

Fall 2020

Title: Paranoid Peoples: Conspiracy Rhetoric in Contemporary Russian and American Culture

Course: UGS 302

Unique: 60335

Instructor: Keith Livers

Time: MW: 3:00-4:30

Place:

ZOOM/ONLINE

Office hours: TH: 1:00 – 5:00

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Conspiracy thinking has become an important part of the cultural and political landscape in the past decades. The spectrum of paranoia in contemporary (American) culture extends from fiction to film and television, and in recent years has fully entered the realm of political rhetoric. Meanwhile, Russia has been characterized as one of the world leaders in the production of paranoia. This course examines a wide spectrum of conspiracist expression with a focus on cultural artefacts, from such historical texts as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or *The Turner Diaries* to the fictions of Philip K. Dick, Don DeLillo, Viktor Pelevin and others. Since popular culture represents a major platform for the development of the conspiratorial imagination, we will also be looking at a number of pop culture artifacts that thematize conspiracy and paranoia, such as Chris Carter's *The X-Files*, George Axelrod's *The Manchurian Candidate*. Secondary works by a number of contemporary scholars working in the field of conspiracy studies will provide the theoretical framework for our discussions.

Format: Lecture/Discussion

REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. *Ubik* (Philip K. Dick)
2. *White Noise* (Don DeLillo)
3. *Homo Zapiens* (Viktor Pelevin)
4. *Ice Trilogy* (Vladimir Sorokin)
5. *Conspiracy Nation: The Politics of Paranoia in Post-War America* (ed. Peter Knight)
6. *The Turner Diaries* (check online availability)
7. Course Packet [Jenn's Copies]

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Regular attendance and participation (20%)

2. Completion of required readings by date assigned (consult syllabus).
3. Course Work/ Course Credit: 1 presentation with a partner on a topic of your choosing (15 minutes) (20%); 3 papers (5-6 pages) [one of these must be revised incorporating instructor feedback] (60%)

ZOOM GUIDELINES:

- Find a quiet space where you would not be disturbed during the Zoom session.
- Conduct yourself as you would in a face-to-face meeting.
- Clothing is not optional! Dress comfortably, but remember that you are in a public setting.
- Have your video on, unless you are experiencing technical difficulties (contact us if those persist). If your video is off, we would assume that you are not present for the session.
- Mute your microphone when you're not speaking. This would help limit background noise.
- When you wish to speak, raise your hand or post a hand icon in Zoom.
- To ensure optimal connectivity, close all other windows/applications on your device.
- To hear and be heard better, consider using a headset with external microphone.
- Be aware that you are on camera, and avoid doing other tasks during the class meeting (checking email, updating social networks, checking your phone, etc.)

WEEK ONE:

W: *SYLLABUS & BRIEF INTRO to COURSE*

WEEK TWO:

M: Readings for discussion: "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" (Richard Hofstadter) [<http://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics/>]; *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Flourishes and Where It Comes From* [Daniel Pipes, in COURSE PACK]; *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Culture from Outerspace to Cyberspace*, pp. 126-152; "Conspiracy Culture: From Kennedy to the X-Files" [Peter Knight in COURSE PACK], pp 23–56 [in COURSE PACKET]

W: Skip William, "Spinning Paranoia: The Ideologies of Conspiracy and Contingency in Postmodern Culture," [*Conspiracy Nation*] & Timothy Melley, "Agency Panic and the Culture of Conspiracy" [*Conspiracy Nation*]

WEEK THREE:

M: *Ubik* (Philip K. Dick)

W: *Ubik* (Philip K. Dick)

WEEK FOUR:

M: *White Noise* (Don DeLillo)

W: *White Noise* (Don DeLillo)

WEEK FIVE:

M: *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962)

Read: Chapter 3 in *What Have They Built You To Do? The Manchurian Candidate and Cold War America*, Matthew Frye Jacobson & Gaspar Gonzalez, access through PCL

W: *Doctor Strangelove* (1964)

Read: Chapter 3 in *The Kubrick Legacy* (2019), ed. By Mick Broderick, access through PCL.

WEEK SIX:

M: *The Parallax View* (1974); Chapters 2 & 3 of *Conspiracy Films: A Tour of Dark Places in the American Conscious* (Barna William Donovan) [in COURSE PACKET]

W: *All the President's Men* (1976)

WEEK SEVEN:

M: Viewings/readings for discussion: *X-Files* (Season 1: Pilot, Deep Throat, Eve, E.B.E., Darkness Falls, Erlenmeyer Flask; Season 2, Little Green Men, Duane Barry); Clare Birchall, "The Commodification of Conspiracy Theory" [*Conspiracy Nation*]

W: *X-Files* (Season 2: Sleepless, Anasazi, Blessing Way, Paper Clip, Jose Chung is From Outer Space)

Recommended reading: Chapter 6 of *PopLit, PopCult and the X-Files: A Critical Exploration*, Jan Delasara, access through PCL

WEEK EIGHT:

M: *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*

“The Antichrist as an Imminent Political Possibility”: Sergei Nilus and the Apocalyptic Reading of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion” (Michael Hagemester) [in COURSE PACKET].

W: *The Turner Diaries*, Ingrid Walker Fields, “Conspiracy, Nationalism and Revolution in *The Turner Diaries* and *Hunter*” [*Conspiracy Nation*]

WEEK NINE:

M: Viewings/readings for discussion: *9/11 Loose Change & Fahrenheit 9/11*; “A Geopolitical Mapping of the Post 9/11 world: Exploring Conspiratorial Knowledge through *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *Manchurian Candidate*,” (Laura Jones) [https://scholar.google.com/scholar?start=10&q=the+manchurian+candidate&hl=en&as_sdt=0,44]; SUGGESTED *Manchurian Candidate* (2004). SUGGESTED: *The Terror Conspiracy: Deception, 9/11, and the Loss of Liberty* (Jim Marrs).

W: Post-Truth

Read chapters 4-5 in *America’s Post-Truth Phenomenon*, ed. C. G. Prado, access thru PCL

WEEK TEN:

M: *Homo Zapiens*;

Read Chapter 2 in Eliot Borenstein’s *Plots Against Russia*, access through PCL

W: *Homo Zapiens*

WEEK ELEVEN:

M: *Homo Zapiens*

W: *Ice* (Sorokin)

WEEK TWELVE:

M: *Ice* (Sorokin)

W: Guest Speaker?

WEEK THIRTEEN:

M: Russian Internet Conspiracemes

W: Russian Internet Conspiracemes

WEEK FOURTEEN:

M: Presentations

W: Presentations

WEEK FIFTEEN:

M: Presentations

W: Presentations