

PARANOIA AND CONSPIRACY IN US FILM

Gowen Hall 301, T Th: 3:30 - 5:20

Professor Stephen Groening

groening@uw.edu

Office: Padelford B-515

Office hours: Tuesdays 1:30-2:30

TA: Doug Anderson

anderdou@uw.edu

Office: Padelford C-522

Office hours: T Th 2:30-3:20

What is it about conspiracy theories that are so compelling and beguiling? Why do conspiracy theories continue to persist? What is the relationship between technology and conspiracy theories? Is paranoia actually a reasonable and sensible attitude in contemporary society? Might it be the only available one? This course seeks to answer these questions by examining tropes of conspiracy and paranoia in U.S. cinema. The course has a special emphasis on conspiracy films from the 1970s, such as *3 Days of the Condor* and *The Parallax View*, but we will also analyze more recent films such as *The Truman Show*, *Get Out*, and *Enemy of the State*.

This course is part of the Cinema and Media Studies major that allows students to develop their understanding of how film and media function as distinctive modes of transmitting and critiquing cultural values and practices. Cinema and Media Studies is a 60-credit major with a required gateway course, "Film and Media Studies: Analysis" (CMS 301, 5 credits), and "Senior Capstone" (CMS 480, 5 credits). Courses include "History of New Media"; "Great Directors: Zhang Yimou"; "Cult Cinema; "Bollywood, Hollywood, and Beyond"; "Horror"; "Classical Hollywood Cinema"; "History of Film, 1960-1988"; "Cell Phones Cultures"; and "Screenwriting".
<https://complit.washington.edu/cinema-and-media-studies-major>

IMPORTANT DATES

- Paper 1 (on "Totality as Conspiracy"): **October 31**
- Paper 2 (on paranoia and the self): **November 14**
- Paper 3 (on conspiracy, race, and gender): **December 12**

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO?

- Participate in class.
- Do the readings, answer online discussion questions on Canvas.
- Watch the films (via Modalis on Canvas), take the viewing quizzes.
- Write the papers.

WHAT WILL I LEARN?

By the end of this course, students will learn:

- How to critique film genre in its historical setting
- How economic, political, and social frameworks affect cultural production.
- How to analyze film and other moving image forms
- How to think through the relationship between culture and technology.

WHAT DO I GET GRADED ON?

QUIZZES (18 POINTS)

Quizzes on the films are administered in the first five minutes of class and help make sure you are keeping up with the screening materials. Students are to remain silent during the quiz. If you need to leave the classroom, submit your quiz to the teaching assistant, then leave without disrupting others.

ONLINE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (17 POINTS)

Reading questions are administered through Canvas via the discussion tab. They are for me to see how you understand the readings. Discussion between students is not required, but you are able to see other students' answers after you submit your answers.

PARTICIPATION (10 POINTS)

Participation includes answering cold call questions in class, group exercises, visiting office hours, taking engaged and thorough notes, preparation of the materials. The more time, energy and thought you put into the course, the more you will get out of it. I take film studies seriously and expect you to do the same. I expect each student to do all the reading, which amounts to 20-30 pages per class session.

Much of the work we will study requires open and inquisitive attitudes. Some of the theoretical readings are difficult, even counterintuitive, but this is neither reason to dismiss them or to give up on your own ability to acquire knowledge and understanding. I cannot overemphasize the importance of hard work for this course. This is a reading intensive course and there are many ideas, concepts, methodologies and theories introduced in these readings. Pay close attention to them.

PAPERS (20, 15, 20 POINTS)

The three papers must follow the Written Assignment Guide found on Canvas and constitute the bulk of your grade. Hard copies are submitted to the teaching assistant at the beginning of class (prior to the quiz) on the due date stated in the syllabus and on Canvas.