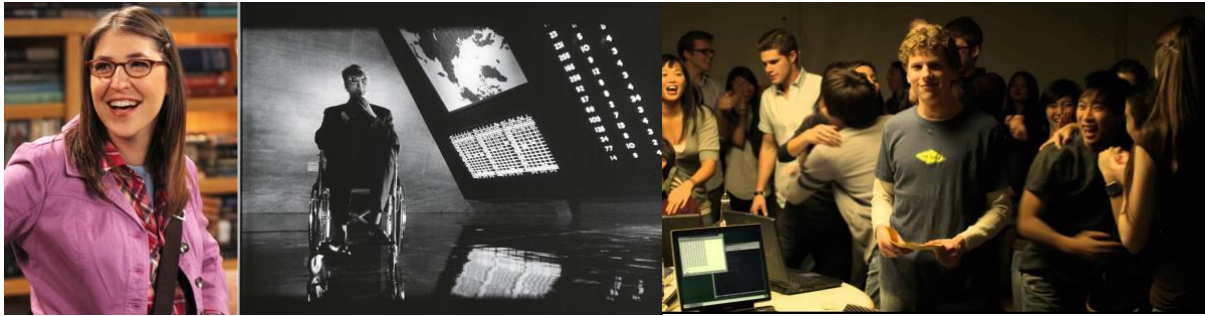


Nerds, Experts, and Geniuses – Intellectuals in Popular Culture



The Course

In this seminar we will consider the figure of the intellectual in contemporary culture by looking to recent Hollywood films and popular television shows like *The Imitation Game* (2014) and *The Big Bang Theory* (2007 - Present). Today, we commonly encounter portraits of “smart people” as experts, geniuses, or nerds, variously cast as techno-visionaries or hyper-specialized technicians, and often struggling with social difficulties. What do these contemporary portraits tell us about the central if unusual role that intellectuals play in our culture? And how have significant transformations in key social institutions like higher education and the mass media shaped our conceptions of, and attitudes towards, intellectuals and intellectual life?

To explore these questions, we’ll look at the history of intellectuals in literature and culture over roughly the last century, touching on a series of key moments and milieux from early portrayals of bohemia like Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), to the essays and fiction of controversial political figures like George Orwell—*Homage to Catalonia* (1937) and *Animal Farm* (1949), and more popular genres like the campus novel/film—*Lucky Jim* (1954), *Revenge of The Nerds* (1984), as well as recent documentaries chronicling the lives of public intellectual figures who cultivated high-profile media personas such as Gore Vidal and William F. Buckley Jr. in *The Best of Enemies* (2015).

Along the way, we’ll also read a number of critical and scholarly writings on the subject such as Edward Said’s *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), as well as essays from critics like Russell Jacoby, Elaine Showalter, Mary McCarthy, Richard Hofstadter and C. Wright Mills.

Texts

Available at the Bookstore:

Amis, Kingsley. *Lucky Jim* (1954), NYRB Classics.
Cline, Ernest. *Ready Player One* (2011), Broadway.
Doyle, Arthur Conan. *A Study In Scarlet* (1887), Oxford.
Eggers, David. *The Circle* (2013), Vintage.
Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), Scribner.
Hofstadter, Richard. *Anti-Intellectualism In American Life* (1963), Vintage. [OPTIONAL]
Orwell, George. *Animal Farm* (1949), Signet.
Said, Edward. *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), Vintage.
Vonnegut, Kurt. *Cat’s Cradle*. (1963), Dial Press.
Wells, H.G. *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), Penguin.

On Blackboard (more to be added):

Collini, Stefan. "The History of A Word," "A Matter of Definition" from Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. "Echoes From the Jazz Age"

Jacoby, Russell. Selections from The Last Intellectuals

Mailer, Norman. "The Man Who Studied Yoga"

McCarthy, Mary. Selections from The Company She Keeps

Mills, C. Wright. Selections from White Collar

Orwell, George. Selections from Homage To Catalonia

Williams, Raymond. "Intellectual" from Keywords

NOTE: Throughout the semester we will also be reading a handful of intellectual essays from online magazines and journals possibly including *The New Inquiry*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The New Yorker*, *3AM Magazine*, *Jacobin*, *Real Life Magazine* and *The New Republic*. These essays will linked to on the Blackboard site, or distributed as hard copies in class, the week prior to their assigned discussion.

Films and Television

Curtis, Adam. *Pandora's Box* (1992)

---. *All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace* (2011)

Fincher, David. *The Social Network* (2010)

Gilliam, Terry. *Brazil* (1985)

Gordon, Robert. *The Best of Enemies* (2015)

Kanew, Jeff *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984)

Kubrick, Stanley. *Dr. Strangelove* (1964)

Lorre, Chuck. *The Big Bang Theory* (2007- Present)

Tyldum, Morten. *The Imitation Game* (2014)

Requirements

- Seminar participation (This includes contributions to class discussions and attendance. You are allowed one unexcused absence during the semester and need not inform me; since we only meet twice a week, more than six absences means that you have not satisfactorily completed the course);
- Weekly reading responses (described below);
- Two short papers (described below);
- Final paper (described below).

Grade

Your grade will be based on the weighted breakdown below.

Assignment	Weighted Value
Reading Responses	20%
Short Paper #1	15%
Short Paper #2	15%

Final Paper	40%
Participation	10%

Schedule

Week 1 – Introduction to The Course

Collini, Stefan. “The History of A Word”; Williams, Raymond. “Intellectual”; Goldstein, Evan. “The New Intellectuals”

Tues 01/17 – Syllabus and Schedule
 Overview of Course Topics
 Peer Introductions

Thurs 01/19 – “The History of A Word”; “Intellectual”; “The New Intellectuals”
 Mini-Lecture: A Brief History of Intellectualism

Week 2 – Bohemians

Hemingway, Ernest. The Sun Also Rises; Fitzgerald, F. Scott. “Echoes of the Jazz Age”;

Tues 01/24 – The Sun Also Rises, pp.1-116; “Echoes of the Jazz Age”

Thurs 01/26 – The Sun Also Rises, pp.117-250

Week 3 – Bolsheviks

Orwell, George. Animal Farm; “Introduction” by Lionel Trilling and selections from Homage To Catalonia.

Tues 01/31 – “Introduction”; selections from Homage To Catalonia

Thurs 02/02 –Orwell, Animal Farm pp. 3-141

Week 4 – Mid-Century Paragons

McCarthy, Mary. “Portrait of the Intellectual As a Yale Man”; Mailer, Norman “The Man Who Studied Yoga”; Jacoby, Russell. selections from The Last Intellectuals; *The Best of Enemies* (2015); Collini, Stefan. “A Matter of Definition”; Sartre, Jean-Paul. “A Plea For Intellectuals?”; de Beauvoir, Simone. Selections from The Mandarins.

Tues 02/07 – “The Man Who Studied Yoga”; “A Portrait of the Intellectual As a Yale Man”; “A Plea For Intellectuals?”; selections from The Mandarins

Thurs 02/09 – *The Best of Enemies*; selections from The Last Intellectuals; “A Matter of Definition”

Week 5 – The University

Amis, Kingsley Lucky Jim; Williams, Jeffrey “Unlucky Jim”; Showalter, Elaine “Ivory Towers”; Halsey, A.H. “Higher Education”

Tues 02/14 – Amis, Lucky Jim pp.1-197; “Higher Education”

Thurs 02/16 – Amis, Lucky Jim pp.198-265; “Ivory Towers”; “Unlucky Jim”

Week 6 – The Rise of the Experts

Dr. Strangelove (1964); Cat’s Cradle (1963); *All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace* Ep.2 “The Uses and Abuses of Vegetational Concepts”; *Pandora’s Box* Ep.2 “To The Brink of Eternity”; Hofstadter, “The Rise of the Expert”

Tues 02/21 – *Dr. Strangelove*; “To The Brink of Eternity”; “The Rise of the Expert”

Tues 02/23 – Cat’s Cradle pp.1-287; “The Uses and Abuses of Vegetational Concepts”

Week 7 – Technocrats and Technicians

Mills, C. Wright. selections from White Collar; *Brazil* (1985); Ross, Andrew “The Mental Labor Problem”

Tues 02/28 – White Collar pp. 63-141; “The Mental Labor Problem”

Thurs 03/02 – *Brazil*; White Collar pp. 142-160, pp.189-212

Proposal #1 due

Week 8 – Critical Interlude

Said, Edward. Representations of the Intellectual; Hofstadter, Richard. selections from Anti-Intellectualism In American Life

Tues 03/07 – Said, Representations of the Intellectual pp.1-121

Thurs 03/09 – Hofstadter, “Anti-Intellectualism In Our Time” pp.1-23; “On The Unpopularity of Intellect” pp.24-51; “The Intellectual: Alienation and Conformity” pp.393-423

Paper #1 due

Week 9 – SPRING BREAK

Tues 03/14 – NO CLASS

Tues 03/16 – NO CLASS

Week 10 –What Was The Nerd?

Revenge of The Nerds (1984); Osterweil, Willie “What Was The Nerd?”; Fan, Christopher T. “Not All Nerds”; Spode, EJ. “Blame The Nerds! – American Punditry Achieves Peak Stupid”; Kunyosying, Kom and Soles, Carter “Postmodern Geekdom as Simulated Ethnicity”

Tues 03/21 – *Revenge of The Nerds*; “What Was The Nerd?”; “Not All Nerds”; Blame The Nerds! – American Punditry Achieves Peak Stupidity”

Thurs 03/23 – “Postmodern Geekdom as Simulated Ethnicity”

Week 11 – Geek Culture Goes Mainstream

The Big Bang Theory Season 1 (2007); Williams, Ian. “On Geek Culture”; “Why The Geek Community Hates the

Big Bang Theory”

Tues 03/28 – *The Big Bang Theory* Season 1; “Why The Geek Community Hates the Big Bang Theory”

Thurs 03/30 – *The Big Bang Theory* Season 1; “On Geek Culture”

Proposal #2 due

Week 12 – The Gamification of Popular Culture

Cline, Ernest. Ready Player One; Striplhas, Ted “Algorithmic Culture”; Koopman, Colin “The Algorithm and The Watchtower”

Tues 04/04 – Cline, Ready Player One pp.1-248

Thurs 04/06 – Cline, Ready Player One pp.249-372; “The Algorithm and the Watchtower”; “Algorithmic Culture”
Paper #2 due

Week 13 – Silicon Valley: A New Technocracy?

Eggers, David. The Circle; Hofstadter, Richard. “Business and Intellect” from *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*; Gittlitz, A.M. “Let Them Drink Blood”

Tues 04/11 – Eggers, The Circle pp.1-117; “Business and Intellect”

Thurs 04/13 – NO CLASS: Reading Day

Week 14 – Silicon Valley: A New Technocracy? Cont.

Tues 04/18 – Eggers, The Circle; pp.118-497; “Let Them Drink Blood”
Final Proposal due

Thurs 04/20 – NO CLASS: Carnival

Week 15 – Mad Scientists and Super-Heroes: Genius Intellectuals in Genre Fiction

Doyle, Arthur Conan. A Study In Scarlet; Wells, H.G. The Island of Dr. Moreau; Cawelti, James G. “The Art of The Classical Detective Story” from Adventure, Mystery, and Romance; Nivens, Jess. “Organ Theft and the Insanity of Geniuses: A History of Mad Scientists in the Industrial Age”

Tues 04/25 – A Study In Scarlet pp.1-127; “The Art of the Classical Detective Story”

Thurs 04/27 – The Island of Dr. Moreau pp. 1-131; “Organ Theft and the Insanity of Geniuses: A History of Mad Scientists in the Industrial Age”

Week 16 – Techno-Visionaries and Social Outcasts: Contemporary Portraits of “Genius”

The Social Network (2010); *The Imitation Game* (2014)

Tues 05/02 – *The Social Network*; *The Imitation Game*

Thurs 05/04 – Conclusion
Course Wrap-Up
FCE’s

Week 17 – FINALS WEEK

Fri 05/12 – Final Papers Due @ 11:59PM (on Bb through Turn-It-In)