

Research Network:

Feeling and Understanding. The Role of Empathic Emotions in Understanding Persons and Literature

## **Workshop: Empathy, Understanding, and Appreciation**

Georg-August-University Göttingen, February 21<sup>st</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019

Benjamin Gittel (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen):

### **“To live as if one were a character in a book” – Appreciation, Empathy and Autofiction**

To live as if one were a character is a recurring idea in intellectual and literary history, most prominently in Robert Musil's "The Man Without Qualities". While traditional interpretations of this metaphor try to determine what one's life would have to look like to resemble the life of a character, I propose to ask, what it means to understand one's life as if it were the life of a character in a work of literature. Therefore, I'm interested in the question how we understand the life of a fictional character in comparison to real-life-narratives (e.g. biographies), the different processes of empathy/sympathy involved and whether these processes can be said to be governed by the practice of fiction and/or the practice of literature. I sketch several challenges to study these points and outline different approaches that could be pursued in the context of our DFG-network. One approach deals with the reception of so-called "autofictions", overtly autobiographical narratives with the paratext "novel", thus texts used by authors "to turn themselves" into characters.