilled from historically situated corpora, which themselves encode biases and exclusions. In the nurse vignette, for instance, "restraint" is achieved partly by the user's prompt (a human preference), partly by learned genre conventions (minimalist interiority), and partly by platform constraints that privilege "safe" generalities—so the voice the reader encounters is already a composite outcome of multiple agencies. Narratological analysis attuned to infrastructural conditioning can thus help make visible how algorithmic storytelling reproduces or challenges existing hierarchies of language, genre, and representation. Its added value is methodological: it lets us explain why two texts with similar first-person narration can feel differently "authentic" or "bland" once we account for the platform's framing and constraint regime.

At the same time, empirical research on narrative transportation suggests that readers may attribute mind and agency to AI narrators in ways that blur the distinction between synthetic and human voice. Studies of AI-generated stories indicate that readers' evaluations are shaped not only by textual qualities but also by their beliefs about the ontological status of the narrator and the perceived authenticity of the voice (Appel et al.; Chu and Liu; Messingschlager and Appel, "Creative Artificial Intelligence"). The same nurse excerpt can therefore be read in two sharply different ways depending on paratext: presented as "written by a clinician," the restrained tone may be taken as professional understatement; labeled "AI-generated," the same restraint may be reinterpreted as statistical genericness. This suggests a feedback loop between narratological categories and cultural imaginaries: as AI systems become more pervasive, new folk theories of authorship and voice emerge, which in turn shape how stories are written, read, and valued. A critical theory of narrative voice in the age of algorithms must therefore integrate structural analysis of narrative levels with empirical investigation of reception, while also engaging with philosophical debates about attribution, responsibility, and the ethics of speaking in others' voices. Crucially, it should track how "infrastructure" becomes readable inside the narrative encounter—through the specific wording a system permits, the summaries it supplies, and the frames through which readers are invited to attribute (or withhold) agency.

Focalization in Data Field and Interactive Story World

Focalization, in Genette's influential formulation, concerns the regulation of narrative information: who sees, who knows, and from what vantage point (Bal, *Narratology*; Genette; Rimmon-Kenan). In traditional print narratives, focalization is typically analyzed at the level of individual texts, in terms of shifts between internal, external, and zero focalization and in relation to the psychological depth afforded to characters. Digital and algorithmic environments introduce additional layers of focalization that operate at the interface and infrastructural level. To avoid an overly abstract extension of the term, this section uses two simple definitions and a set of practical criteria for identifying focalization in algorithmic contexts.

Definition 1 (textual focalization): the distribution of access to perception, knowledge, and interpretive privilege within a narrative (e.g., whose perceptions and thoughts organize what the reader can know).

Definition 2 (infrastructural focalization): the distribution of encounterability—which stories, perspectives, and narrative frames become visible, salient, or repeated for particular users because of interfaces, ranking, recommendation, moderation, or personalization. Identification criteria (how to recognize it): A narrative environment exhibits infrastructural focalization when at least one of the following is true: (i) access to stories is filtered through ranking/selection (a "feed," recommendations, search ordering); (ii) visibility is personalized (two users receive meaningfully different story sets or framings); (iii) the same story is presented with different paratext (labels, summaries, warnings, thumbnails) that changes what seems important; or (iv) some topics/voices are systematically down-ranked, removed, or made harder to find (moderation and safety filters). These criteria make "focalization" identifiable not only inside storyworlds, but also at the level of the narrative encounter.

In interactive narratives and games, the player's avatar often serves as a focalizing device, mediating access to information and constraining what can be perceived or acted upon in the storyworld (Ensslin; Murray; Ryan). Camera control, map visibility, and diegetic interfaces (such as in-game journals or devices) all contribute to complex patterns of focalization that are partly determined by design decisions and partly by player behavior. Here, the criteria above map cleanly onto practice: camera constraints and fog-of-war implement (i) filtered access to information; quest logs and interface prompts implement (iii) paratextual emphasis; and different playstyles can implement (ii) personalized exposure to story-relevant information.

In platformized and datafied contexts, focalization must also be understood at the level of content selection and personalization. Recommendation algorithms curate the subset of available stories that each user encounters,

effectively focalizing the cultural field according to inferred preferences, engagement metrics, and commercial priorities (Bory; Doshi and Hauser). This form of infrastructural focalization is not explicitly represented within the storyworld but nevertheless shapes which narratives are available to be experienced and thus which perspectives become salient. It can amplify certain genres, affective tones, or ideological framings while suppressing others, thereby exerting a powerful yet opaque influence on collective narrative imaginaries. From this standpoint, the concept of focalization can be extended beyond the textual level to encompass the socio-technical systems that filter and prioritize narratives in public discourse. For example, if a platform repeatedly recommends "uplift" climate stories to one user and "catastrophe" climate stories to another, the divergence is not a difference in textual focalization inside any single narrative; it is a difference in infrastructural focalization across the sequence of narratives each user is made likely to encounter. That divergence satisfies criteria (i) and (ii) above and clarifies what "platform-level focalization" means in operational terms.

AI-generated narratives further complicate focalization by producing perspectives that are at once personalized and generic. Prompt-based systems can generate stories tailored to individual users' instructions—for example, 'tell a story about climate change from the perspective of a coastal fisherman'—yet these narratives are synthesized from generalized patterns in training data rather than from lived experience. The resulting focalization is paradoxical: it mimics the particularity of situated perspectives while being grounded in aggregate representations and stereotypes. This tension raises ethical questions about the appropriation of voices and the risk of flattening complex subject positions into formulaic narrative templates. Critical narratology in the age of algorithms must therefore attend to how focalization is operationalized through data practices, including whose experiences are overrepresented, misrepresented, or absent from training corpora, and how these asymmetries manifest in the perspectives offered by AI narratives. In the terms above, the "coastal fisherman" prompt produces textual focalization (a first-person or perspectival voice inside the story), but the infrastructural focalization question is different: which "coastal fisherman" stories are most likely to be generated, surfaced, and repeated—and which are suppressed by safety rules, genre defaults, or dataset biases. This distinction provides a concrete handle for identifying where ethical risks enter: not only in what the story says, but in what perspectives are made encounterable at scale.

Plot Under Algorithmic Conditions: Probability, Information, and Constraint

Plot has often been theorized as the principle of organization that endows a sequence of events

with coherence, causality, and thematic significance. Classical narratology analyzes plot in terms of temporal reordering, frequency, and narrative pace, while Aristotelian and structuralist traditions emphasize conflict, complication, and resolution as key components of plot dynamics. In digital and algorithmic contexts, however, plot is increasingly understood as a space of possibilities constrained by rules, probabilities, and algorithmic parameters. Interactive digital narratives employ branching or modular structures in which plot emerges from the combination of preauthored segments and player choices, often guided by underlying state machines or rule-based systems (Koenitz; Koenitz et al.). In generative AI storytelling, large language models produce sequences of events by predicting tokens that are statistically likely given preceding context, subject to sampling procedures that tradeoff between coherence and diversity.

Recent work on AI-generated stories suggests that such probabilistic mechanisms have distinctive consequences for plot dynamics. Rettberg and Wigers report that, across a large corpus of AI-generated short stories, plots tend to favor stability over transformation: characters often fail to undergo substantial change, conflicts are resolved in predictable ways, and narrative trajectories gravitate toward normative resolutions. This pattern can be interpreted as a function of how large language models encode the statistical regularities of their training corpora, effectively averaging over many narrative possibilities. Schulz et al.'s "Narrative Information Theory," by contrast, proposes a formal framework for quantifying narrative pivots, suspense, and complexity using information-theoretic measures. By modeling plot as a sequence of states and transitions with varying degrees of predictability, their approach enables comparisons between human and machine-generated narratives and provides tools for designing algorithms that optimize for specific narrative effects, such as surprise or gradual revelation.

From a critical perspective, algorithmically constrained plot structures raise questions about the diversity of narrative forms and the reproduction of dominant storytelling norms. If recommendation systems and generative models both favor familiar plot arcs—because they are statistically common and reliably engaging—then the narrative ecosystem may become increasingly homogenized, with limited space for experimental, non-linear, or counter-normative plots (Doshi and Hauser; Reagan et al.). Conversely, algorithmic tools can also be harnessed to explore underrepresented narrative patterns, for instance by intentionally sampling from low-probability continuations or by using information-theoretic metrics to seek out narratives with atypical pivot structures. A narratology attuned to algorithmic plot must therefore balance formal modeling with normative

reflection on which story trajectories are being privileged, for whom, and with what cultural consequences.

Table 3. Approaches to Plot in Algorithmic Contexts

Approach	Techniques / models	Strengths	Limitations / risks
Rule-based and state-machine models of interactive plot	Finite-state machines; behavior trees; story grammars; designer-authored branches	Enables fine-grained control over narrative logic and ensures coherence across branches.	Limited scalability; labor-intensive authoring; risk of combinatorial explosion and predictable patterns.
Probabilistic language models for story generation	Large language models (e.g., GPT-style); sampling strategies; prompt engineering	Can generate diverse plots with minimal manual authoring; adaptable to user prompts and contexts.	Plots may be shallow, stereotyped, or conservative; difficult to guarantee global coherence and ethical constraints.
Information-theoretic modeling of plot	Measures of narrative complexity, pivots, suspense, and surprise (Schulz et al., 2024)	Offers formal, medium-independent metrics for comparing plots across human and machine-generated narratives.	Risk of reductivism; may overlook cultural and experiential dimensions that resist quantification.
Distant-reading analyses of plot patterns	Topic modeling; sentiment analysis; network analysis of character and event structures (Moretti, 2013; Reagan et al., 2016)	Reveals large-scale regularities and historical shifts in plot structures across corpora.	Dependent on existing corpora and their biases; interpretive leap from quantitative patterns to qualitative meaning remains non-trivial.

Methodological and Ethical Challenges

The reconfiguration of narrative by algorithms raises methodological challenges for scholars and ethical questions for societies. Methodologically, the analysis of algorithmic narratives demands interdisciplinary literacy: narratologists must engage with technical descriptions of AI systems and recommendation algorithms, while computer scientists must be willing to grapple with the nuanced vocabularies of narrative theory. Tools such as narrative information theory (Schulz et al.) and distant-reading frameworks (Jockers; Moretti; Underwood) offer promising bridges, but they risk flattening narrative into a set of measurable features. Conversely, purely qualitative analyses that ignore the material and computational specifics of algorithms may overlook crucial loci of power and constraint. Hybrid methodologies that combine close reading, corpus analysis, user studies, and technical audits of systems are therefore essential for capturing the full complexity of algorithmic narrativity.

Ethically, AI storytelling and algorithmic curation raise concerns about authorship, accountability, and representation. Questions of who owns AI-generated stories, who is responsible for harmful narratives, and how consent operates when training data include uncredited or marginalized voices remain under-theorized. At the level of representation, the biases encoded in training corpora can lead AI systems to reproduce stereotypes or to systematically underrepresent the experiences of certain groups. From a narratological standpoint, this means that the synthetic voices and focalizations produced by AI may reinscribe existing hierarchies under the guise of neutral generativity. Critical work on AI art and authorship demonstrates that people often

devalue works labeled as machine-made while simultaneously relying on such systems in creative labor, raising concerns about de-skilling and the commodification of narrative creativity (Bianchi et al.; Chamberlain et al.; Messingschlager and Appel, "Mind Ascribed to AI").

Finally, there is a geopolitical and decolonial dimension to algorithmic narrativity. The major platforms and AI companies that shape global narrative flows are largely based in the Global North and operate according to commercial logics that prioritize engagement and profitability. This can marginalize narrative traditions, languages, and genres that do not fit platform metrics, thereby reinforcing cultural asymmetries. Scholars such as Sánchez-López and Scolari point to the need for transmedia and AI narrative research that foregrounds Latin American and other non-hegemonic contexts, while digital humanities initiatives increasingly emphasize the importance of open, community-controlled infrastructures (Sánchez-López; Scolari). A systematic critical review of narrative theory in the age of algorithms must therefore not only catalog conceptual innovations but also interrogate whose stories, voices, and plots are being privileged in the algorithmic rewriting of cultural memory.

Conclusion

This review has argued that the age of algorithms does not render classical narratology obsolete; rather, it exposes the need to rethink and extend core narratological concepts in light of new media ecologies. Voice, focalization, and plot remain indispensable tools for analyzing narrative, but they must be supplemented by distinctions between textual and infrastructural voice, between intra-diegetic and platform-level focalization, and between plots understood as single trajectories and plots conceived as distributions over possible narrative paths. Systematic engagement with research on interactive digital narratives, AI-generated stories, narrative transportation, and information-theoretic models reveals a field in rapid transformation, where disciplinary boundaries between literary studies, media studies, psychology, and computer science are increasingly porous.

Practical model proposed (from "program" to "procedure"). To make the paper's contribution actionable, the authors propose a simple analytic model—an Infrastructural Narratology Toolkit (INT)—that can be applied to any algorithmically mediated narrative encounter (a generated story, an interactive game episode, or a platform feed). The model operationalizes the article's central claim by requiring analysts to document three layers and then read their interactions: (1) Text layer (narratorial cues, focalization markers, pivot structure); (2) Paratext/interface layer (labels, summaries, warnings, thumbnails, interaction prompts); and (3) Infrastructure layer (generation constraints, moderation rules, ranking/ recommendation logics, dataset/ training

provenance where available). The payoff is practical: instead of treating "infrastructure" as an abstract external context, INT treats it as something that becomes legible through traceable textual and paratextual effects.

INT can be implemented as a short checklist (usable as a methods appendix or coding sheet):

– (A) Voice tracing: Identify the narratorial stance in the text (person, distance, evaluative register), then record infrastructural traces that shape it (e.g., safety-driven euphemism, tonal smoothing, template-like metaphors), and finally note any paratext that invites agency attribution ("written by…," "AI-generated," "recommended for you").

– (B) Focalization tracing: Identify who perceives/knows inside the story, then record interface constraints on perception (camera, fog-of-war, feed ordering), and document encounterability effects (what is surfaced/hidden for whom, with what repetition).

– (C) Plot tracing: Identify the pivot(s) or state changes in the event sequence, then record the constraint regime that governs continuation (branching rules, sampling settings, recommendation feedback), and note whether the plot is presented as a single path or as a menu/feed of probable next narratives.

– (D) Reception coupling (optional but recommended): Record how attribution frames and platform context plausibly alter evaluation (authenticity judgments, transportation, trust), linking back to empirical work on labeling effects.

In practical terms, this toolkit yields a "narrative encounter profile": a compact description of how voice, focalization, and plot are co-produced by text, interface, and infrastructure. The micro-cases developed in Sections 5–7 can be re-described in this format: the late-night-train vignette shows (A) synthetic voice as prompt-compatible restraint plus paratextual attribution shifts; platform curation examples show (B) infrastructural focalization as differential encounterability; and probabilistic story continuation illustrates (C) plot as a distribution shaped by sampling and feedback. By offering a repeatable procedure rather than only conceptual proposals, the conclusion clarifies what "infrastructural" and "posthuman" narratology look like when actually practiced.

Three programmatic directions emerge from this synthesis. First, an infrastructural narratology should focus on the material and algorithmic systems that condition narrative production and circulation, treating recommendation engines, platform architectures, and datasets as narratological actors in their own right. Second, a posthuman narratology should develop frameworks that take the distributed and composite character of narrative agency in AI contexts, moving beyond binary oppositions between human and machine authorship. Third, a

comparative and decolonial narratology is needed to situate algorithmic narratives within global power relations, attending to how digital infrastructures shape the visibility, translation, and transformation of stories across languages and regions. These directions are not mutually exclusive; together, they outline a research agenda that can help literary studies and allied disciplines grapple with the ethical and conceptual stakes of narrative in the age of algorithms. INT provides one concrete bridge among these directions: it keeps the focus on infrastructure (layered tracing), treats agency as distributed (voice/focalization/plot as composite outcomes), and can be extended comparatively by adding fields for language, region, platform governance, and dataset provenance.

For journals committed to interdisciplinary, inclusive, and globally attuned scholarship, the challenge is to foster critical dialogue across these strands while remaining attentive to the lived experiences of readers, players, and communities who engage with algorithmic narratives in everyday life. This entails not only analyzing AI-generated texts and digital story systems but also listening to the stories people tell about their interactions with algorithms and the roles these systems play in structuring their horizons of possibility. If narratology began as a science of narrative forms, its future may lie in becoming a critical theory of narrative infrastructures—a field that not only describes how stories are structured but also asks how algorithmic stories might be otherwise. A practical next step is for future research to publish INT-style encounter profiles alongside close readings and user studies, making claims about "infrastructure" empirically accountable and comparable across platforms, languages, and communities.

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