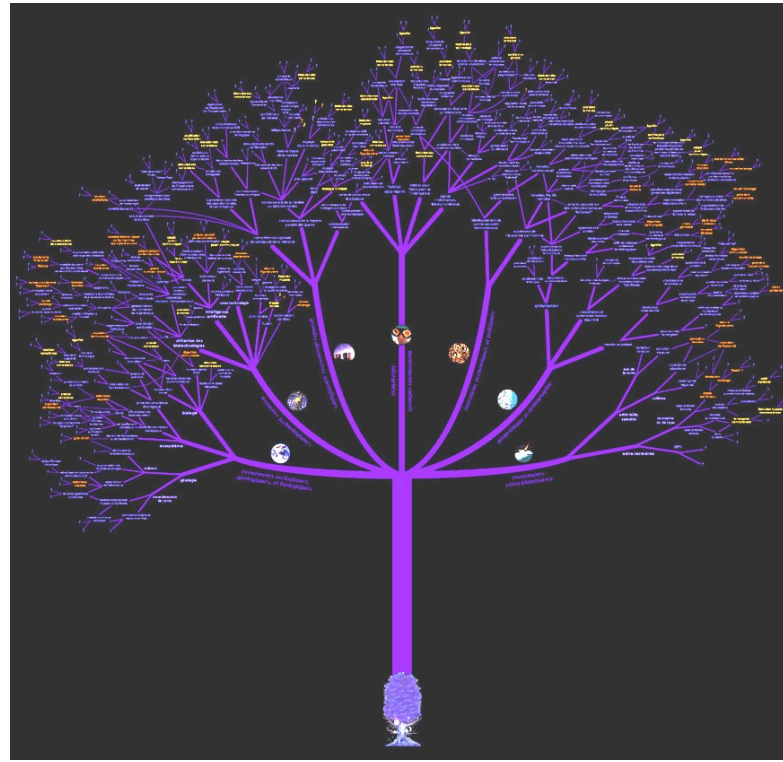


# FRENCH 420 Scientifiction ou La littérature du Si

Can literature help us construct better futures in the real world? Some science-fiction writers think so. The image on this page is a map of hypothetical futures for humanity. It is from a web site by a young French science-fiction author Bernard Werber, called “l’arbre des possibles” (based on a book which we will also read.) It is an internet futurology project: a collaborative and ongoing effort to map the different directions human society might take based on projected permutations of scientific discoveries and social change represented by the different branches of the tree. A few branches lead to utopian ideal futures, others to mass destruction, and Werber truly believes that science fiction authors can lead the way into the future through their imagining of the consequences of technological advances. In this class, we’ll put Werber’s “arbre des possibles” to the test as we read works of French “speculative fiction” to understand what kinds of worlds they imagine, and why. What happens when the seemingly vast possibilities of science and technology are allied with the equally vast possibilities of fiction, and is scientific knowledge even compatible with fiction?



The readings, discussions, and assignments will all be in French. Students will be responsible for weekly reading responses and structured discussions on Canvas; bringing discussion questions to class; presenting on a contemporary popular-scientific debate related to the readings; two short in-class quizzes; a short research assignment; and a final paper or non-traditional alternative.

What sorts of fears and hopes about our techno-futures show up in speculative fiction? What ethical questions does science make us confront? We will see that often, the very definition and survival of “the human” is at stake in these books, and we will identify some of the problems with such definitions of humanity. We will also critique the ways in which speculative fiction can reproduce rather than challenge existing social inequities, especially gender and race. We will consider what might be specifically French about the books we read and the questions they raise. Ultimately, we will test the theory that speculative fiction offers a kind of laboratory for imagining the kinds of futures we could inhabit. Students will be encouraged to make connections with contemporary debates about science and morality (artificial intelligence, over-dependence on technology, genetic modification, the human-animal divide, etc.) While the class is based on reading works of literature, I hope you will be surprised at how wide-ranging and relevant the conversations can be!

**Spring 2021 - Prof. Louisa Mackenzie - Taught in French**

**Asynchronous course with an optional class meeting Thursdays 2:30-3:50pm on Zoom**