

## Designing Urban Media Storytelling through Greimas' Narrative Model

Jeong-Hee Kim and Jong-Youl Hong\*

*SunMoon University, GalSanRi 100, TangJungMyun, Asan, Korea*

*HanKuk University of Foreign Studies, ImunRo 107, Seoul, Korea*

*savie11@sunmoon.ac.kr, herr\_hong@hufs.ac.kr*

### Abstract

*This article attempts to establish an urban media storytelling model based on Greimas' narrative model. Greimas' narrative model is distinguished into Narrative Schema model and Actantial model. Of course, other contents that reproduced through urban media can also establish storytelling strategies using these. Moreover, it can also be utilized in establishing a storytelling that applies to the entire space called "city." To be more specific, it is a process that receives information and entertainment based on the city, explores the city and ultimately recognizes the city image. This writing suggest such storytelling design linked with a narrative schema and actantial model.*

**Keywords:** *Greimas, Narrative Schema, Actantail Model, Storytelling, Urban Media, Narrative Semiology*

### 1. Greimas' Narrative Model

In this section, a method to plan Urban Storytelling, based on Greimas' narrative model, is investigated. First, the narrative schema, which can be utilized as a useful tool for content storytelling planning, is suggested. In narrative semiology, the narrativity is defined as the "transformation" from the first situation to the final situation. It is formulated as follows:

$$(S \cup O) \rightarrow (S \cap O)$$

(S: Subject, O: Object, U: Disjunction,  $\cap$ : Conjunction)

Greimas determined that the integrated unit of a story has three forms of *épreuves*: 1) *épreuves qualifiante* is the phase in which the subject achieves the required competences; 2) *épreuves principale* is the phase in which the subject duels and wins in order to possess the object; and 3) *épreuves glorifiante* is the phase in which the subject is confirmed as the final hero (or heroine). Greimas suggested the relationship between these elements and the narrative grammar through one narrative schema<sup>1</sup>.

Contract / manipulation → competence → performance → sanction

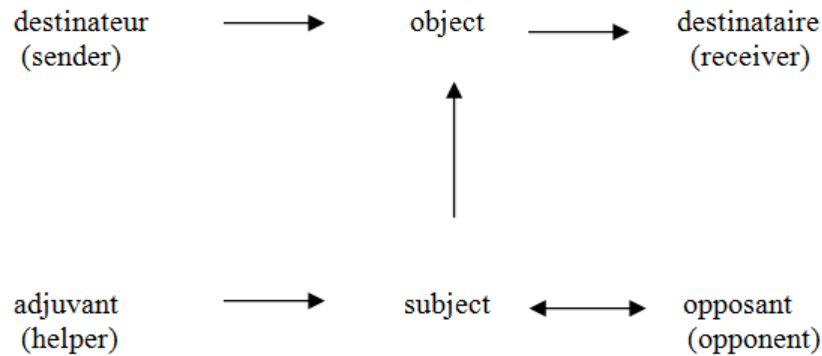
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\* corresponding author

<sup>1</sup> A. J. Greimas, *Sémiotique et sciences sociales*, Paris: Seuil, 1976.

First is the phase in which the subject manipulates or makes a certain contract in order to seek the object. The second phase is when the subject achieves the required competences in order to take the object. In the third phase, the subject acquires the object while the last phase is when the subject receives a prize or sanction according to his/her performance.

Greimas' Actantial model is used as a tool to understand a character's composition. In every story there is a subject, and there is an object, which is a certain value that the subject aims to acquire. The two are linked by the axis of desire or pursuit. There is also a destinateur(sender) that delivers a physical or cognitive object and a destinataire(receiver) that receives it. They are linked by a communication axis. Lastly, there is an adjuvant(helper) that assists the subject in his pursuit of the object and an opposant(opponent) that interferes in the process. These two are linked by the capability axis.



**Figure 1. Actantial model**

For example, the structure of the story of *Cinderella* shows Cinderella as the subject of the story. However, she lacks the value called “love” due to the absence of her mother, and this is recovered at the end of the story. That is, the story encompasses the process in which the subject achieves the object called “love,” which she seeks. The heroine acquires “competence” in order to tempt the prince through the godmother's “manipulation.” She meets the prince at a ball and “performs” so that she can achieve love. She is then rewarded with marriage, i.e., a prize or sanction is executed. This flow of the narrative schema described above can be found not only in folktales but also a number of modern stories.

**Table 1. Narrative Schema of *Cinderella***

Narrative Schema	<i>Cinderella</i>
Manipulation	godmother's appearance
Competence	acquiring competence in order to tempt the prince
Performance	achieving prince's love
Prize and Sanction	marriage with prince

In this case, Cinderella, the subject, pursues the object of love. The fairy godmother that gives the crucial aid to achieve the pursuit is the destinateur and patron, and the stepmother and stepsisters are the opposants. The recipient here is Cinderella herself.

## 2. Analysis of Storytelling based on Narrative Model

It is suggested that Greimas' narrative model comprises the most universal of systems and can be applied to all kinds of narrative texts. This paper therefore seeks to determine whether or not this schema can be applied to a variety of current cultural content storytelling as represented in the image and digital media of today. The most representative plots of all stories are the romantic and heroic plots.<sup>2</sup> *Titanic* falls into the romantic plot category, and it maintained succeeded in breaking records as the world's greatest box office hit for over 10 years. *Harry Potter*, however, falls into the heroic plot category and was produced as a series, which caused a sensation. These two stories could be analyzed through narrative model as follows:

In *Titanic*, the story begins with Rose's (heroine) suicide attempt due to the pressure brought about by her impending marriage to Cal, a young aristocrat. The heroine's condition, in which she wishes to lead her life according to her own will, indicates a kind of "lacking." This story overcomes the imbalanced phase and returns the heroine to a balanced condition, i.e., Rose comes to lead the life she really wants in the end by denying the false consciousness of high society. This transformation coincides with her process of achieving "love."

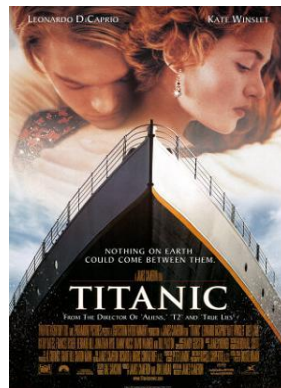


Figure 2. Titanic

When Rose tries to jump into the sea from the bow, Jack (hero) rescues her dramatically. He makes her lead her life without giving up on herself. Although Jack is so poor that he has to travel tourist-class, he is a man with a free spirit. Cal and Jack find themselves in an antagonistic relationship with each other, but the meeting with Jack could be considered as a "manipulation" to make Rose find her true love.

Jack is invited to dinner with the aristocrats but tactfully deals with the situation and then takes Rose to a tourist-class party. Once there, Rose dances as much as she likes and has a good time. Furthermore, Jack is an excellent painter and Rose invites him to draw her naked body. This episode provides an opportunity for them to fall in love with each other. In other words, Rose runs away from the normative and hypocritical life of the aristocrats and bravely

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<sup>2</sup> Patrick Colm Hogan, *The Mind and Its Stories: Narrative Universals and Human Emotion*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2003.

selects romance with Jack. As a result, she acquires “competence” in order to achieve true love.

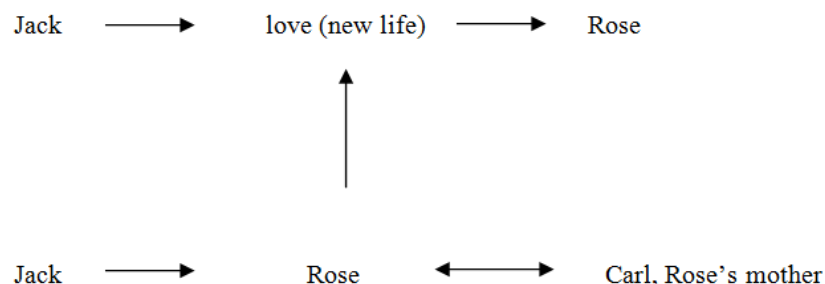
As the ship, the Titanic, dramatically starts to sink when it hits an iceberg, their love takes a dramatic turn. Rose does not get into a lifeboat like the other first-class passengers. She looks for Jack who is locked in a tourist-class room. They cling to the end of the ship together but ultimately, Jack drowns. Before this, however, Jack finds a piece of floating debris and puts Rose on it. He is dying but asks her not to give up on her life. In order to keep her promise to him, Rose blows a whistle and is rescued. Therefore, although Jack is dead, Rose “performs” by having achieved true love.

She transforms herself as a result of finding true love and subsequently acts according to her own will. Rose survives but does not return to Cal, Instead, she lives a fruitful life of her own, as she wants. This could be considered the “prize or sanction” part of the performance.

**Table 2. Narrative Schema of *Titanic***

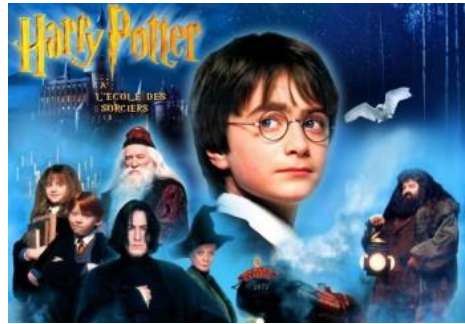
Narrative Schema	<i>Titanic</i>
Manipulation	Jack's dramatic saving of Rose.
Competence	Rose's choice for romance with Jack
Performance	Jack and Rose's efforts to keep their love alive in spite of the ship's sinking.
Prize and Sanction	Rose keeping her promise to Jack by leading her life according to her will until the end.

In this case, the subject is Rose, and what she pursues is a life she can live according to her own will. What makes this is possible is her love with Jack. This desir or quête starts when Jack saves her when Rose attempts to give up her life. Jack is the destinateur that propels her to keep living. At the same time, he also serves as a adjuvant in her pursuit of love. He takes part in the party held in the third-class cabin and draws a naked picture of Rose. In other words, he helps Rose to let go of a pretentious life and choose true love between him and her. The opposants are clearly her fiancé Carl and her mother, who forced her into the engagement. The recipient is Rose herself, as she succeeded in true love with Jack and gained a whole new life.



**Figure 3. Actantial model of *Titanic***

*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* can also be examined through narrative schema. The main character, Harry Potter, loses his parents when he is young and goes to live with his aunt and her family. The closet under the stairs is his room, and he is ill-treated by his aunt's family (uncle and cousin). This covers the "transformation" in that Harry Potter, who lives a sad life with no sense of who he is, finds his identity as a sorcerer and thereafter lives happily.



**Figure 4. Harry Potter**

Harry has his 11<sup>th</sup> birthday ahead, and a few days before this, he receives a letter. It is an admission invitation from the legendary Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. A giant called Hagrid, who visits to take Harry there, relays the fact that Harry is a sorcerer with the greatest power. This is considered to be "manipulation" by the principal (Dumbledore).

The process of his learning about various mysterious sorceries at Hogwarts School is the phase of "competence" acquisition. Quidditch games and adventures with amazing animals unfold. Meanwhile, Harry comes to know the "sorcerer's stone," which is hidden in the basement of Hogwarts school, but it is also wanted by Voldemort, who had killed Harry's parents.

Harry's action to find and protect the stone from Voldemort is the "performance," which is the core point of the story.

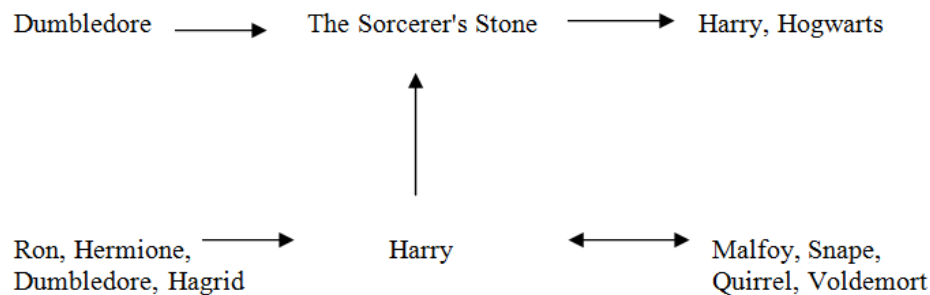
In doing so, Harry saves Hogwarts from danger and makes it peaceful. Moreover, Harry then happily leads the life of a sorcerer.

**Table 3. Narrative schema of *Harry Potter***

Narrative Schema	<i>Harry Potter</i>
Manipulation	Dumbledore's invitation for Harry to go to Hogwarts.
Competence	Harry's learning of mysterious sorceries in Hogwarts.
Performance	Successfully defending the sorcerer's stone from Voldemort.
Prize and Sanction	Peace at Hogwarts.

In the Harry Potter series, the subject, Harry, realizes his destiny through Dumbledore and purpuses to become a wizard. He gains the capability by learning different kinds of magic at Hogwarts. If one limits the case to the first book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's*

*Stone*, the value object the subject pursues is the Sorcerer's stone. By protecting the stone, the subject strengthens his identity as a wizard and brings peace to Hogwarts. During this quest, multiple adjutant and opposants appear in clear and distinct compositions. Ron, Hermione, Dumbledore and Hagrid are the adjutant. The opposants are Malfoy, who keeps conflicting Harry, Snape and Quirrel, and finally Voldemort.



**Figure 5. Actantial model of *Harry Potter***

Greimas' narrative model is shown together with the genres that are applied to storytelling. In the case of a computer game, it has an open storytelling structure based on the characteristics of its interaction with the user. That is, the user plays a role as the hero (or heroine) and intervenes in the storytelling. At the moment when the user understands the game's principles and presses the start button, a "contract" is made. The success of the most important mission in the game is the "performance." Achieving the necessary items and/or powers prior to this is the "competence" phase. The "prize and sanction" are provided according to the game's result. Narrative schema can be applied to offline content, such as theme parks or festivals, as well. Therefore, narrative schema will now be applied to urban media storytelling.

### 3. Application of Designing Urban Media Storytelling

Urban media is commonly defined as the methodology in which data is transformed for use in urban spaces and represented in a visible way. That is, it primarily aims to deliver urban information to the public in an effective way. For this, the city requires users who are able to travel into the city. They live in the city or travel with the help of urban media. Fundamentally, users come to acquire knowledge of the city or gain a particular impression through these experiences. The series of such processes could be assumed to be storytelling. In other words, the subject transforms the lack of experience about a certain city into satisfaction. Hence this paper seeks to analyze urban media storytelling's phases through narrative model.

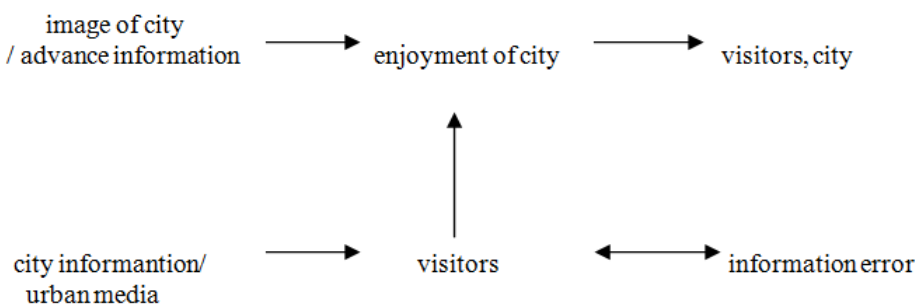
At the moment of inflow into the city, regardless of the mechanisms, *e.g.*, house-moving or sightseeing, a "contract" is made. Image promotion about the city plays an important role in this: it could appeal to the inflow into the city through urban advantages, such as natural environments, cultural resources, and cultural programs. Also, it is important in order to draw out initial motivation and curiosity. Urban information and images are imperative as well and are provided at gateways, such as airports, train stations, or terminals. A city "manipulates" people into experiencing it in various ways. It is advantageous for regional development for people to stay in the city for as long as possible, and therefore the city attempts to provide maximum activities for people to pursue. At the same time, in a sense, it establishes a positive image of the city.

If a user comes into the city, it is essential to acquire a level of “competence,” which helps them to explore the city and/or live there. For this, various urban media are utilized. In general, urban media visualizes and delivers information about urban spaces. Information is important for the user. Greimas suggested four aspects of competence.<sup>3</sup> They are *pouvoir* (power: able to do), *savoir* (knowledge: knows how to do), *devoir* (obligation: obliged to do), and *vouloir* (will: want to do), respectively. In this context, information about the city refers to knowledge. However, another competence that is important is *vouloir* (want). That is, besides the delivery of information about the city, entertainment content should be added to the entertaining elements.

Some people have a different view, which purports that urban media does not convey simple information. A scholar might look at the city as a public space and a media environment in which the public can freely participate and express themselves.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the giant media called a city is not planned by an expert, but it is a space for the public to immerse and enjoy themselves. Urban media is more likely to be developed as entertainment that is enjoyed by the public, over and above the actual information that it delivers. Entertainment content based on storytelling could utilize the storytelling method. It could also be developed as infotainment content, which reflects the shape of games, although its main objective is to deliver information. Therefore, narrative model could be utilized not only at a macroscopic level but also in individual media content.

If the phase of competence is accomplished effectively, the user's “performance” could be undertaken in a much smoother way. For sightseeing or settling in a city to live, competence could be a great help. In the performance phase, users experience and enjoy both hardware and software elements: hardware elements involve buildings and cultural artifacts while software elements include various cultural programs, such as exhibitions and festivals. As a result, the additional value of the city comes into play. “Prize and sanction” are the evaluation of the performance. It depends on how users recognize the city. In the case of positive evaluation, satisfaction with life and the overall urban experience increases. Furthermore, users establish the intention to revisit the city. Fundamentally, such an effect leads to regional development

The Actantial model of storytelling as I mentioned above will be established as follows.



**Figure 6. Actantial model of urban media storytelling**

The Actantial model above is applied from the perspective of urban media. Enjoyment of a city is based on the resources or high amenities that a city has. However, this writing suggests

<sup>3</sup> Anne Hénault, *Nrratologie, Sémiotique générale*, Paris: P.U.F., 1983.

<sup>4</sup> Hyun-Jin Lee, “Expanding Urban Media Screen Experiences: the City as a Big Canvas”, *Design Studies* Vol.24, No.1, pp.5-14, Seoul: Korean Society of Design Science, 2011.

a model based solely on information. With the help of city information delivered by various urban medias, the subject explores and enjoys the city. When successful, the subject is satisfied and the city becomes the recipient as it not only gains added value but also an improved image. This can serve as the foundation of a virtuous cycle structure that leads to potential re-visits.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on discussions in this study, the model of urban media storytelling could be demonstrated as follows:

**Table 4. Urban Media Storytelling Model**

Narrative Schema	Urban Media Storytelling	Content
Manipulation	Entering the city	Promoting urban images : in advance or at a city's gateways
Competence	Acquiring information about urban spaces	Infotainment: Information element Entertainment: Story element
Performance	Exploring the city (sightseeing/residence)	Hardware: Buildings, cultural artifacts Software: Exhibitions, festivals, cultural programs
Prize and Sanction	Recognizing the urban image	Increase of amenity, intention of re-visit

From a macroscopic perspective, urban media storytelling could be understood as a narrative schema to assimilate the urban image by entering and exploring city. That is, it could be understood from the perspective that the city itself is an urban media as well as, like games, it has an open narrative structure derived from users' interaction. In general, urban media is closest to the competence phase if you focus on its information delivery function. For this, more effects could be produced if the simple information is developed into game or story content. However, enjoying urban media might be considered as the performance itself from a macroscopic perspective. In any case, Greimas' narrative model could be utilized to represent the universal structure of the story for both individual content and recognition of the urban image overall.

#### References

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## Authors



**Jeong-Hee Kim**

She received Ph.D degree in cultural contents from Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in 2009. She is a professor at Sunmoon University, Department of Cultural Contents. Her current research interests include storytelling, visual art, contents planning, locality and cultural contents.



**Jong-Youl Hong**

He received Ph.D degree in cultural contents from Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in 2011. He works as a lecturer at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Department of Global Culture and Contents. His current research interests include cultural policy, European Union studies, interculturalism, creative city, space and storytelling.

