This chapter considers the narrative ‘method’ of the *Tale of Genji* as it is presented in the narrative scroll paintings owned by the Tokugawa and Goto Museums. In attempting to ‘read’ the *Tale of Genji* in this format, one must first address the somewhat fluid and inconsistent boundaries of the word ‘narrative’. The parameters of ‘narrative’ could be described as follows:

i. narratives have plots  
ii. narratives give form to time  
iii. narratives are operated by the act of narrating  
iv. narratives require a reader.

The plot is the organization of the events. These events (which took place, or were anticipated) are described by different narrative voices (via various deliveries, or perspectives), and the ‘narration’ or ‘reading’ of the incidents coincides with the ‘experiencing’ of time. That is to say, however, it is not simply the causal relation and continuity of the incidents that conceptualizes time. Instead, one could say that the locus of narration is also the locus where time is manifest.

Enomoto Masazumi, for example, has written that *The Tale of Genji*’s basic temporal structure is:

… the sense of time that a reader takes away from *The Tale of Genji* … [is] … one of presence and ‘presentness’ at the locus of narration, giving the impression that the action is occurring ‘now’ right before one’s eyes.

Enomoto’s focus upon narration as giving ‘form to time’ augments a similar discussion by Shimizu Yoshiko’s who notes that in any scene:
The author [of *The Tale of Genji*] exhaustively pursues the precise and the vague ticking away of time. Therefore, although the pace may appear to slow down suddenly, or even condense on a single point, one scene clearly ticks out the detailed time of its content and the overall action proceeds. Although the scene central to the chapter is conceived by the author as a single static painting, the event is conveyed in the world of language, in which the quality of continuous narration is not lost.3

Nakayama Masahiko, citing the peculiar nature of the ‘voice convention’4 of Japanese adjectives (of emotion or desire) and verbs (of feeling and thought) writes:

… of course the finitive form of these terms expresses the present tense, and that present is taken as far as possible to correspond to pure, localized present time.5

He observes that the text of *The Tale of Genji* possesses the peculiar features of that localized present time, and of a manifested subject of textual action. This is to say, Nakayama explains that the narration of *The Tale of Genji* is such that the reader identifies himself/herself with the basis of textual action as ‘here and now’ and the subject of that action as ‘I’.

In Shimizu’s thought-provoking critique, narrative time is continuously unfolding even within a static framed scene.6 Enomoto, in the piece mentioned above, follows Shimizu’s argument and focuses on narrative and time. Although in another essay Enomoto deviates from the idea of the ‘presence and “presentness” of the locus of narration’ in the text, he points to a quality of ‘now-ness’ found in the painted scenes of the *Genji Scrolls*, noting that the auxiliary verbal suffix ‘けり’ (which defines a past event) is excluded from the excerpt for this purpose, and discusses the ‘here and now’ manifested in the *Genji Scrolls* narrative format.7 Nakayama presents an argument interpreting the narrative composition of *The Tale of Genji* by comparing it to its French translation.

These arguments are persuasive and special attention should be given to the fact that this type of analysis performed on this particular work (*The Tale of Genji*) has initiated a wider debate redolent with possibilities. Specifically, however, they are particularly noteworthy for taking up the realm of ‘time’ as a narrative problem.

This issue of the ‘presentness’ of narrative does not end with the peculiar qualities of the text of *The Tale of Genji*; nor does it end with the debate on the peculiarities of the Japanese language. Rather we are led to an examination of the basic theoretical arguments of narrative itself. To begin with, let us ask the following question: is not narrating – be it textual or oral – the sort of action which generates a space in which the reader and the listener can hold in common the present?8 Narrating not only manifests the localized time of ‘now’ and ‘here’ (in other words, time without breadth). Narrating is also a manipulation (productive action) which combines localized moments of ‘now’ and ‘here,’ and gives them form – something we must not lose sight of.

Furthermore the narrated ‘now’ (the ‘now’ held in common by the reader/listener) is positioned in relation to the expansion of memory and antic-