

Call for Paper - Workshop

“Exploring Narrative Gaps in Literature: Identity, Memory, and the Absent“

IRTG Baltic Peripeties, University of Greifswald, 10 and 11 July, 2025

What is missing from a narrative can be just as revealing as what is included. This specially applies to literature, where a story is shaped not only by what is present, but also by what is deliberately omitted or left unspoken. An author might choose to omit details, whether to conceal parts of a story or to emphasize others through what is left unsaid, shaping the storytelling in the process. It is also possible that the narrator’s memory is incomplete because of medical conditions, (intergenerational) trauma, or suppression. Both the inability to remember and remembering “too much“ might be felt as hurtful.

The concept of *mimesis of remembering* (Michael Basseler, Dorothee Birke) is highly relevant for identifying memory-related gaps. Building on Gérard Genette’s work on temporal structures as well as the theorization of unreliable narratives, they conclude that the process of remembering is always aesthetically constructed. Examples of this can be found in literary texts like Anne Rabe’s *Die Möglichkeit von Glück* (2023) and Bianca Schaalburg’s graphic novel *Der Duft der Kiefern* (2021). They explore remembrance as both a theme and as an aesthetic form. Rabe’s protagonist experiences memory gaps and questions her grandfather’s past, reflecting on fragmented recollections. Schaalburg delves into her family’s Second World War history, piecing together memories and facts. Both works artistically contribute to a culture of remembrance by depicting history as reconstructed through fragile and selective memories.

An interesting case for contemporary literature studies is analyzing the tension between autofictional genre and gaps. Considering the fragmented nature of memory and identity, authors working in the autofictional genre often do not aim to dispose of these gaps. Instead, traumatic gaps of memory and remembering are often used for self-narration. For instance, authors may narrativize their own search for clues, hoping to shed light on what remains obscured and to answer lingering questions.

Narratives of the self, changing throughout time, are dependent on, or conditioned by, various factors, some of which include cultural, interpersonal, and linguistic influences (Jerome Bruner). In order to “make a life livable“ (Judith Butler), one sometimes has to adjust one’s self-narrative(s) to a particular situation. Along with changes in the social environment, the surroundings and accessible objects, there are also certain transformations in the way(s) people use them to tell their life stories and narrate memories. Sherry Turkle’s theory of *evocative objects*, as “things we think with“ and “companions to our emotional lives or as provocations to thought“, allows us to understand how narrated selves are partly constituted by the network(s) they form with such objects (Richard Heersmink), and what kinds of gaps these distributed self views form and resolve.

The workshop aims to encourage a theoretical and methodological examination of authorial creation of narrative gaps in contemporary (auto)fictional literature. We welcome original proposals that focus on the aesthetic construction of gaps in (graphic) novels, contemporary narrative texts of different genres, and life writing. Furthermore, we seek to explore how literary scholars can more effectively identify and analyze these gaps in narratives and whether it is possible to approach this analysis within a consistent methodological framework.

Possible questions might include, but are not limited to:

- What exactly constitutes a gap in literature and which methodological framework can be used to identify gaps in literature?
- What aesthetic techniques and narrative strategies do contemporary authors use to reveal gaps in identity and memory?
- How do gaps fragment and affect the temporal structures in literary texts? In which ways is the artistic impact supported by the temporal structure of a text?
- What gaps emerge in identity and memory when remembering and narrating one's life in a changed environment?
- What is the role of new materialist or posthuman self-narration in individual remembering, identity construction practices, and life writing? What role do objects play in narrating the self, and how can these artifactual-personal networks be analyzed methodologically?
- Are there significant differences in the gaps in pre-digital and digital literature? How should they be analyzed? And what role do social media platforms play in the process of creating and resolving gaps, in authorial life writing online?

Submission guidelines: The workshop is organized by Paula Friedericke Hartmann, Hanna Horn and Tim Senkbeil, International Research Training Group (DFG) [Baltic Peripeties. Narratives of Reformations, Revolutions and Catastrophes](#), and will be held at the University of Greifswald on 10 and 11 July, 2025. The working languages will be English and German.

To apply, please submit the following in a single document (one PDF): an abstract (English or German) of 300 to 500 words, your contact details (name, email, affiliation), and a short bio (up to 150 words) to Hanna Horn at hanna.horn@uni-greifswald.de by **14 January, 2025**. In subject line, please specify "Workshop Gaps in Literature".

Applicants will be notified regarding the acceptance of their contribution in February 2025.

Other practicalities:

Participants whose proposals are accepted will be asked to submit a **draft paper (3–5 pages, excluding bibliography) by 1 June, 2025** for distribution among all other participants prior to the workshop. The drafts will serve as the basis for a 30-minute presentation (in addition to 15 minutes of discussion) at the workshop. We aim to publish the revised and extended versions of these papers (20–30 pages) for inclusion in an edited volume or special issue with an internationally recognized publisher.

The organizers will reimburse travel expenses within reasonable means and arrange accommodation for all speakers. We kindly ask for you to coordinate your travel plans with us in advance. If you have any specific (accessibility) requirements, please let us know and we will do our best to accommodate such requests. For further information on the workshop, travel, or accommodation, please contact Paula Friedericke Hartmann at paula.hartmann@uni-greifswald.de.

Bibliography:

Basseler, Michael and Dorothee Birke. "Mimesis des Erinnerns," in *Gedächtniskonzepte der Literaturwissenschaft: Theoretische Grundlegung und Anwendungsperspektiven*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005, 123-148.

Bruner, Jerome. "Life as Narrative," *Social Research* 54,1 (1987): 11–32.

Butler, Judith. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.

Genette, Gérard. *Die Erzählung*. München: Wilhelm Fink, 1994.

Heersmink, Richard. "The Narrative Self, Distributed Memory, and Evocative Objects," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 175(8), (2018): 1829–1849.

Turkle, Sherry, ed. *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007.