Drama

- McKee describes the **dramatic** story, the story told by Hollywood screenplays and "non-experimental" stageplays
  - Well formed plot arcs (structure)
  - Intensity (nothing extraneous, distilled, boiled down)
  - Mimesis (telling a story by showing)

- For many of us, our implicit model of what makes a good story is informed by our experience of cinema

- Drama is communicated through action
  - Why might this be a useful model for interactive narrative?

Dramatic structure

- Drama selects key moments from characters' life stories
  - The story told vs. life story
  - Distillation of the essence of life

- Structure is a selection of events from characters' life stories strategically composed to express specific emotions and points of view

- Story event
  - A story event turns (changes) a story value

- Story value
  - Universal binary qualities of human experience
  - Alive/dead, love/hate, freedom/slavery, courage/cowardice, wisdom/stupidity, ...

- Conflict
  - Change in the story value is achieved through conflict – values shouldn’t change through accident or coincidence
**Scenes and beats**

- **Scene**
  - A story event that changes at least one value (from negative to positive or vice-versa)
  - No exposition – information should always be communicated through value change
  - Test of “sceneness” – could the story event be expressed in a unity of time and space? Is there a focus on a single story value?

- **Beat** – action/reaction pairs that shape the turning of the scene
  - The smallest unit of value change

**Sequences, acts and stories**

- A sequence is a series of scenes (typically 2 to 5) that culminates with greater impact than any previous scene
  - Each scene turns its own value
  - The sequence turns a greater value that subordinates the others

- An act is a series of sequences that peaks in a climactic scene causing a major reversal of values, more powerful than any preceding scene or sequence

- The story, in the story climax, brings about absolute and irreversible change
  - The audience can’t imagine any change past this

**The Protagonist**

- The protagonist is the central character, providing a point of view and motive force for the action
  - The protagonist might be plural (e.g. representing a whole social class) or multiple (interwining multiple points of view)

- The protagonist must be willful – no passive protagonists
  - Has a conscious, and potentially an unconscious object of desire

- The protagonist must have the capacities to pursue the object of desire and must have at least a chance
  - Without the possibility of achievement the audience loses interest

- The protagonist has the will and capacity to pursue the object of desire to the limit
  - The story will build to a final action beyond which the audience can not imagine another
Empathy and identification

- The audience must be able to empathize with the protagonist
  - This is not the same as sympathy – doesn’t mean you like the character
- In Aristotelian drama, empathy results in identification – the audience experiences what the protagonist experiences
- The drama takes the audience on an emotional journey through the values explored by the story
- The audience then experiences catharsis (a purgation of the emotions)

Conflict

- The will of the protagonist must be resisted
  - The protagonist takes the minimal, reasonable action to achieve her goal, but provokes antagonism
  - This is different from real life – most of the time our actions don’t provoke antagonism (though we may encounter resistance)
- Inner conflicts
  - Mind, body, emotions
- Personal conflicts
  - Family, lovers, friends
- Extra-personal conflicts
  - Social institutions, individuals in society (social roles), physical environment

The gap

- Conflict happens where the subjective and objective realms touch
- The protagonist has an expectation of the results of her action, but the provoked conflict violates expectations
- The first action of the protagonist results in this gap – the second action now involves risk (there’s something to lose)
- As actions result in gaps, the ante must be upped, with the “minimal and reasonable action” becoming bigger and more being put at risk
- The character’s desire must be strong enough to take us to the end of the story (maximum risk, irrevocable change)
- To create emotional truth for your character, you must write from the inside out, asking yourself “if I were this character in these circumstances, what would I do?”
Introduction to narratology

- Narratology – a structuralist analysis of narrative
  - Enabling move: separating the “objective” story from the presented story
- Story/fabula – The objective sequence of events that constitutes the story
- Discourse/sjuzhet – The presentation of the story (always involves manipulation)
- Diegesis – The story world, the time-space continuum of the story (the story is a sequences of events in the diegetic world)
- Narration – the mechanics by which the discourse is produced from the story (e.g. third vs. first person etc.)

The narrative situation

Narrative, Media, Modes

- In order to be able to talk about interactive narrative, one must be able to talk about narrative in different media (since various forms of interactive narrative will constitute new media)
- Classical narratology tends towards privileging specific media
  - Radical media relativism argues that signifier can’t be separated from signified – therefore there’s no way to talk about “narrative” in the abstract
- Other theorists have so generalized the notion of narrative, that it ceases to form a coherent category
  - Narratives of identity
  - Grand narratives of history
  - Cultural narrative
- Ryan’s goal in this chapter is to define a notion of narrative powerful enough to define a coherent category, but general enough to be medium independent
Narrative dimensions

- Consider “narrativeness” a scalar value (more or less narrative) rather than a boolean value (is or is not a narrative)
  - Do this by defining 8 narrative dimensions – if a specific media instance strongly has all these properties, then it has very high narrativeness (a “classical” story)
  - Subsets of the dimensions can be considered for specific purposes

- Spatial Dimension
  - 1. Narrative must be about a world populated by individuated existents

- Temporal Dimension
  - 2. The world must be situated in time and undergo significant transformations
  - 3. The transformations must be caused by non-habitual physical events

Narrative dimensions (continued)

- Mental Dimension
  - 4. Some of the participants in the events must be intelligent agents who have a mental life and react emotionally to the states of the world
  - 5. Some of the events must be purposeful actions by these agents, motivated by identifiable goals and plans

- Formal and Pragmatic Dimensions
  - 6. The sequence must form a unified causal chain and lead to closure
  - 7. The occurrence of at least some of these events must be asserted as fact in the story world
  - 8. The story must communicate something meaningful to the recipient

The cognitive skills of narrative interpretation

- Understanding a narrative involves the exercise of multiple cognitive skills
  - Focusing thought on specific objects cut out from the flux of perception
  - Inferring causal relationships between states and events
  - Situating events in time
  - Reconstructing content of other people’s minds based on their behavior

- But the exercise of these cognitive skills alone does not make something a narrative – only when all of these skills come together to construct a stable mental image do we have narrative