Panel 8. Nabokov’s practice of detail and its reverberations through American fiction: the aesthetics of detail in the literature of the United States. Marie Bouchet (Toulouse 2 JeanJaurès), Suzanne Fraysse (Aix-Marseille) As a writer, a literature professor, a translator or an entomologist, Vladimir Nabokov gave preeminent importance to details: for his Cornell students, he would draw a map of Stephen Dedalus’s rambling through Dublin in Ulysses, or sketch the tennis apparel sported by Tolstoy’s characters, and would instruct them that “in reading, one should notice and fondle details” (Lectures on Literature, 11). Nabokov had an acute sense of observation, sharpened by his entomological practice and his émigré status which cast him in the role of an outside observer; this is maybe why in his American works he developed specific aesthetics based on details— works that profoundly reflect the paradoxes of detail as revealed by art historian Daniel Arasse in his study of detail in the history of painting. In Nabokov’s texts just as in other American writers’ fiction, one can observe the tension Arasse underscored between the mimetic verisimilitude of detail and the meticulous work on language that self-reflexively indicates the literary process at play. Details are not only the ideal tools to produce referential illusions (Hamon) or “reality effects” (Barthes), but also potent metafictional emblems, as exemplified by Steven Millhauser’s extraordinary miniatures. Details can also be points of stasis in the story, but such descriptive pauses can paradoxically spur narrative digressions (Louvel), as if details were some sort of narrative push-button—like the “question mark of a hair” that Humbert notices in the bathroom during his survey of the Haze house. Is Nabokov’s status as an exile the only reason why he pays such close attention to the details of the world around him, or could it be the conjunction of such a situation with his own appropriation of the English language, which he considered superior to Russian for its precision (“our wise, precise, plastic, beautiful English language”, he wrote to Edmund Wilson in 1943)? Nabokov’s prose is probably the furthest removed from Hemingway’s, in its abundance of details, multicolored images, sounds and sensations, and it therefore offers an alternative to the iceberg theory and to the aesthetics of concision often set up as a model in the United States. May literary detail work differently in exuberant prose than in drier prose? This workshop invites papers reflecting on how detail may be the paradoxical center of Nabokov’s aesthetics, and on what use American writers make of this complex literary object. To what extent have American writers followed, or rejected, the Nabokovian art of detail? Contact: marie.bouchet@univ-tlse2.fr/suzanne.fraysse@univ-amu.fr