

## **Narrativity as a Travelling Concept: Philologically and Anthropologically Oriented Approaches to Narrative**

Nora Berning

**Abstract:**

Matthias Aumüller's 2012 *Narrativität als Begriff. Analysen und Anwendungsbeispiele zwischen philologischer und anthropologischer Orientierung* is a collection of essays that discuss the concept of narrativity through the lens of different disciplines: historiography, journalism, game studies, film, literature, linguistics, language acquisition, psychoanalysis, philosophy, sociology, law, and psychology. In its entirety, the book is an eclectic overview of the multifaceted nature of narrativity that serves as a solid introduction to the commonalities and differences between philologically and anthropologically oriented conceptualizations of narrativity.

**How to cite:**

Berning, Nora: „Narrativity as a Travelling Concept: Philologically and Anthropologically Oriented Approaches to Narrative [Review on: Aumüller, Matthias (Hg.): *Narrativität als Begriff. Analysen und Anwendungsbeispiele zwischen philologischer und anthropologischer Orientierung*. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2012.]“. In: *KULT\_online* 35 (2013).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22029/ko.2013.773>

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Matthias Aumüller (Hg.). *Narrativität als Begriff. Analysen und Anwendungsbeispiele zwischen philologischer und anthropologischer Orientierung*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2012. 325 S., kartoniert, 99.95 EUR. ISBN: 978-3-11-027851-4

Matthias Aumüller's edited volume *Narrativität als Begriff. Analysen und Anwendungsbeispiele zwischen philologischer und anthropologischer Orientierung* (2012) is the ambitious effort of thirteen scholars to shed light on the notion of narrativity as it is conceptualized in different disciplines and divergent analytical contexts. The book is divided into two parts: The first part consists of seven articles that explore philologically oriented concepts of narrativity as one finds them, for instance, in historiography, journalism, game studies, film, literature, linguistics, and language acquisition. The second part encompasses five articles that deal with anthropologically oriented concepts of narrativity, as one finds them, for instance, in psychoanalysis, philosophy, sociology, law, and psychology.

Both parts are theoretically dense and comprise articles that differ from one another not only in terms of theory and methodology, but also with regards to the object of research and the authors' writing styles. For instance, Axel Rüh's overview of various aspects of historiographic narrativity is strongly influenced by literary studies, whereas Karl N. Renner's analysis of journalistic narrativity is an exhaustive case study research based on a multi-methodological approach. Interesting though such a multifaceted collection of articles is, the classification of the contributions into two groups – articles concerned with philologically oriented concepts of narrativity on the one hand and articles inspired by anthropologically oriented concepts of narrativity on the other – creates an artificial binary that stands in the way of an inter- and transdisciplinary approach to narrativity, which might be understood simultaneously as a travelling concept and as a culture-transcending analytical category (*sensu* Marie-Laure Ryan).

According to Matthias Aumüller, researchers who draw on a philologically oriented conceptualization of narrativity are primarily interested in exploring texts and symbol systems (e.g. films, computer games, etc.), whereas scholars whose works are characterized by an anthropologically oriented conceptualization of narrativity are also interested in the sense-making and identity-making functions of narration. In Aumüller's eyes, only the latter concept of narrativity has constructivist underpinnings in the sense that anthropologically oriented conceptualizations are more sensitive to the cognitive and constructivist functions of narratives. Such a dichotomy has severe limitations, however, especially considering that there is a substantive

body of research in the philologically oriented tradition that focuses on the complex relationship between narrativity and experientiality. Monika Fludernik's natural narratology is but one example that contradicts Aumüller's strict separation between philologically and anthropologically oriented concepts.

The volume itself also contains quite a number of articles that thwart Aumüller's neat separation: Kati Hannken-Illjes well-researched article on narratives and counter narratives in criminal law not only opens up interesting portals for dialogue between the law-as-literature research tradition and the first of the three domains of narrativity explored in Inga Römer's article on narrative in philosophical discourses; Hannken-Illjes moreover identifies fruitful interdisciplinary connections between law, literature, and journalism when she reflects upon the media's coverage of verdicts and how cases are narrated in the news.

The idea of narrativity as a travelling concept, then, is not so much a subtext of the volume, but rather an invisible framework that recipients have to establish themselves in the course of reading. This is all the more surprising considering that inter- and transdisciplinarity has, in recent years, become the master narrative in the context of both philologically and anthropologically oriented approaches to narrative. In light of this, one could argue that Aumüller's edited volume represents an important counterweight to the bulk of cross-, trans-, and interdisciplinary research on narrative.

Its main shortcoming though lies in the bifurcation between the disciplines represented in the first and second parts of the book. Isn't it precisely the in-between spaces between philologically and anthropologically oriented conceptualization of narrativity, i.e. the grey zones that the disciplinary lens cannot capture, which make for the most interesting narrative encounters? Hence, the question remains whether the binary division between philologically and anthropologically oriented approaches to narrative has heuristic potential and can be sustained in the face of highly inter- and transdisciplinary research on narrativity and narrative.