



NEUBAUER
COLLEGIUM
FOR CULTURE AND SOCIETY



Impossible Fictions

*Second International Congress
of the*

*International Society for Fiction and Fictionality Studies /
Société internationale des recherches sur la fiction et la
fictionnalité
(ISFFS/SIRFF)*

March 2-5, 2022

Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society
The University of Chicago



THE UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO

Overview

Fiction has long been associated with possibility and plausibility – with the construction of plots that are governed by a certain causal logic. But how exactly does fiction model our understanding of what is possible in the real world? Conversely, how does our sense of what is possible in reality constrain what is perceived to be possible or impossible in fictional worlds? Are certain subjects off-limits to fictional representation? These questions are not new ones, but they have taken on a renewed urgency in the twenty-first century. In a context where our “real-world” conceptions of possibility and predictability are shifting in the face of global crisis, how can (or should) fiction present current or future possibilities?

Organizers

Alison James (University of Chicago)

Akihiro Kubo (Kwansei Gakuin University)

Françoise Lavocat (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle)

Sponsors

Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society

France Chicago Center

SIRFF/ISFFS

Department of Romance Languages and Literatures

Institut Universitaire de France

Université Sorbonne Nouvelle



Wednesday, March 2

1:30 p.m.

Arrival and Opening Remarks

Alison James (University of Chicago)

Akihiro Kubo (Kwansei Gakuin University)

Françoise Lavocat (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

2:00 – 4:50 p.m.

Parallel Sessions: A-C

Session A: *Narrateurs impossibles* (in French)

Reading Room (2nd Floor)

Chair: Akihiro Kubo (Kwansei Gakuin University)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

2:00 p.m.

Camille Brun (Aix-Marseille Université), “Au seuil de la fiction: Saint-Aubin ou le préfacier impossible” (online)

2:30 p.m.

Maxime Decout (Université Aix-Marseille/Institut Universitaire de France), “Du narrateur menteur au narrateur démembré”

3:00 p.m.

Richard Saint-Gelais (Université Laval), “La narration impossibilisée par sa fiction” (online)

3:30 – 3:50 p.m.

Break

3:50 p.m.

Lolita Felgueiras (Université de Laval), “*J’irai cracher sur vos tombes* ou l’impossible énonciation” (online)

4:20 p.m.

Franck Salaün (Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier), “Paradoxes de l’identité et impossibilités narratives”

Session B: Impossible Beings

Seminar Room (3rd Floor)

Chair: Mario Sluga (Queen Mary University of London)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

2:00 p.m.

Nicolas Correard (Université de Nantes), “Speaking Animals and Unthinkable Thoughts in a Pre-Darwinian Context” (online)

2:30 p.m.

Kai Mikkonen (University of Helsinki), “Impossible Narrative Situations and the Principle of Minimal Departure”

3:00 p.m.

Anke Sharma (Freie Universität Berlin), “We-Narration, Focalization and ‘Impossible’ Perspective” (online)

3:30 – 3:50 p.m.

Break

3:50 p.m.

Annjeanette Wiese (University of Colorado, Boulder), “Impossible Identities: An Exploration of Character and Storyworld in Charles Yu’s *Interior Chinatown*”

4:20 p.m.

Jamie Cawthra (Bloomsbury Institute, London), “Unreliable Narration and Explaining the Impossible (Away)”

Session C: Ethical and Legal Issues

Collaborative Studio (3rd Floor)

Chair: Thomas Pavel (University of Chicago)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

2:00 p.m.

Lena Seauve (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), “The Impossibility of the Perpetrator’s Perspective” (online)

2:30 p.m.

Simona Zetterberg-Nielsen (Aarhus University), “Possible Dangers of Impossible Fictions” (online)

3:30 p.m.

Christine Baron (Université de Poitiers), “Jurisdictions impossibles” (in French)

3:30 – 3:50 p.m.

Break

3:50 p.m.

Otto Pfersmann (EHESS, Paris), “Impossible Pseudo-Norms in Fiction, Law and Morals”

Keynote Lecture

“Impossibility, Fiction, and (Make-)Belief” Murray Smith (University of Kent)

5:00 p.m.
Forum (1st Floor)
[Join via Zoom >](#)

In this talk Murray Smith will open up a new perspective on impossibility in fiction – taken in the broad sense to encompass logical contradictions, contingent impossibilities, and values to which we are “imaginatively resistant.” Taking note of a recently developed position in philosophical aesthetics which disputes the orthodox distinction between fiction (understood in terms of imagining or make-belief) and nonfiction (understood in terms of belief), Smith will argue that fictions both import and export states of belief, and cannot be understood adequately in terms of imagining or make-belief alone.



Murray Smith is Professor of Film and Director of the Aesthetics Research Centre at the University of Kent. He was President of the Society for Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image from 2014 to 2017, and a Laurance S. Rockefeller Fellow at Princeton University's Center for Human Values for 2017-18. His publications include *Film, Art, and the Third Culture: A Naturalized Aesthetics of Film* (Oxford, 2017; revised paperback 2020) and *Trainspotting* (BFI, revised edition 2021). A revised edition of his *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford) is forthcoming.

6:30 p.m.
Reception
Neubauer Collegium
Award of SIRFF/ISFFS Prize

Thursday, March 3

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Parallel Sessions D-F

Session D: Temporal Distortions

Seminar Room (3rd Floor)
Chair: Chiara Nifosi (University of Chicago)
[Join via Zoom >](#)

9:00 a.m.
Kohei Takahashi (Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts), “Value, Genre, Possibility: Contingency and Literature in Modern Japan” (online)

9:30 a.m.
Kaiwei Xia (Hunan Normal University), “Symptomatic *Histoire*, or Don DeLillo's Realist Imagination” (online)

10:00 a.m.
Martin Riedelsheimer (University of Augsburg), “Fictions of Infinity: Reading Beyond Boundaries in 21st-Century Novels”

10:30 – 11:00 a.m.
Break

11:00 a.m.
Katherine Weese (Hampden-Sydney College), “Somebody Telling Somebody Else that Something Did and Did Not Happen”

11:30 a.m.
Julia Elsky (Loyola University Chicago), “Living Backwards: Elsa Triolet's Female Sisyphus”

Session E: Cognition and Imaginative Resistance

Reading Room (2nd Floor)
Chair: Murray Smith (University of Kent)
[Join via Zoom >](#)

9:00 a.m.
Alberto Voltolini and Carola Barbero (University of Turin), “How One Cannot Imagine What One Could Imagine” (online)

9:30 a.m.
Henrik Zetterberg-Nielsen (Aarhus University), “Impossible Fantasies” (online)

10:00 a.m.

Anne Duprat (Université de Picardie-Jules Verne/Institut Universitaire de France), “Anomalous/Abnormal/Unnatural”

10:30 – 11:00 a.m.

Break

11:00 a.m.

Edgar Dubourg (ENS Paris), “The Psychological and Evolutionary Foundations of Impossible Worlds” (online)

11:30 a.m.

Deena Skolnick Weisberg (Villanova University)
“Impossible Elements in Children’s Educational Media” (online)

Session F: La mimésis en question (in French)

Collaborative Studio (3rd Floor)

Chair: Franck Salaün (Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

9:00 a.m.

Fuhito Tachibana (Waseda University), “La ‘sans-mondialité’ en tant qu’impossibilité fictionnelle” (online)

9:30 a.m.

Claude Calame (EHESS, Paris), “Les mythes grecs: pour une pragmatique de la fiction impossible” (online)

10:00 a.m.

Antonino Sorci (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle), “Les camélias de la fiction. Impossibilités narratives et processus interprétatif.”

10:30 – 11:00 a.m.

Break

11:00 a.m.

Amélie Derome (Université Aix-Marseille), “Improbabilités de la fiction et impossibilités de la traduction: les stratégies de post-rationalisation des traducteurs français de *Gulliver’s Travels* de Jonathan Swift de 1727 à nos jours” (online)

A Discussion with Laurent Binet

12:30 – 1:30 p.m.

David Rubenstein Forum, Room 701

[Join via Zoom >](#)

Laurent Binet

In conversation with:

3:30–3:50 p.m.

Break



Alison James (University of Chicago)

Akihiro Kubo (Kwansei Gakuin University)

Françoise Lavocat (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle)

Laurent Binet lives and works in France. His first novel, *HHhH*, was an international bestseller that won the prestigious Prix Goncourt du premier roman, among other prizes. *The 7th Function of Language* won the Prix de la FNAC and Prix Interallié. The bestselling *Civilizations* has won the Grand

Prix de l’Académie française.

Presented in association with the Seminary Co-op Bookstores.

2:00 – 4:50 p.m.

Parallel Sessions G-I

Session G: Impossibilities on Screen

Seminar Room (3rd Floor)

Chair: Marc Downie (University of Chicago)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

2:00 p.m.

Mario Slugan (Queen Mary University of London), “Imaginative Resistance and Objectival Imagining in Film”

2:30 p.m.

Rami Gabriel (Columbia College Chicago), “The Heart of Darkness of Cinema: Orson Welles’ *The Other Side of the Wind*”

3:00 p.m.

Gretchen Busl (Texas Woman’s University), “Alternate Streams: Cognitive Desire and Counterfactual Narrative TV Series” (online)

3:30 – 3:50 p.m.

Break

3:50 p.m.

Caroline Bem (Saint Paul University), “Diptychal Thinking, Paradox, and the (Im)Possibility of Fiction in Greta Gerwig’s Adaptation of *Little Women*” (online)

Session H: Violences sexuelles aux frontières de la représentation: impossibles fictions? (in French)

Collaborative Studio (3rd Floor)

Chair: Charlotte Krauss (Université de Poitiers)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

2:00 p.m.

Véronique Lochert (Université de Haute-Alsace), “La fiction face au viol: (im)possibilités classiques et contemporaines”

2:30 p.m.

Enrica Zanin (Université de Strasbourg), “Sexes impossibles et invraisemblables: pourquoi à la fin de la Renaissance le viol remplace l’amour dans les fictions?”

3:00 p.m.

Zoé Schweitzer (Université de Saint-Étienne), “Mutilations du corps et de la parole: le spectacle impossible du viol de Philomèle?”

Session I: Impossible Spaces

Reading Room (2nd Floor)

Chair: Brian Richardson (University of Maryland)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

2:00 p.m.

Jérôme Pelletier (Institut Jean-Nicod), “Seeing the Impossible with Magritte” (online)

2:30 p.m.

Matthew McGinity (Technical University Dresden), “Impossible Worlds in Virtual Reality” (online)

3:00 p.m.

Sladja Blažan (Bard College Berlin), “Vegetomorphism: Weird Biology in Jeff VanderMeer’s *Annihilation*” (online)

3:50 p.m.

Chiara Nifosi (University of Chicago), “Embracing the Paradox: Rhetorical Strategies of the Impossible in Proust and Beckett”

4:20 p.m.

Victoria Saramago (University of Chicago), “Geographies of Degeographication: Latin America and the Virgin Woods in Mário de Andrade’s *Macunaíma*”

Keynote Lecture

“Are Impossible Fictions Possible?”

Marie-Laure Ryan (Independent Scholar)

5:00 p.m.

Forum (1st Floor)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

In this presentation Marie-Laure Ryan will discuss texts that transgress our intuitive conceptions of time, space, and ontological boundaries, and ask whether these transgressions are a matter of imaginative impossibility or a matter of worlds that are different but still conceivable, like the worlds of fantasy. Ryan will also discuss texts that are impossible not because of what they say but because they could never be written – neither in this world nor in any other one.



Marie-Laure Ryan is an independent scholar based in Colorado. She is the author of *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory* (1991), *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (2001), *Avatars of Story* (2006), *Narrating Space/Spatializing*

Narrative (2016, with Kenneth Foote and Maoz Azaryahu), and over 100 articles. She has also edited several volumes on storytelling and narrative theory. Her scholarly work has earned her the Prize for Independent Scholars (1992) and the Jeanne and Aldo Scaglione Prize for Comparative Literature (2000), both from the Modern Language Association, and she has been the recipient of Guggenheim and NEA fellowships. In 2017 she received the Wayne Booth Life Achievement Award from the International Society for the Study of Narrative.

Friday, March 4

9:00 – 11:00 a.m.

ISFFS General Assembly/Assemblée générale de la SIRFF

Forum (1st Floor)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

11:00 – 11:30 a.m.

Break

11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Parallel Sessions J-K

Session J: Affordances des médias (in French)

Reading Room (2nd Floor)

Chair: Khalid Lyamlahy (University of Chicago)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

11:30 a.m.

Olivier Caïra (Université Paris-Saclay, Centre Pierre Naville/CRAL), “Le paradoxe du goof – Qui a besoin de fictions possibles?” (online)

12:00 p.m.

Alexis Hassler (Independent Scholar), “*There Is No Game, Pony Island*, le glitch vidéoludique ou la narration impossible” (online)

12:30 p.m.

Jean-Bernard Cheymol (Université Paris Saclay/Université Sorbonne nouvelle), “Une fiction impossible à suivre? 3” de Marc-Antoine Mathieu”

Session K: Theory of Fiction

Seminar Room (3rd Floor)

Chair: Larry Norman (University of Chicago)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

11:30 a.m.

Manuel García-Carpintero Sánchez-Miguel (University of Barcelona), “Against the *Mere Pretense* View of Fiction” (online)

12:00 p.m.

John Pier (CRAL – CNRS/EHESS), “Competing Narratives”

12:30 p.m.

Nicholas Paige (University of California Berkeley), “Narration, Description, Fiction”

1:00 – 2:30 p.m.

Lunch Break

Fictional Worlds, Fictional Possibilities: A Roundtable in Honor of Thomas Pavel

2:30 – 3:30 p.m.

Forum (1st Floor)

Chair: Nicholas Paige (University of California, Berkeley)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

Anne Duprat (Université de Picardie-Jules Verne)

Françoise Lavocat (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle)

Larry Norman (University of Chicago)

Marie-Laure Ryan (Independent Scholar)



Thomas Pavel is Emeritus Professor in Romance Languages and Literatures, Comparative Literature, and Social Thought at the University of Chicago. His works ask three major questions: What makes literary works intelligible? How do they interact with human moral concerns? How does diversity and competition shape literary-cultural history? He is the author of *Fictional Worlds* (1986), *The Spell of Language: Post-structuralism and speculation* (1989), *L'Art de l'éloignement. Essai sur l'imagination classique* (1996), *La Pensée du roman* (2003), and *The Lives of the Novel* (2013).

3:30 – 3:50 p.m.

Break

3:50 – 4:50 p.m.

Parallel Sessions L-M

Session L: Graphic Paradoxes

Reading Room (2nd Floor)

Chair: Kai Mikkonen (University of Helsinki)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

3:50 p.m.

Charlotte Krauss (Université de Poitiers), “ ‘...for Time is Space and Space is Time’: When Comic Books Defy the Laws of Fiction”

4:20 p.m.

Elizabeth A. Oakes (University of Helsinki), “Ameliorative Impossibility: Thematics in Vandermeer’s *Borne* and Dalrymple’s *The Wrenchies*” (online)

Session M: Intermedial Extensions

Seminar Room (3rd Floor)

Chair: Patrick Jagoda (University of Chicago)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

3:50 p.m.

Tonguc Sezen (Teesside University), “Epistolary Paratexts at the Threshold of Both Text and Fiction” (online)

4:20 p.m.

Annick Louis (Université de Franche-Comté/EHESS), “A Flawless Masterpiece. *The Big Bang Theory*, *Indiana Jones*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and fictional immersion”

KEYNOTE LECTURE

“Plotting against Probability: Unruly Sequences, Impossible Fictions, Contradictory Worlds”

Brian Richardson (University of Maryland)

5:00 p.m.

Forum (1st Floor)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

In this talk Brian Richardson will reflect on the concept of probability in fiction and the lack of a corresponding notion of improbable fiction. He will discuss ways that contradiction is theorized in narrative poetics, both at the local level and at the level of fictional worlds. The talk will conclude with an analysis of multiversion narratives – that is, ones in which, unknown to the characters, many of the same key scenes, events, and settings are repeated and varied.



Brian Richardson is a Professor of English at the University of Maryland, where he teaches modern and postmodern literature and narrative theory. He is the author or co-author of several books on narrative theory, including *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction* (2006), *A Poetics*

of Plot for the Twenty-first Century: Theorizing Unruly Narratives (2019), and, most recently, *Essays on Narrative and Fictionality: Reassessing Nine Central Concepts* (2021). Richardson has edited or co-edited numerous collections of essays on narrative theory, including the anthologies *Narrative Beginnings: Theories and Practices* (2009) and, with Jan Alber, *Unnatural Narratology: Extensions, Revisions, and Challenges* (2020). He is currently working on reading and misreading in modern fiction.

7:30 p.m.

Dinner

Quadrangle Club Solarium

Saturday, March 5

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Parallel Sessions N–P

Session N: Fact and Fiction

Forum (1st Floor)

Chair: Anne Duprat (Université de Picardie-Jules Verne/Institut Universitaire de France)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

9:00 a.m.

Guido Furci (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle), “*Le Rapport sur Auschwitz* de Primo Levi et Leonardo De Benedetti (entre fait et fiction?): genèse/analyse d’une ‘anomalie nécessaire.’ ” (online)

9:30 a.m.

Delphine Edy (Sorbonne Université/Université de Strasbourg), “Transfuges de classe (D. Eribon, É. Louis): Fiction littéraire impossible vs. reconstruction fictionnelle en scène ?” (online)

10:00 a.m.

Camelia Paquette (Université de Sherbrooke), “*HHhH* ou le roman sans fiction (im)possible” (online)

10:30 – 11:00 a.m.

Break

11:00 a.m.

Jeppe Barnwell (Society for Danish Language and Literature/ University of Copenhagen), “Impossibility in Pseudo-Factuality”

11:30 a.m.

Dunja Dušanić (University of Belgrade, European Graduate School), “The Non-Fiction Novel as an Impossible Genre”

Session O: Impossibilités politiques et éthiques/Political and Ethical Impossibilities (in French and English)

Seminar Room (3rd Floor)

Chair: Maxime Decout (Université Aix-Marseille/Institut Universitaire de France)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

9:00 a.m.

Irina Holca (University of Tokyo), “The Paradox of Socialist Realism: Japan and the Orient as (Improbable) Tropes in Romanian Historical Fiction” (online)

9:30 a.m.

Maria Anna Mariani (University of Chicago), “Catastrophe and the Historical Novel: Elsa Morante’s *La Storia*” (online)

10:00 a.m.

Mathilde Zbaeren (Université de Lausanne), “Collecting the Voices of the Rwandan Genocide: Rewriting and Fictionalizing”

10:30–11:00 a.m.

Break

11:00 a.m.

Patrick Maurus (INALCO, Paris), “Le fictif comme solution au fictionnel impossible: Des Nord-Coréens dans le cinéma sud-coréen” (online)

11:30 a.m.

Alexandre Gefen (CNRS/Université Sorbonne Nouvelle), “La mise en fiction du terrorisme contemporain: nécessité ou interdit? Une comparaison France-USA” (online)

Session P: Fantasy, the Fantastic, and Science Fiction (in French)

Reading Room (2nd Floor)

Chair: Marie-Laure Ryan (Independent Scholar)

[Join via Zoom >](#)

9:00 a.m.

Laurent Bazin (Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines), “L’âge de tous les (im)possibles? Formes et enjeux de l’im-plausibilité dans les fictions pour adolescents” (online)

9:30 a.m.

Monique Villen (Universidad Francisco de Vitoria), “La science-fiction: imaginer l’impossible”

10:00 a.m.

Aurore Noury (CRAL/EHESS), “Les contradictions du corpus fictif de Tolkien, ou le creuset d’un renouveau de l’imaginaire”

10:30 – 11:00 a.m.

Break

11:00 a.m.

Simon Bréan (Sorbonne Université), “Faire vivre l’impossible: fonctions des protagonistes dans les récits de science-fiction” (online)

11:30 a.m.

Tiako Djomatchoua Murielle Sandra (Princeton University), “Des fictions impossibles? *Ceux qui sortent dans la nuit*, une théorisation du fantastique africain” (online)

About the Possible and Impossible Fictions Project

The “Possible and Impossible Fictions” project at the Neubauer Collegium builds on the intellectual exchanges begun by the “Fact and Fiction” Neubauer Collegium project (2016–17), while orienting them toward new research questions. The first project took the contested border between fact and fiction as the point of departure for a cross-disciplinary dialogue, in a moment when “alternative facts” and “post-truth” politics had become a central preoccupation in public discourse. The project leaders now turn to a different area in the study of fiction and fictionality: that of possibilities and impossibilities in and of fiction. Fiction has long been associated with possibility and plausibility—with the construction of plots that are governed by a certain causal logic. But how exactly does fiction model our understanding of what is possible in the real world? Conversely, how does our sense of what is possible in reality constrain what is perceived to be possible or impossible in fictional worlds? Finally, are certain subjects off-limits to fictional representation? If these questions are not new ones, they have taken on a renewed urgency in the twenty-first century: in a context where our “real-world” conceptions of possibility and predictability are shifting in the face of global crisis, how can (or should) fiction present current or future possibilities?

About the Neubauer Collegium

The Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society explores new possibilities for humanistic research by fostering an environment in which new forms of thinking emerge and thrive. Research projects sponsored by the Neubauer Collegium bring together scholars and practitioners whose collaboration is required to address and solve complex challenges. Our Visiting Fellows program brings the best minds from around the world for collaboration, animating the intellectual and creative environment on campus and strengthening ties between the University and its global partners. Our gallery exhibitions express creative ideas in the context of collaborative research, enabling thought and creativity to move in whatever directions they need to go to address problems of human significance.

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