**Research Seminar on Degrees of Fictionality**
University of Chicago Center in Paris
6, rue Thomas Mann, 75013 Paris

**June 4-7, 2024**

**Tuesday June 4**

9:30 a.m. CET    Opening remarks: Alison James, Akihiro Kubo, Françoise Lavocat

10:00 a.m.    Stacie Friend, University of Edinburgh
"Dimensions of Fictionality"

12:00 p.m.    Lunch

2:00 p.m.    Marie-Laure Ryan, independent scholar
"Gradual or Binary? Folk theories vs. Formal Theories of Fictionality"

**Wednesday June 5**

10:00 a.m.    Monika Fludernik, University of Freiburg
"Graded Fictionality: Degrees of Non-Factuality and Hybridizations"

12:00 p.m.    Lunch

2:00 p.m.    Kohei Takahashi, Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts
"Factors Influencing the Degree of Fiction's Influence on Beliefs"

**Thursday June 6**

10:00 a.m.    Françoise Lavocat, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle and IUF
"The Border between Fact and Fiction: Contemporary Challenges"

12:00 p.m.    Lunch

2:00 p.m.    Matthieu Letourneux, Université Paris Nanterre
"'Non ce n'est pas un roman': Factual Articles and Fictional Models in the Popular Press"

**Friday June 7**

10:00 a.m.    Simona Zetterberg-Nielsen, Aarhus University
"Degrees of Fictionality in the Rise of Fiction."

12:00 p.m.    Lunch

2:00 p.m.    Discussion and Conclusions – all participants

# Abstracts

**Stacie Friend, "Dimensions of Fictionality"**

Properties that come in degrees are scalar properties which can be measured along a single dimension. Proponents of the idea that fictionality is such a property typically (though not always) contrast it with 'factuality', so that a representation that departs more from real-world facts is 'more fictional/less factual' whereas one that stays closer to those facts is 'less fictional/more factual'. There is no doubt that the term 'fictional' can be used in this way; but I argue that this usage sheds little light on how works (texts, films, etc.) should be classified as fiction or non-fiction. This is because classification as fiction or non-fiction turns on multiple dimensions of a work, rather than a single value. In this paper I consider what these dimensions are, and argue that 'borderline' cases are better explained by the multi-dimensional approach than by taking fictionality to come in degrees.

**Marie-Laure Ryan, "Gradual or Binary? Folk theories vs. Formal Theories of Fictionality"**

This presentation begins by examining a number of narratives that combine facts and fiction in ways that challenge the conventions of culturally established genres: fictions that consist wholly or mostly of facts, and factual narratives that contain non-verified information. Folk (intuitive) theories of fiction account for such phenomena by regarding fictionality as a gradual concept, yet most formal theories are binary. One exception is the rhetorical theory of fictionality, proposed by Nielsen, Phelan and Walsh (2015), which distinguishes a global level of fictionality from a local level, so that texts can be more or less fictional on the local level depending on their combination of fact and fiction. I contrast the rhetorical theory with a world-based theory that associates fictionality with imaginary worlds, and regards all the statements of a fictional text as contributing to the construction of this world, rather than segregating fictional from nonfictional statements. I also compare how each theory conceives the communicative purpose of fiction: expressing messages about the real world for the rhetorical theory, creating fictional worlds for the sake of the pleasure we take in the act of imagining them for the world-based theory.

**Monika Fludernik, "Graded Fictionality: Degrees of Non-Factuality and Hybridizations"**

Starting out from Gerald Prince's distinction between *narrativehood* and *narrativity*, the latter a graded concept, this paper will discuss the question of whether fictionality has to be an either/or or a graded concept from a narratological perspective. It will start by reconsidering the fact vs. fiction divide, especially in the light of the oppositions of non-fiction and non-factual. Another aspect to discuss will be the distinction between fictionality and fictivity (a typically German(ic) differentiation). I will then go on to analyze situations in which fact and fiction are mixed (key concept: hybridity) and proceed to discuss possible instances of grading fictionality under the titles of undecidability and refunctionalization. Given the fact that I espouse Françoise Lavocat's institutional definition of fictionality, any grading will ultimately be a social process rather than a textual one.

**Kohei Takahashi, "Factors Influencing the Degree of Fiction's Influence on Beliefs"**

Reading fictional works can alter readers' beliefs about the real world, particularly concerning facts, values, and norms. This paper introduces the concept of the Degree of Fiction's Influence on Beliefs (DFIB), which represents the extent to which fictional works can transform readers'

beliefs about reality. Our goal is to lay the theoretical groundwork for further research on DFIB, enhancing our understanding of how fictional literature influences readers' perceptions of reality.

Currie (2020) examines the mechanisms through which fiction affects readers' beliefs, exploring how readers form new beliefs about the real world from fiction, even when they cannot be certain that the fiction asserts anything about the real world. Currie identifies factors including "the author's reliability," "genre," "narrative value," and "the availability heuristic."

Expanding on Currie's analysis, this study suggests additional factors such as paratexts, reading motivation, and interpretive practices. We organize these factors into four categories: text-related, author-related, reader-related, and context-related. Text-related factors cover semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic elements, while author-related factors involve the author's perceived trustworthiness and background. Reader-related factors include knowledge, immersion, and cognitive biases, while context-related factors account for the cultural, historical, and social contexts surrounding the work, along with its critical reception and public discourse.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive framework for investigating the factors that influence DFIB, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between fictional literature and readers' beliefs about reality.

Currie, G. (2020). *Imagining and Knowing: The Shape of Fiction*. Oxford University Press.


**Françoise Lavocat, "The Border between Fact and Fiction: Contemporary Challenges"**

In this paper, I propose to examine the question of degrees of fictionality in the light of the question of fake news and conspiracy sayings. This is not a simple question, because fiction and lies have long been linked. If we were to exclude from the realm of fictionality fiction whose paratext is misleading (which is, as Nicholas Paige has shown, the case of all French fiction up to the end of the eighteenth century), the field of fictional works would be drastically reduced to the last two centuries, which is unacceptable. Following this observation, I propose to examine the extent to which degrees of fictionality can be admitted, and I come to the conclusion that they can only be envisaged in the case of hybrid works. I also show that these degrees are impossible to formalise, while proposing an attempt at categorisation. Finally, I exclude fake news and conspiratorial discourse from the realm of fiction, showing that this can only be done by means of internal signposts of fictionality.


**Matthieu Letourneux, " 'Non ce n'est pas un roman': Factual Articles and Fictional Models in the Popular Press"**

This presentation will consider a wide range of popular periodicals (tabloids, news publications, erotica and the popular press) that play with the intertexts of fiction—and sometimes propose ambiguous devices—to promote a sensational (i.e., aesthetic) reading of what are presented as factual texts.


**Simona Zetterberg-Nielsen, "Degrees of Fictionality in the Rise of Fiction"**

Two competing views on the history of fiction dominate the scholarly domain: One strand argues that a radical change in the history of literature gave birth to the novel around the 18th century; and another contends that the history of prose fiction stretches all the way back to the ancient or medieval times. In recent years, the opposition between the positions has been foregrounded by a disagreement regarding fictionality. In her article "The Rise of Fictionality" (2006) Catherine Gallagher argues that fictionality changed so dramatically in the 18th century that it came to form the novel as a new genre. Theorists such as Monika Fludernik (2018), Julie

Orlemanski (2019), Michelle Karnes (2020) and Benedict S. Robinson (2024) among others have, however, opposed Gallagher's thesis by providing evidence that fictionality predates the 18th century. In my paper, I am going to suggest that a reconceptualization and separation of fictionality as a rhetorical strategy and fiction as a genre provides a new framework for outlining the history of fiction. My suggestion is that fictionality has a long history while fiction as a genre is a relatively new invention. From this outset, I contend that whereas fiction is a question of either-or, we might think of fictionality in terms of degrees. Whereas it is possible to locate the historical moments in which fiction was solidified as a genre, fictionality has a developmental history which both precedes and surpasses the novel. I am going to suggest that we may profitably think of a history of fiction and a history of fictionality, separately and that this lends us a perspective in which we witness an increasing degree of fictionality in the novel throughout the 18th century, even beyond the establishment of fiction as a genre.