Section Description

In this course, we will grapple with the difficult and fraught relation between truth and fiction. As narrating and narrativizing animals, we only ever access truth through fiction; truth is always mediated by and in fiction for human beings. This has implications of immense importance not only for philosophy, but also for literature, history, anthropology, sociology, politics, psychology, and art, in short, for the entirety of the humanities and human sciences.

In order to explore this relationship, we will read, discuss, and apply philosophical and theoretical texts that address this paradox of the human condition:

- Plato’s productive tension in the *Republic* between his expulsion of all artists and representers from his perfect city and his simultaneous use of fables, lies, allegories, similes, imagery, and myths to advance his argument
- Oscar Wilde’s lament for the decay of lying in modern times and his claims that life and nature imitate art, rather than the other way around
- Roland Barthes’s views on the mythologies that structure modern social life
- Charles Fourier’s utopian vision of the future
- Performance studies’ stances on the roles played by narrative, performance, and representation in the social construction of identity
- Cindy Sherman’s illustration of the coincidence between identity, image, and imagination in her *Untitled Film Stills*

In addition to reading assignments, we will be developing a praxis of expressing truth through fiction in several creative projects in written and other media. The course will be more or less evenly divided between reading days, during which we discuss the readings and how they might be put into practice, and workshop days, during which students share with one another their projects and the results of their praxis.