

## Workshop

### “Challenging concepts of broken and unnatural narratives”

International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) Justus Liebig University Giessen

14-15 November 2017

"Broken" and "unnatural" — these two characterisations of narratives have recently begun to appear together frequently in the field of narratologies (Nielsen 2016; Iversen 2013). While both broken and unnatural narratives subvert and challenge traditional forms of narration, the theories behind point at different aspects. Unnatural narratives confront us with „physically, logically, or humanly impossible scenarios or events“ (Alber 2013), whereas “broken narratives are a very natural phenomenon indeed”, as Nünning (2016) states. Iversen presents yet another take, suggesting that “rather than talking about the unnatural narrative as a certain type of fictional narrative, an autonomous innovative or experimental text, we might consider talking pragmatically about the unnatural as a rhetorical device, defined in relation to existing processes of sense-making, rather than in relation to existing texts or poetics“ (Iversen 2017). But are these theories mutually exclusive at all? What do they have in common and where are the differences? How can we apply these concepts and possibly bring them together in a fruitful way?

In our workshop, we invite participants to present case studies they are currently working on in the realm of broken and/or unnatural narratives. We would like to critically discuss questions pertaining to the following subjects: Are there narratives which are broken and unnatural at the same time? Where do broken and unnatural narratives evolve? Where, when, why and how do narratives break? Is there a proliferation of unnatural narratives in contemporary literature and if yes – why could that be? Where are brokenness and unnaturalness located – in the events, the characters, narrators, in the discourse, the reception process? How do we come to terms with these narratives? Which effects and functions does the assumption of a broken or unnatural narrative entail? What are their normative dimensions? Why do we still understand broken and unnatural narratives? Discussing these questions together should lead to the broader question of where the similarities and the differences in the forms, functions and theories of broken and unnatural narratives are. There is also room to critically investigate the affordances and limits of these theories.

The GCSC Research Area „Cultural Narratologies“ is excited to be able to invite (post-)doctoral researchers from various disciplines to a two-day intensive workshop on the topic of broken and unnatural narrations. We are going to explore the theory behind these concepts and apply them to ongoing research in the study of literature and culture. The aim of this course is to examine the

forms, mechanisms and aesthetics of fictional/factual broken and unnatural narratives in and between the respective realms, deepen and broaden the understanding and challenge the concepts. The workshop is designed as a forum to read and discuss theoretical texts, to get input and to present current work in the field to peer doctoral researchers and senior narratologists. We are delighted to have cast together three experts theorising broken and unnatural narratives who are eager to work with early career researchers in the field.

The workshop offers (post-)doctoral researchers the opportunity to present their problems and questions within the approach of broken and unnatural narratives in a small interdisciplinary group of peers and selected experts. The intense reading retreat with key texts on the topic of broken narratives and unnatural narratives as well as the keynote lecture and the masterclass on broken narratives held by Prof. Stefan Iversen will deepen the participant's knowledge in the respective field. Furthermore, the participants are invited to make use of the specialised consultations by Prof. Ansgar Nünning and Prof. Jan Alber (10 minute slots). With this highly individualised offer, we would like to give participants the chance to discuss questions and problems with some of the most important representatives in the research field of broken and unnatural narratives. Finally, the workshop will be a platform for networking and interchange both formally and informally.

For the presentations, we ask applicants to focus on a specific problem in connection with broken and/or unnatural narratives that they encounter in a current project. Presenters get the opportunity to introduce their case in 5 minutes slots with subsequent discussions of 10 minutes.

We ask applicants to hand in abstracts of no more than 200 words about the case of broken or unnatural narratives that they would like to present in the colloquium. Please send your abstract to all of the organisers [ann.m.riesner@gcsc.uni-giessen.de](mailto:ann.m.riesner@gcsc.uni-giessen.de), [susanne.k.christ@gcsc.uni-giessen.de](mailto:susanne.k.christ@gcsc.uni-giessen.de) and [andrea.zueger@gcsc.uni-giessen.de](mailto:andrea.zueger@gcsc.uni-giessen.de) no later than **October 17, 2017**. Please do also include your institutional affiliation, e-mail, and a 100-word bio. We will notify you of acceptance on **October 23, 2017**.

#### **Invited Scholars:**

**Jan Alber** is Professor at the English Department at the University of Aachen. He has published several books and articles within the field of unnatural narratives, for example "Unnatural Narrative: Impossible Worlds in Fiction and Drama. Frontiers of Narrative" (2016). His research interests include the history of English literature from the Middle Ages to today, narrative theory, unnatural or impossible narratives, Postmodernism (prose and drama), prison narratives, Charles Dickens, Romantic poetry and Aborigines and Australian Culture. Prof. Alber is president of the International Society for the Study of Narrative.

**Stefan Iversen** is Associate Professor at the Department for Aesthetics and Communication at Aarhus University in Denmark. His research concerns in unnatural narratives, broken narratives, early modernism, narrative rhetoric, and the literature of testimony. Prof. Iversen leads the annually Ph.D.-summer school Summer course in Narrative Studies in Denmark. He has published and co-edited several books and article in the broad field of narratologies such as “Strange Voice in Narrative Fiction” (2011). His current research project focuses on interacting narratives in political rhetoric.

**Ansgar Nünning** is Professor of English and American Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Gießen. He is the founding director of the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC). Nünning has published widely on English and American literature, narratology, cultures of memory and literary and cultural theory. His article “Conceptualizing ‘Broken Narratives’ from a Narratological Perspective” (2016) together with Vera Nünning, is a substantive contribution to the conceptualisation of broken narratives.

### **Provisional programme:**

#### **14 November 2017**

- 2-5 pm:           **Reading Retreat:** Discussion of texts by Ansgar and Vera Nünning, Stefan Iversen and Jan Alber
- 5-6 pm:           Break
- 6-8 pm:           **Keynote Lecture:** Stefan Iversen, Associate Professor, Aarhus University  
                          „Strange Narratives in Rhetorical Discourse“

#### **15. November 2017**

- 9 am:              Informal Coffee Break
- 9.30am-1pm:   **Masterclass:** Stefan Iversen, Aarhus University:  
                          “Broken Narratives: The works of Joshua Oppenheimer”
- 1-2pm:            Lunch Break
- 2-4pm:            Presentations in **Colloquium** with Prof. Ansgar Nünning and Prof. Jan Alber
- 4.15-5.45pm:   **Individual consultations** of 10 minutes with Prof. Ansgar Nünning and  
                          Prof. Jan Alber
- 5.45-6.15pm:    Final discussion