

**Stony Brook University
The Graduate School**

Doctoral Defense Announcement

Abstract

The Paranoiacs Who Knew Too Much: Postmodern Knowledge and Hollywood Cinema

By

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This dissertation examines a specific manner in which paranoia finds expression in postwar Hollywood cinema. Paranoia, in addition to its clinical definition, defines a cultural phenomenon and a film genre, both of which have grown exponentially in the U.S. during the latter half of the twentieth century. The basic premise of my project is that in Hollywood cinema paranoia emerges primarily as excessive rather than distorted knowledge. What has often been understood as a form of reactionary thought is employed in a manner that reinforces rather than challenges the status quo. The male paranoiac is an infallible hero with unique cognitive abilities, and with an unrestrained desire for truth and meaning. My project takes a unique approach to the structure and function of the paranoid style of storytelling: using popular visual texts as case studies—and reading them against the grain—each chapter poses a theoretical question that explores the relationship paranoia holds to other nuanced theoretical concepts, such as fetishism, postmodernism, Hollywood narrative, and the female subject. The challenge to paranoia's monolithic treatment by exploring cinematic texts that do not fit comfortably in the genre of paranoid narratives reveals, among other things, that naturalized modes of thought and cinematic storytelling are informed by and even rely on the paranoid model for their effectiveness. The function and utility of paranoid narratives in the postmodern era is also explored in relation to the function and utility of Greek myth in the fifth century BC Greece. I take the mythical figure of Oedipus as portrayed in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* to be the archetype for Hollywood's male paranoiac.

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