According to a recent poll, about 75% of Americans believe that JFK’s assassination was the product of a conspiracy. Over 70% believe «the government knows more about UFOs than they are telling us.» In this seminar, we will consider conspiracy theories — as well as other phenomena linked to the Culture of Anxiety — as social, cultural, and historical phenomena. We will discuss what attracts people to the rhetoric of fear and what conspiracy theories tell us about the groups that produce them. Is Richard Hofstadter correct when he speaks of the «Paranoid Style in American Culture»? Films to be examined include I MARRIED A COMMUNIST (1949), MY SON JOHN (1952), WAR OF THE WORLDS (1952/2004), JFK (1991), CONSPIRACY THEORY (1997), and FLIGHT PLAN (2005). In addition, we will look at television shows such as South Park and the X-Files.
Syllabus:

25. April  Introduction: September 11 and Conspiracy Theories

02. May  American Paranoid Culture
          Television and Beyond: South Park (2001)

09. May  The Red Menace
          Anti-Communist Hysteria in My Son John (1952)

16. May  The JFK Assassination
          JFK (1991)

23. May  The Coming of the Apocalypse
          The Day After (1983)

30. May  Alien Conspiracy Theories
          Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956/1977)

13. June  Panic Bodies: The Fear of the Invisible
          Outbreak (1997)

20. June  Personal Identity and the Crisis of Government
          Conspiracy Theory (1997)

27. June  Enjoying Paranoia: The Power of the Unreal
          The X-Files

04. July  Fear and Control: Hollywood and Islam
          Flight Plan (2005)

11. July  Final Exam: Analysis of a film sequence (see handouts)