

Course Title: Paranoid Fictions: Conspiracy in Contemporary Culture

Course No.: RUS356/REE325
45030, 44630

Unique No:

Instructor: Keith Livers

Meeting Time & Place: TTH: 3:30 – 5:00, Parlin 301

Office Hours: M: 2:00 – 4:00

There is no denying that conspiracy thinking has become an important—perhaps even unavoidable—part of the cultural landscape in the past decades. The spectrum of paranoia in contemporary (American) culture extends from fiction to film and television, and beyond. This course examines a rich and constantly growing body of conspiracist expression, from such historical texts as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to the intricately woven fictional worlds of Phillip K. Dick, Thomas Pynchon, Viktor Pelevin and others. We will also be looking at such pop cultural explorations of the theme as Chris Carter's *The X-Files* or the Wachowski Brothers' *The Matrix*. Theoretical works by Jodi Dean, Peter Knight, Daniel Pipes and others will be used to provide a theoretical frame for the primary materials.

Required TEXTS:

Dick, Phillip K. *Ubik*

Pelevin, Viktor. *Homo Zapiens*

Pelevin, Viktor. *Sacred Book of the Werewolf*

Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49*.

Sorokin, Vladimir. *Ice Trilogy*.

Zamyatin, Yevgeny. *WE*.

GRADING:

Three essays: 70%

Presentation: 20%

Participation: 10%

WEEK ONE:

Thu: Introduction to the course.

WEEK TWO:

T: READ: Read chapters 2 & 3 in Daniel Pipes *How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From* [in course pack]. Also chapter 4 in Jodi Dean's *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Culture's from Outerspace to Cyberspace* [in course pack] and chapter 2 "Plotting the Kennedy Assassination" in Peter Knight's *Conspiracy Culture: From Kennedy to the X-Files* [in course pack].

RECOMMENDED/INTERESTING: "The Paranoid-Critical Method," by Rob Horning, *The New Inquiry* [<http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/marginal-utility/the-paranoid-critical-method/>]

TH: *The Crying of Lot 49* (Pynchon)

WEEK THREE

T: *The Crying of Lot 49* (Pynchon)

TH: *The Crying of Lot 49* (Pynchon)

WEEK FOUR

T: *Ubik* (Phillip K. Dick)

TH: *Ubik* (Phillip K. Dick)

WEEK FIVE:

T: *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers). Read: chapters 3 & 4 in *Philosophers Explore the Matrix*, ed. Christopher Grau [in coursepack].

TH: *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers). Read: "'So Tonight I'm Gonna Party Like It's 1999': Looking Forward to the Matrix," Jon Stratton. Also "Revolution in the Matrix: A Cue Call for Reflexive Sociology," Kimberly Barton [in coursepack].

WEEK SIX:

T: *Fight Club* (David Fincher). Read: chapters 2 in *Fight Club*, ed. Thomas E. Wartenberg [ebook, PCL]

TH: "The Erlenmeyer Flask" (*X-Files*). Read: "Freedom and Worldviews" in *The Philosophy of the X-Files*, Kowalski, Dean. Also, "Postdemocratic Society and the Truth Out There," in *The Philosophy of the X-Files*. [ebook, PCL]

WEEK SEVEN:

T: *X-Files* (cont'd)

TH: *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (excerpts). Also read the introduction to *The Paranoid Apocalypse*, eds. Richard Landes, Steven T. Katz [ebook, PCL]

WEEK EIGHT:

T: *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (excerpts). Also read the introduction to *The Paranoid Apocalypse*, eds. Richard Landes, Steven T. Katz [ebook, PCL]

TH: *The Turner Diaries* [in course pack]. Read: “Hate, Narrative, and Propaganda in *The Turner Diaries*” (Rob McLear).

WEEK NINE:

T: *Loose Change 9/11: An American Coup* (Dylan Avery). Read: chapter 6 of Jodi Dean’s *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* [ebook, PCL]

TH: ?

WEEK TEN:

T: *WE* (Yevgeny Zamyatin)

TH: *WE* (Yevgeny Zamyatin)

WEEK ELEVEN

T: *Envy* (Yuri Olesha)

TH: *Envy* (Yuri Olesha)

WEEK TWELVE:

T: *Homo Zapiens* (Viktor Pelevin)

TH: *Homo Zapiens* (Viktor Pelevin)

WEEK THIRTEEN:

T: *Sacred Book of the Werewolf* (Viktor Pelevin)

TH: *Sacred Book of the Werewolf* (Viktor Pelevin)

WEEK FOURTEEN:

T: *Ice* (Vladimir Sorokin)

TH: *Ice* (Vladimir Sorokin)

WEEK FIFTEEN:

T: *Night Watch* (Timur Bekmambetov)

TH: *Day Watch* (Timur Bekmambetov)

WEEK SIXTEEN:

T:

TH: Cactus