

ENN8 “Limits of Narrative”, September 29 to October 1, 2025, Wuppertal

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Fiction without Narrative?

The question of whether fiction can exist without narration is far from obvious, and has not, until now, attracted much interest from literary theorists.

To answer this question, I believe it would be unproductive to focus on forms whose fictionality is weak and controversial (such as music or poetry). Instead, I will focus on artefacts whose fictionality is unquestionable in order to ask whether narrativity can be absent or minimal in them. I also propose to examine practices and figures generally considered inherent to fictionality, such as immersion in a non-existent world, or characters. I will ask to what extent they can be conceptually and pragmatically understood independently of a narrative.

I will therefore address the question of worlds, which became central to theories of fiction in the 1980s, and then contemporary micro-narratives, by examining the disproportion between the imagined world and the textual fragment that gives rise to it. Finally, I will question the ‘spatial turn’, in other words the shift from narrativity to spatiality, which some theorists associate with contemporary fantasy universes. Finally, I will examine the hypothesis of the autonomy of characters, who are supposed to be the best allies of narrativity, but who are also capable of doing without it.