

FRSEM-UA.541-001
Conspiracy Theories:
Paranoid Fictions before and after Freud

W 9:30-12
24 W. 4th St., Room C-16

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19 University Place, Room 503
Tuesday/Friday 2-4 PM
Or by appointment

Course Description: The century that recently came to a close was the golden age of paranoia: with its clash of ideologies and the rise and fall of metanarratives (modernism, postmodernism, Marxism, etc.), the twentieth century saw a proliferation of conspiracy theories and intricate attempts to impose rational order on increasingly chaotic systems. In America, at least, the reigning paranoid fantasies of the nineteenth century lost much of their purchase, growing quaint and laughable. Whereas in Russia and other parts of Europe, it is still possible to invoke world-wide Masonic conspiracies, in the United States such ideological narratives have either been replaced by myths rooted in science and pseudoscience, involving secret government laboratories, alien abductions, and hidden branches of government, or updated for a post-Freudian age (Satanic ritual abuse). This course posits that paranoia in general and conspiracy theories in particular are best viewed as narrative constructs that fulfill specific epistemological functions: they are explanatory myths, but, unlike many creation stories, they deal with demiurges rather than full-fledged gods, demonstrating how dark forces have ruined a pre-existing world rather than inventing it whole-cloth.

In this course, we will read narratives that both exemplify and explore the modernist and postmodernist paranoid mindset. Some of these texts exploit the potential of first-person storytelling in order to delve into solipsism; others depict a simulated world in which all representation proves to be an illusion. A significant portion of our readings is made up by science fiction. As a genre, science fiction is particularly well-suited to representing and interrogating paranoia; since its conventions allow for the fulfillment of a number of paranoid tropes (all-powerful conspiracies, hyperreality, and worlds created entirely for the benefit or detriment of a particular character). In particular has become a particularly attractive locus of paranoid anxiety.

In addition, we will also be reading a number of theoretical works related to paranoia and conspiracy.

NYU Classes and the Internet. NYU Classes, which is accessible through the "Academics" tab of NYU Home, is an important part of course, facilitating announcements and the distribution of course materials.

Please keep in mind that, by default, NYU Classes uses your NYU email account. Many of you may have other email accounts that you use. If so, it is a quite simple matter to arrange for your email from one account to be forwarded automatically to the other. I strongly urge you to do so. It is **your responsibility** to make sure that you are receiving official email sent to your NYU account.

Course Requirements: No knowledge of any foreign language is expected, as all works will be read and discussed in English. Some of the texts are translated from other languages--feel free to read them in the original if you have the proficiency. It is essential that you keep up with the reading assignments and come to class prepared either to make observations or ask questions. Attendance is, of course, mandatory.

Class participation. Most class periods will be a mix of lecture and discussion; only occasionally will I spend the entire class giving a lecture. Everyone is encouraged to participate in discussion, which will be in-class exercises, and by the short papers (see below).

Writing Assignments: There will be three short analysis papers, a mid-semester paper (5-7 pages), and a final paper (8-10).

The *short analysis papers* may be no longer than *two* pages, and they can be about any of the works we are reading. These papers are a tool to help you think about an aspect of the text that interests you, and any ideas you generate in the course of these assignments would be welcome contributions to class discussion. You must turn in the short paper by the beginning of the last class during which the text is being discussed. That is, if you want to write a response to *The Trial*, you must turn this paper on October 8. **If you do turn in a short paper and don't show up for class, your grade for the assignment goes down by one letter. A letter is also dropped for each day the short paper is late.**

You may not wait until December to turn in three short papers. The semester has been divided into three parts, and you must write one short paper by each of these three deadlines. That is, your first short paper must be turned in no later than **October 1**, your second short paper is due no later than **October 29**, and the third short paper is due no later than **November 26**. Though you are not allowed to wait to do all the short papers until the end of the course, if you feel you would rather do your short papers earlier (turning two short papers during the first or second segments of the course), you are free to do so.

The topics of your *mid-semester paper* and *final paper* are yours to choose, but you must come talk to me about them in advance. It is hoped that the short papers will lead you toward topics for your longer papers. Both your mid-semester and your final papers can be based on short papers, as long as you are not tapping the same short paper for both longer works.

I welcome full or partial drafts of any of these writing assignments. Drafts of the short papers must be shown to me no later than one week before the due date; drafts of the long papers must be submitted no later than two weeks before the due date.

Electronic submission of written assignments. Please do not submit hard copies of your short and long papers; I prefer to receive students' papers electronically. Please send me your assignments by email, as attachments. The preferred format is any version of Word (97 or above, any platform)--such documents usually take the ".doc" extension. Failing that, .rtf files (which can be generated by most word processing programs) are also fine. I can open most other formats as well, including Word Perfect (.wpd), but this requires some extra effort on my part. Please feel free to consult with me about file format questions.

When you submit a paper electronically, please give it a descriptive filename. I have dozens of students, and if all of you send me files called "Words Assignment" or "Gogol Paper," this will be confusing and frustrating. After the first time you make this mistake, I will not accept another paper with an unidentifiable file name.

The preferred (but not required) format for file names is <Student last name> <Type of assignment> <Assignment number> <Topic >. Examples: if Bonnie Tyler has written a second short paper on Olesha the file should be something like "Tyler Short Paper 2 (Olesha).doc". If Eric Roberts has written a midterm paper on Gide then the file should be something like "Roberts Midterm (Gide).doc". A final paper on Showlater by Scott Baio would be "Baio Final (Showalter).doc".

Finally, please note that I have multiple email accounts. Please do not send email to all accounts at once ("cc"); if you do, I will end up with three copies of your message. Any of my accounts will do.

Final Grade. Your final grade will be determined as follows:

Class Participation	20%
Short papers:	30%
Mid-semester paper:	20%
Final paper:	30%

Useful Reference Material:

For writing papers and citation formats (you may choose any citation format so long as you use it consistently):

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

** This site reproduces much of the information located in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

Turabian, Kate. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 7th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th ed.

Strunk, William & White, E.B. *The Elements of Style*. Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon, 2000)

Williams, Joseph. *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. 8th ed.

Editions: Many of these books come in different editions and different translations, and I understand that you might prefer to buy used copies of these editions to save money. Therefore I am including my recommendations / warnings about the various editions of each of these books.

Required Texts, Part One (NYU Book Store)

Banks, Iain. *The Wasp Factory*

Barkun, Michael. *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*
(Second Edition.)

Dick, Philip K. *Ubik*.

Gide, Andre. *Lafcadio's Adventures*

Kafka, Franz. *The Trial*.

Moore, Alan & Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen*.

Olesha, Yuri. *Envy*.

Pelevin, Viktor. *Omon-Ra*.

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

Required Texts , Part Two (On NYU Classes)

The rest of the readings for this class will be available on NYU Classes.

Baron-Cohen, Simon. *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind*. London: Bradford, 1997. (Chs. 1-4)

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulations* (excerpts).

Freud, Sigmund. "A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Psycho-Analytic Theory of the Disease." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated from the German under the General Editorship of James Strachey in Collaboration with Anna Freud. Assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson. Volume XIV (1920-1922). 261-272.

---. "On Narcissism: An Introduction." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated from the German under the General Editorship of James Strachey in Collaboration with Anna Freud. Assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson. Volume XIV (1920-1922). 67-102.

---. "Psycho-Analytic Notes upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)." *Collected Papers*. Volume 3. Authorized Translation by Alix and James Strachey. New York: Basic Books, 1959. 387-470.

- "Some Neurotic Mechanisms In Jealousy, Paranoia And Homosexuality." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated from the German under the General Editorship of James Strachey in Collaboration with Anna Freud. Assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson. Volume XVIII (1920-1922). 221-232.
- Kinderman, Peter "Social Cognition in Paranoia and Bipolar Affective Disorder." *The Social Brain: Evolution and Pathology*. Edited by Martin Brune, Hedda Ribbert and Wulf Schiefenhover. Chichester, England.: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2003
- Ruskin, John. "The Pathetic Fallacy."
- Sheldon, Racoona. "The Screwfly Solution."
- Showalter, Elaine. *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. Chs 1-2, 6, 10,11, 12 (104 pages)
- Varley, John. "Manikins."
- Wimsatt & Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy."

Required Texts, Part Three: The EBook Options

Some of you might prefer to read the required texts as eBooks. You should feel free to do so. Many of the books ordered at the NYU bookstore are available as eBooks from various Internet vendors (Amazon, Kobo, iBooks, etc.).

In addition, I have made all of the NYU Classes readings available in the "Resources" tab as eBooks.

I have made them available in two different formats:

- 1) Epub format. This is the format that was designed to be an industry standard. It is the only format read by Apple's iBooks app, and can also be read in Nook and Stanza.
- 2) Mobi format. This is the format that Amazon acquired for the Kindle, and can be read natively by any Kindle application.

Finally, please note that you must **bring the texts with you to class**.

Video

- Bowman, Rob (dir.). "Jose Chung's *From Outer Space*". *The X-Files* Season 3, Episode 20. Original air date: April 12, 1996.
- Forbes, Bryan (dir.). *The Stepford Wives*. 1975 [Please note: watching the 2004 remake does not fulfill the assignment]
- Hyams, Peter (dir.) *Capricorn One*. 1977.
- Polanski, Roman (dir.). *Rosemary's Baby*. 1968. [Please note: watching the 2014 remake does not fulfill the assignment]

CLASS SCHEDULE

September 3 (W) Introduction

September 10 (W) Paranoia: Theory and Practice (1)

- ▼ For Today:
✦ Read Freud (all four essays)

September 17 (W) Banks

- ▼ For Today:
✦ Read Banks
✦ Read Baron Cohen Chs 1-2

September 24 (W) The Truth Is Out There

- ▼ For Today:
✦ Read Barkun
✦ Watch "Jose Chung's *From Outer Space*"

October 1 (W) The Vatican Swindle

- ✦ Read Gide
✦ Read Baron Cohen Chs 3-4

Final Deadline for Short Paper #1

October 8 (W) Complex Persecution Complexes

- ▼ For Today:
✦ Read Kafka
✦ Read Wimsatt

October 15 (W) Ideology (1): Manichaen Delusions

- ▼ For Today:
✦ Read Olesha
✦ Read Ruskin

Midterm Paper Due

October 22 (W) Pynchon

- ✦ Read Pynchon
✦ Read Kinderman

October 29 (W) "It's Not Real"

- ▼ For Today:
✦ Read Dick, *Ubik*
✦ Read Baudrillard
✦ Read Showalter (1-2)

Final Deadline for Short Paper #2

November 5 (W) Watchmen

- ▼ For Today:
✦ Read Moore & Gibbons, *Watchmen*
✦ Read Showalter (6)

November 12 (W) The Devil Made Me Do It

- ✦ Read Showalter (10-12)
✦ Watch *Rosemary's Baby*

November 19 (W) Body Snatchers

- ✦ Read Dick, "The Father Thing"
✦ Watch *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*

November 26 (W) The Pathos of Outer (and Inner) Space

- ▼ For Today:
✦ Read Pelevin, *Omon-Ra*
✦ Watch *Capricorn One*

Final Deadline for Short Paper #3

December 3 (W) It's Reigning Men

- ▼ For Today:
✦ Read Varley, "Manikins"
✦ Read Sheldon, "The Screwfly Solution"
✦ Watch *The Stepford Wives*

December 5 (F) FINAL PAPER DUE