

Gaps and Narrativity: Strategies and Functions

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The notion of gaps is one of the key theoretical concepts in fictional worlds theory; gaps are essential elements of fictional worlds. However, in addition to these ontological gaps, fictional worlds also contain another type of gap that can be seen as aesthetic, optional, or contextual. These gaps significantly shape the final design of fictional worlds and hold considerable value for analytical and interpretative practices. Aesthetic gaps influence the semantic design of fictional worlds and operate in conjunction with ontological gaps. While ontological gaps are integral to the structure of a fictional world and cannot be removed or filled, aesthetic gaps depend on the specific semantic design of individual fictional works. The number and distribution of aesthetic gaps are determined both by general artistic conventions (conventional gaps) and by the subjective choices of the authors (auctorial gaps), as they are intentionally created and structured.

Aesthetic gaps can be identified at various levels; they may arise from specific types of fictional worlds and their settings, stem from different conventional and/or auctorial strategies, and ultimately play a wide range of roles in shaping a fictional world. These roles, in turn, influence how the world is received and conceptualized—along with the stories it contains.

In this paper, I will examine the notion of aesthetic gaps through the lens of narrativity (and vice versa). If there is a strong connection between aesthetic gaps and narrativity—and I believe there is—this raises an important question: How, and to what extent, can aesthetic gaps influence narrativity? Can they enhance or diminish narrativity? And if so, how?

It seems that most fictional narratives, along with their gaps, fall into specific genre categories and subcategories, following conventionally established patterns that make them familiar and recognizable. Others, however, deviate from genre norms and are perceived as unexpected, unconventional, auctorial, or innovative.

For my analysis of aesthetic gaps and their relationship to narratives and narrativity, I will examine two distinct fictional works that belong to two vastly different conventional and auctorial “worlds”: Franz Kafka’s *The Castle* and Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. At first glance, while the former appears to be full of gaps, the latter seems relatively gapless.

For the purpose of analyzing the specific aesthetic gaps in both novels, I will employ—purely instrumentally—the particular perspective on narrativity introduced by Meir Sternberg. This analysis will lead to a classification of these gaps and an exploration of their respective functions within the semantic structures of both novels, as well as their pragmatic “use”.