

## SESSION ONE—READINGS

Read these to think about the writing of information and disinformation:

[http://art.yale.edu/file\\_columns/0000/0066/borges.pdf](http://art.yale.edu/file_columns/0000/0066/borges.pdf)

<https://granta.com/the-boys-of-karachay-lake/>

<https://granta.com/why-were-post-fact/>

INTRO:

ART HAS A DOUBLE FACE, OF EXPRESSION AND ILLUSION, JUST LIKE SCIENCE HAS A DOUBLE FACE: THE REALITY OF ERROR AND THE PHANTOM OF TRUTH.

— [René Daumal](#)

'The Lie of the Truth'. (1938)

The ultimate, and ultimately unfinished novel of [René Daumal](#), French author of the above quote, was the story of a disparate group of adventurers who set out for an island in the South Pacific which, thanks to a trick of light, atmosphere, magnetism and ocean currents, is functionally invisible to the human eye. The principle feature of the hidden island is a mystical mountain called Mount Analogue\* that the adventurers must climb. Daumal, tragically died of tuberculosis before he could complete the tale, and the book was abandoned mid-sentence. It manages nonetheless to chronicle the discovery of the island, and the ascension of the travelers up Mount Analogue, whose “summit must be inaccessible, but its base accessible to human beings as nature made them.” Both the journey and the location take on an allegorical shade, and the story is peopled with an Alice in Wonderland-esque variety of conundrums, strange characters, and bespoke logics. Nonetheless, the idea of scaling the inaccessible heights of a fantastical mountain on a hidden island feels like a fitting description of an attempt to discover something, in this day and age, approximating truth or reality.

## HIDDEN MEANINGS: CREATIVE FICTION, NON-FICTION, AND FACTS

The pieces in this section of the course invite different discussions around these ideas of reality, truth, fact, and illusion. While in the third piece, we might agree with the author that the shift toward “narrative” in the media is little more than a palatable synonym for government-sanctioned deception, manipulation, and perhaps even propaganda; we might find ourselves in the second piece staunchly desecrating the fantastical elements of the story as necessary, indeed, perhaps revealing an underlying truth beyond the facts of the actual historical events that make up the central plot of the story. While one moment we might cry, facts! data! science!, the next moment we might discover ourselves just as vehemently defending invention, metaphor, illusion, and craft. Like trying to drink from a mirage, the more we attempt to apprehend truth, the thirstier for it we become.

If you, a writer, here taking this course, are anything like me, you are also an avid reader, and no stranger to the captivating, revelatory experience that reading a fictional account, or a line of poetry can be. Does the fact that the impetus for the revelation was invented or imaginary, make the revelation somehow less impactful? Are our imaginal experiences any less real than physical experiences? In any discussion of reality it becomes necessary to define the scope of what one means by “reality” at all. Does the term solely rely on a kind of scientific empiricism? What then of things like love and hate? They are not physically measurable, yet anyone who has loved, anyone who has felt the weight of a hateful eye, could not deny that they exist. Does it extend, then to emotions? Are our emotions “real”? Are they “true”? What of dreams? While the events of the dream may not be said to have “happened” in reality, the fact that it was dreamed, that the dreaming occurred is a truth. A rumor may not be “true” but it can damage or elevate an individual just as much as if it were. A work of science fiction may contain purely imaginal people, made-up facts, ideas, technologies, and philosophies, but those elements (as we see in the selection by Borges) may have profound and lasting effects on the world.

When we begin to pick at the idea of factual reality, we quickly and with great dismay find that it too readily crumbles in our hands, like the walls of a summer sandcastle. Whatever declarations we believe we can make with confidence, once prodded, devolve with alarming swiftness into questions.

And when it comes to discussing issues of truth and fact, I am nothing but questions. Perhaps it is true that facts are slippery; that there are many kinds of reality, and that they are all

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important. Perhaps it is true that there is no such thing at all, and none of it matters. Whatever the outcome, we are inviting you, in this course, to grab your climbing gear, to venture with us into uncharted waters, and to set your sights on an impossible mountain, and its wild, unscalable peaks. We may find, as so many sages have said, that it is not, after all, the destination that is the point of a journey, but who one becomes along the way.

The questions in this session are meant to open a discussion around the provided texts. By no means should you feel obligated to answer all (or any) of the inquiries they pose. Choose one or two lines of thinking that most interest you and use those as a springboard for your responses. Be sure to read and respond to your classmates posts as well!

Onward, friends, and here's to the journey.

\* The book itself is cheekily titled, [\*Mount Analogue: A Novel of Symbolically Authentic Non-Euclidean Adventures in Mountain Climbing\*](#)