

## Cinema and Conspiracy

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, Thursdays 2-3pm and by appointment

## Course Description

This class is devoted to narratives of secrecy and conspiracy, though this statement already raises a problem: how can we narrate that which ought, by rights, not to be told? We'll begin by considering what distinguishes a conspiracy from a secret society before considering the religious, legal, and political stakes of conspiracy as a concept and a narrative and an expression of our *Zeitgeist*.

## Required Texts

All texts are available on Sakai.

## Assignments and Grades

Above all else, students are required to participate in the seminar; more than three absences will result in a deduction of points from the final grade. In addition, students will be asked (1) to write one short essay; (2) to compete a creative project/take-home midterm; (2) to take five quizzes (the lowest grade will be dropped); and (4) to write a longer, final paper.

### Grade Break-Down

Short Paper	10%
Participation	20%
Quizzes	15%
Oral Presentations	10%
Midterm Project	20%
Longer Final Essay	25%

## Week 1: Introduction

### Week 2: Secret Societies

Tuesday January 17: Georg Simmel, "Secrecy" (330-344)

Thursday January 19: Georg Simmel, "The Secret Society" (345-376)

*Fight Club* (dir. David Fincher)

### Week 3: The Con and the Conspiracy

Tuesday January 24: David Maurer, *The Big Con* (1-10, i.e., until you reach "The Big Store")

*The Killing* (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1956)

Thursday January 26: Sir Arthur Conan-Doyle, "The Red-Headed League,"

*Coma* (dir. Michael Crichton, 1978)

## Short Essay Due (3 Pages)

### Week 4: The Uses of Conspiracy

Tuesday January 31: Ed White, "The Value of Conspiracy Theory"; Jodi Dean, "Theorizing Conspiracy Theory"

Thursday February 2: Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (9-22)

*Three Days of the Condor* (dir. Sydney Pollack)

### Week 5: The Trouble with Conspiracy

Tuesday February 7: Karl Popper, "The Conspiracy Theory of Society"

Thursday February 9: Cass Sunstein, chapter 1 of *Conspiracy Theories and Other Dangerous Ideas*

*American History X* (dir. Tony Kaye, 1998)

### Week 6: Religion

Tuesday February 14: Michael Barkun, Chapter 3 of *Culture of Conspiracy*; selections from *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*

Thursday February 16: Perry Miller, Preface to *Errand into the Wilderness*

*The Witch* (dir. Robert Eggers, 2015)

**Week 7: Conspiracy as a Matter of American Law (Traitors and Moles)**

Tuesday February 21: Gordon S. Wood, in “Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century”  
*No Way Out* (dir. Roger Donaldson, 1987)

Thursday February 23: Doyle, “Federal Conspiracy Law: A Brief Overview”

*Salt* (dir. Philip Noyce, 2010)

**Week 8: The Detective (Function)**

Tuesday February 28: Sir Arthur Conan-Doyle, “The Final Problem,” “The Adventure of the Empty House”  
*Sherlock* (episode 1)

Thursday March 2: The Detective Club, “Ten Commandments”; S.S. Van Dine, “Twenty Rules for Writing a Detective Story”; Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder”  
*The Big Sleep* (dir. Howard Hawks, 1946)

**Week 9: The Red Scare (The Paranoid Right)**

Tuesday March 7: Robert Alan Goldberg, chapter 2 of *Enemies Within: The Culture of Conspiracy in Modern America*  
*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (dir. Don Siegel, 1955)

Thursday March 9: Daniel Bell, selections from *The Radical Right*; documents re: “Fluoridation of Water”  
*Doctor Strangelove* (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1964)

**Midterm Exam Due**

**Spring Break**

**Week 10: The Paranoid Left**

Tuesday March 21: Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics”

Thursday March 23: David Shapiro, selections from *Neurotic Styles*;

*The Manchurian Candidate* (dir. John Frankenheimer, 1962)

**Week 11: A Map of His Own Failure? The (Neo) Noir Detective**

Tuesday March 28: *Chinatown* (dir. Roman Polanski, 1974)

Thursday March 30: *Night Moves* (dir. Arthur Penn, 1975)

**Week 12: Political Nihilism**

Tuesday April 4: *Three Days of the Condor* (dir. Sydney Pollack, 1975); *Capricorn One* (dir. Peter Hyams, 1977)  
Thursday April 6: *The Parallax View* (dir. Alan Pakula, 1974); *All the President’s Men* (dir. Alan Pakula, 1976)

**Week 13: Conspiracy and Globalization**

Tuesday April 11: Sigmund Freud, selections from *The Psychotic Doctor Schreber*  
*The Matrix* (dir. Warshowski Brothers, 1998)

Thursday April 13: Sigmund Freud, “On Narcissism”

**Week 14: “Off the Grid”**

Tuesday April 11: Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on Society of Control”; “Primer on the History of GPS”

Thursday April 13: *The Bourne Identity* (dir. Doug Liman, 2004)

**Week 15: Post 9/11—The Security State**

Tuesday April 18: Julian Assange, “Conspiracy as Governance”

Thursday April 20: Borges, “Theme of the Traitor and Hero”  
*Citizen Four* (dir. Laura Poitrus, 2014)

**Week 16: To Be Decided**

***Friday April 28: Final Paper due***