

# Paris-Groningen Van Gogh workshop

## Fiction, Lies, Pretence

Book of abstracts

December 2-3, 2019

**Organisation:**

Louis Rouillé, Emar Maier, Paul Égré

**Venue:**

École normale supérieure

[29 rue d'Ulm, 75005 Paris](#)

**Dec. 2nd:** Salle Paul Langevin (1st floor)

**Dec. 3rd:** Salle U207 (2nd floor)

The abstracts are presented in alphabetical order.

# Half-truths and the Liar

Paul Égré

*Institut Jean Nicod*

**Abstract:**

A half-truth may be defined as a sentence that is true in one sense, but that fails to be true in another sense. This paper discusses some aspects in which the Liar may be considered a half-truth. Talk of half-truths, like talk of half-full containers, implies that truth is gradable, and moreover that some sentences can be true without being perfectly true. I review some evidence for the view that “true” and “false” are absolute gradable adjectives (Henderson 2019, Égré 2019), and discuss the implications of the view for both dialetheism and the strict-tolerant account of the Liar (Cobreros et al. 2013). The view that the Liar is a half-truth is controversial. For a dialetheist, the Liar is both true and false, but to say this is to consider that the sentence is both perfectly true and perfectly false, only that it fails to be “just true” or “just false” (Priest 2019). Likewise, while the strict-tolerant account was initially conceived for vague predicates, its extension to the semantic paradoxes assumed that assertion, but not truth, comes in different degrees. I argue that we get a better explanation for the unified treatment of paradoxes of vagueness and truth offered by ST if we consider that “true” is a special kind of vague predicate indeed, namely an absolute gradable adjective.

# Fraudulent fictions

Stacie Friend

*Birkbeck College*

**Abstract:**

Some people, like the readers who sued Lance Armstrong over his false autobiographies, assume that deceptive non-fiction works are really fictions in disguise. They locate the fraud in the label rather than the content. From this perspective, if only Armstrong had called his books 'fiction' there would have been no grounds for criticism and no fraud. But that is surely incorrect. Many works labelled 'fiction' come under intense scrutiny for factual inaccuracy, their creators accused of deception. In this paper I explore the ways in which works of both fiction and non-fiction generate and frustrate expectations of accuracy. I argue that there can be fraudulent fictions: fictions that are deceptive, including by telling lies.

# Lying with non-assertions

Grzegorz Gaszczyk

*University of Groningen*

## **Abstract:**

According to the consensus view, we can lie only with assertions. The proponents of the assertion-based definitions of lying define lying as insincere assertions (e.g., Carson 2006, Sorensen 2007, Fallis 2009, Stokke 2018). Recently, however, some proposed to extend the possibility of lying to other speech acts (e.g., promises (Marsili 2016), questions (Viebahn at al. 2018)) or to so-called subordinate or auxiliary speech acts (e.g., conversational implicatures (Meibauer 2014), conventional implicatures (Stokke 2017), presuppositions (Viebahn 2019)).

Although I agree that lies are not necessarily assertions, I will argue against some of the above extensions of lying into non-assertoric speech acts. I will focus on questions and presuppositions since these two were recently linked and tested in an experimental study (Viebahn at al. 2018). The study aims to show that questions having false presuppositions should be regarded as lies. I argue that this does not establish that we can lie with questions. Rather, it raises the question whether we can lie with presuppositions. I will criticize Viebahn (2019) who claims that “presuppositional lies are assertions”. I will follow García-Carpintero’s (2018) proposal that presuppositions can be treated as speech acts (although ancillary ones). This will allow for seeing that insincerity of assertions and presuppositions violate a different kind of norms.

# A Functionalist Account of Deceptive Pretense

CANCELLED

**Benjamin Icard**

*Institut Jean Nicod*

Pretense is pervasive in nature, in particular deceptive pretense. In this conference, I focus on two forms of pretense, namely *camouflage* and *faking*, to defend a functionalist account of deceptive pretense. *Camouflage* is famously used by armies, for instance to make soldiers invisible in the battlefield. But *faking* is also commonly practiced, for instance to endorse someone else's identity on social media. In camouflage, one pretends *not* to exist when he or she exists in reality. In faking, one pretends to be different as he or she is in reality. Apart from humans, the use of deceptive pretense is comparable and even richer in the animal kingdom. Amongst insects, butterflies show the greatest variety of deceptive disguises. Some butterflies can rely on *crypsis* to blend into their surroundings while others may benefit from *mimicry* to avoid predation. In this latter case of so-called "Batesian mimicry" [see Bates, 1861], *palatable* butterflies have evolved to fake the warning signals of other butterflies that are *unpalatable* to predators.

Seen from the outside, *camouflage* can be identified to *crypsis* while *faking* is analogue to *mimicry*. Those strategies are relatively *indistinguishable* from an external perspective. That being said, however, deceptive pretense is seen as different in the human versus animal realm. Humans being intentional entities, their deceptive pretense is assumed as "*intentional*": *the deceiver causes the addressee to hold a false belief, — intentionally*. Contrariwise, animal deceptive pretense is seen as purely "*functional*" since animals lack intentions as cognitively unsophisticated species. Consistent with natural selection, (non-human) animals have simply *evolved to have the function of misleading potential predators*. Different perspectives exist on this "*misleading function*" but the main interpretation comes from Skyrms. According to Skyrms [2010, 80], deception should "*benefit the sender at the expense of the receiver*". Since then, Fallis [2014] as well as others [e.g. Artiga & Paternotte 2017], have proposed a variant of this account: *a signal can qualify as deceptive even when the receiver does not suffer any cost*.

In this talk, I support Fallis' view in case of deceptive pretense. I argue that in *camouflage*, like in *crypsis*, the sender does not impose any cost on the receiver since the sender remains undetected in its surroundings. In *faking*, the sender endorses a false identity but the content of its signal can be perfectly *accurate*, and thus innocuous to the receiver. For instance, humans may keep telling the truth under fake pseudonyms or disguises. In the animal kingdom, the corresponding *mimicry*

is called “Müllerian” and usually considered *non-deceptive* in contrast to Batesian mimicry [see Müller 1878]. In the Müllerian case, *already* unpalatable species have evolved to imitate *other* unpalatable species. Despite the non-deceptive reading, I defend that Müllerian mimicry, like *faking*, is more surely *semi-deceptive* than *non-deceptive*. Though they notify their unpalatability, mimics remain silent regarding their true identities.

# Fact, fiction, hoaxes and pathos

Françoise Lavocat

*Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3*

## Abstract:

My paper is based on the assumption that hoaxes provide the ideal environment for examining the question of the existence and nature of signposts of factuality.

In certain respects, hoaxes function like a magnifying glass for signposts of factuality. Even more, the vast majority of hoaxes are a testament to the privilege of the factual; readers often avidly cling to them, proving both a great blindness and great aptness to enrich and prolong their pleasure in being deceived. My purpose is to explore the extent to which hoaxes set up and procure this pleasure, notably drawing upon *The Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (1669) and their unusual reception, as well as *Marbot* (1985). What kinds of signposts of factuality play a strategic role in these texts? They can be defined both negatively (in avoiding novelistic conventions as well as fictional language) and positively (in including elements that make one believe in the referentiality of the wording and the possibility of confirming its accuracy). I also divided them into three categories. The first brings together the pragmatic framework in both the paratext and the text itself. The second category concerns the respect of generic conventions. The third category of signposts of factuality is stylistic. I analyze in particular this third category, which is not wholly determined by literary conventions.

Then, in the second section of the paper, I emphasize the compositional fragility of signpost of factuality in an interpretive context. Moreover most of the signposts that allow readers to carry out an evaluation of probability are fluctuating, ambivalent, and dependent on historical, cultural, literary, individual, and collective contexts. To summarize, internal signposts of fictionality and factuality certainly exist, because hoaxes exploit or avoid them. But these signposts are extremely ambivalent and susceptible to switching sides, due to both overuse and readers very diverse encyclopedias.

In the last part of my paper, I try to highlight the pleasure of factuality, thanks to a cognitive approach, mainly relying on Anna Abraham's work in neuroscience. According to her, the difference between fact and fiction resides in their degree of self-relevance – that is to say, the relationship to oneself created by factual and fictional scenarios. Real entities are, in certain respects, more interesting than fictional creatures, because we have more information on them and because they touch our lives more closely. Admittedly, fictional entities also have a tendency to elicit an emotional investment; but those containing referential entities, as opposed to fictional scenarios, mobilize neuronal networks linked to our relationship to self

and others, empathy, and emotions in general.

The reception of successful hoaxes confirms that this privilege resides in the heightened degree of the relationship to oneself, and of empathy, as correlated to emotions and moral assessments. I argue that successful hoaxes often give way to what we could call remedial actions (as we can see with the male answers to the *Letters of the Portuguese nun*). This may explain why interest in a text always drastically decreases when it is revealed to contain a hoax.

To conclude I argue that fictional and factual texts are profoundly different – not just because of their internal criteria regarding fictionality or their pragmatic framework, but most importantly because of the reading modes they create and require. A peculiar interdependence of modalities, associated with strong emotional participation, seems characteristic of hoaxes. This would explain, on the one hand, why the reader is ready to sacrifice the pathetic dimension of narrative tension, inherent to the introduction of plots in cinematographic or novelistic works of fiction, to taste the (in some way) boring fruits of factuality.



# The semantics and pragmatics of point of view in film

**Emar Maier**

*University of Groningen*

**Abstract:**

A film is a sequence of shots, edited together to convey a coherent story. The shot, depicting a number of individuals and eventualities in a single run of the camera, is the primary unit of semantic interpretation in film, like the panel in a comic strip or the utterance in an oral narrative. Semantically, film is closely related to comics. Both are forms of visual storytelling, with discourse units that express propositions primarily through geometric projection rather than through a compositional grammar and lexicon. This investigation of film semantics takes as its starting point Maier & Bimpikou's (2019) PicDRT framework designed for the interpretation of wordless comics (in turn based on Abusch 2012). I'll extend PicDRT to deal with shots, event reference, and discourse relations. As a first case study we'll then take a closer look at some forms of "perspective shifting" in film.

# Parafictional statements

CANCELLED

**François Récanati**

*Collège de France*

**Abstract:**

The following theses form a prima facie inconsistent triad:

1. (Simulation) In a fictional statement, a fictional name such as ‘Holmes’ or ‘Frodo’ only pretends to refer. As a result, a fictional statement is neither true nor false.
2. (Semantic Innocence) A fictional name such as ‘Holmes’ or ‘Frodo’ works the same way in a fictional statement (‘Frodo is F’) and in the corresponding parafictional statement (‘In Lord of the Rings Frodo is F’).
3. (Truth) A parafictional statement such as ‘In Lord of the Rings Frodo is F’ can be true or false.

Radical simulationists want to preserve both Simulation and Semantic Innocence, at the cost of giving up Truth. Simulation and Truth can be held together at the cost of giving up Semantic Innocence. Giving up Simulation (as descriptivists do) makes it possible to preserve Semantic Innocence and Truth. But can we do better? Can we preserve Simulation, Truth, and Semantic Innocence? I will argue, very tentatively, that we can.

# Export of fictional truth as analogical reasoning

Merel Semeijn

*University of Groningen*

**Abstract:**

It is generally assumed that export of fictional truth (i.e. learning facts about the real world from engaging with fiction) is possible because a fictional narrative may contain (indirect) assertions of the author besides fictional statements. Friend (2011) has distinguished two “patchwork problems” with such views that according to Carcía-Carpintero (2013) can only be solved by opting for a normative account of speech acts. In this presentation I argue that the patchwork problems can be avoided in a traditional Gricean account if we analyse fiction as a “knitwork” of fictional statements (i.e. as not containing any assertions) and analyse export as being based on analogical reasoning with so-called “parafictional beliefs” of the form “In fiction  $f$ ,  $\varphi$ ”. I argue that the proposed view offers a uniform analysis of export of general truths, export of presuppositional content and export from other media than verbal narratives.