

## **Working Title**

*Altered Cognition and Fictionality in Contemporary Science Fiction*

## **Synopsis**

This project will analyse the role of fictionality in works that feature protagonists whose cognition has been altered by (fictional) science or technology. It will examine the narrative depiction of innovations such as brain implants that connect characters to a computer, or nano-drugs that allow them to communicate quasi-telepathically with other nano-drug users. Such innovations are often portrayed as having far-reaching societal consequences and philosophical implications. They also problematize the narrative construction of fact and fiction, both within the characters' world and from an extratextual perspective. Hence, this project's line of enquiry will focus on the epistemological and phenomenological considerations that narrative depictions of technological and scientific innovations typically entail. The direct relevance that actual scientific findings often have for science fiction is an issue inherently connected to this line of enquiry and will be equally central.

This interdisciplinary project is located in the field of literature and science and will be based on a narratological approach, as well as the following three theories or concepts. The cognitive sciences will provide the foundation for understanding the construction of characters' perception, knowledge, and thought in fiction. Then, possible-worlds theory as adapted for literary studies (e.g. by Marie-Laure Ryan; Lubomír Doležel) will allow me to draw a comparison between the textual world and the reader's extratextual world. Lastly, the concept of fictionality, which is closely related to possible-worlds theory and its inherent epistemological concerns, will help evaluate fictional cognition and its impact. The analysis of books that centrally thematise altered cognition will yield significant insights into depictions of the nature of cognition, of knowledge processing and construction, and, by extension, of what it means to be human.