

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

GOVERNMENT DENIES KNOWLEDGE

**Representations of the United States government
in the television series *The X-Files***

A Pro Gradu Thesis

By

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Tutkielman tarkoituksena on tarkastella Yhdysvaltain hallituksen representaatioita amerikkalaisessa televisiosarjassa *Salaiset kansiot (The X-Files)*. Ensisijainen tutkimuskysymys on: 1) Minkälaisia representaatioita Yhdysvaltain hallituksesta kyseisessä sarjassa luodaan? Tähän kysymykseen pyritään vastaamaan seuraavien kahden alakysymyksen avulla: 2) Minkä teemojen kautta nämä representaatiot luodaan? 3) Mitä instituutioita tähän sarjan konstruoimaan hallitukseen kuuluu?

Salaiset kansiot kuvaa kahden FBI-agentin työtä niin sanottujen salaisten kansioiden eli selvittämättömiksi luokiteltujen, paranormaali rikosten parissa. Tutkielman aineisto koostuu sarjan neljän ensimmäisen tuotantokauden (1993-97) jaksoista, joista poimittiin lähempää tarkastelua varten 24 jaksoa. Analyysitapana käytetään sisällön erittelyä, jossa aineistoa tarkastellaan kolmen siitä induktiivisesti johdetun sisällöllisen teeman kautta. Nämä pääteemat ovat liittovaltion byrokraatia, armeija ja ufot, ja niistä edetään yksittäisten huomioiden kautta yleisemmälle analyysitasolle. Tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys muodostuu valtiopin, mediatutkimuksen, populaarikulttuurin ja salaliittoteorioiden aloihin lukeutuvasta kirjallisuudesta. Tutkielma etenee teorian ja empirian välisenä vuoropuheluna, jossa aineistosta tehtyjä havaintoja tulkitaan ja käsitellään taustakirjallisuuden valossa.

Vaikka sarjassa toistuvasti viitataan salaisiin hallituksen sisäisiin ryhmittymiin ja tarkemmin määrittelemättömiin korkeisiin tahoihin, *Salaiset kansiot* rakentaa kuvan hallituksesta verrattain yhtenäisenä kokonaisuutena, jonka sisäiset suhteet ja poliittiset prosessit ovat tosin hyvin epämääräisiä. Tämä kokonaisuus pitää sisällään sekä eri tiedusteluorganisaatiot ja asevoimat että Yhdysvaltain poliittisen järjestelmän edustuksellisemmän elementin eli kongressin. Tämän hallituksen representaatioissa on keskeinen asema amerikkalaista poliittista kulttuuria jo pitkään leimanneilla salaliittoteorioilla. Salaliittojen lisäksi sarjan konstruoimaa hallitusta leimaavat erilaiset poliittiset skandaalit, salamurhat ja salaiset kokeet tietämättömillä kansalaisilla. Hallitus representoidaan suurelta osin autoritatiivisena, valehtelevana ja byrokraattisena instituutiona.

Myönteisempiäkin hallitusrepresentaatioita tutkituista jaksoista löytyy, ja ne liittyvät selvästi tilanteisiin, joissa hallitus, etupäässä FBI, kuvataan rikollisuutta, terrorismia tai uskonnollisia kultteja vastaan taistelevana ja lakia puolustavana. Näissä tilanteissa sarja seuraa perinteisten poliisisarjojen konventioita. Muilta osin *Salaisten kansioiden* tarjoama politiikan tulkintamalli on kuitenkin äärimmäisen vainoharhainen ja seuraa tarkasti amerikkalaisten salaliittoteorioiden ja niitä kierrättävien populaarikulttuurin tuotteiden perinteitä.

Asiasanat: media, salaliittoteoriat, sisällönanalyysi, televisio, yhdysvallat

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1. INTRODUCTION

The political role of television began to outweigh the role of radio during the 1940s. Gronbeck (1996, 33) dates the start of a new era in 1947, when President Truman addressed the Americans about the world food crisis via television. The gradually increasing significance of television led to the situation in the 60s, when, as Gronbeck (1996, 33) states, “America found out that politics and television had been alloyed into new material”. The assassinations of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King, the war in Vietnam and the civil rights movement were extensively covered by television, which led to the “televisualization” of American politics in general. For many in the United States and other industrialized countries, television is perhaps the most important source of information on political issues both on the national and international level. However, television does not merely transmit information. It also constructs images and representations through these constructions individuals view and interpret the world and politics. Kellner (1995, 2) illustrates the significance of media with his argument that “media culture is a contested terrain across which key social groups and competing political ideologies struggle for dominance”.

One area of this social and political struggle is social paranoia, or conspiracy theories, which have gained increasing popularity in the United States during the 1990s, although they have been circulating in the American culture for a much longer period. Today these theories about secret treachery at the high levels of power appear to be more popular and pervasive than ever before (Fenster 1999). Perhaps the most famous conspiracy theories in the United States have evolved around the assassination of President Kennedy. Conspiracy theories have focused on a wide range of issues and of alleged conspirators, often on the government or other people of high position. In 1996, *Wall Street Journal's* media critic Dorothy Rabinowitz (quoted in Showalter 1998, 206) wrote that “the number of alleged governmental deceptions and plots against the citizenry that are uncovered daily in, say, a single night’s TV watching is dizzying to contemplate”. The products of media culture have had an important role in the escalation of

conspiracy theories into a point where, according to Fenster (1999), they have become a form of popular political interpretation, a way of seeing everyday politics. As such, they are a significant part of American culture. The television series *The X-Files* is one example of the current scene of conspiracy theories. In fact, Graham describes the series as “television’s fin de siècle compendium of conspiracy theories” (Graham 1996, 56). Conspiracy theories are born “when the political is interpreted within a specific, conspiratorial narrative frame” (Fenster 1999, xiii). The conspiratorial interpretation of politics that many films and books have fostered has spread into all social strata and political factions, into the Left as well as into the Right.

Although conspiracy theories have been an important part of the media representations of politics, most of the research on the relationship between politics and television has so far focused on news programs and political campaigns on television. The main motivation for this kind of research has been the potential effects that the media have on people’s political views. In the 1970s the term “television malaise” (Dye and Zeigler 1989, 115) was coined to describe the situation where the negative bias of televised politics bred cynicism and suspicion toward decision-makers.

However, in addition to political campaigns, politics and government are recurrent themes in Hollywood films and popular television as well. Some recent examples of films on politics are *The American President* (1995), *Wag the Dog* (1997) and *Primary Colors* (1998). Films that focus especially on conspiracy theories include *JFK* (1991), *Men in Black* (1997), *Conspiracy Theory* (1997) and *Enemy of the State* (1998). In television, *Spin City* (1996-) has depicted politics and politicians in comedy genre, and *Dark Skies* (1996-97) and *The X-Files* (1993-) have delved into supposed governmental conspiracies. All of these films and series are familiar also to Finnish audiences.

The aim of this thesis is to study *The X-Files* and its representations of the government of the United States. Representations are crucial to popular cultural texts like *The X-Files* because representations “constitute the political image through which individuals view the world and interpret political processes, events,

and personalities” (Kellner 1995, 60). I will explore the images that the series constructs of the government and how it constructs them. I will not, however, study the effects that the series may have on its audiences, nor the way in which these audiences interpret the things that they see. What I have said above about the potential effects of television on its viewers only serves as a motivation for this study. It is hardly questioned today that television does at some level influence people’s notions, and thus also *The X-Files* might have some kind of effect on them. Furthermore, the series is extremely popular among adolescents whose political understanding is often limited, and who may be especially susceptible to ideas conveyed in the series. According to Dye and Zeigler (1989, 11), much of the information that young people receive about politics comes from television. This applies to a large part of the adult population as well. Since *The X-Files* is clearly a product of popular culture, the theoretical background of this study consists of studies on popular culture, rather than on news media and political campaigning. Because conspiracy theories are an important part of *The X-Files*, I will also draw on some of the research on these theories.

The X-Files is a mixture of science fiction and crime or police show, with two FBI agents investigating cases that are classified as more or less paranormal. The series relies heavily on conspiracy theories, especially on those related to the governmental secrecy around UFOs (Unidentified Flying Objects) and extraterrestrial life. The principal data for this thesis consists of 24 episodes, selected from the first four production seasons of the series. The data covers therefore the first four years of production.

The analysis will be carried out by investigating the episodes of the series with the help of three thematic subcategories, which are the federal bureaucracy, the military, and the UFOs. These can be considered the main elements through which the series deals with the larger topic, the government of the United States. I will explore the way the government is represented in the series by analyzing the representations of each subcategory and discussing the connections between each category and the government. The linguistic means by which the government is represented as it is are only of secondary importance in this study, and the main

focus will be rather on the different themes in which these representations can be found. The principal analytical method is therefore content analysis, and the study is carried out in the form of a dialogue between theory and empirical observations. I will analyze the fictional world that the series presents to its viewers, acknowledging that the construction of this world relies heavily on social and political realities of the United States.

2. THE X-FILES

The first episode of *The X-Files* was aired on Fox network in the United States in September 1993. Chris Carter, the creator of the series, had initially envisioned a contemporary variation of *The Night Stalker*, a 1970s series about a newspaper reporter Carl Kolchak who constantly encountered supernatural phenomena (Lowry 1995, 10). The lone reporter was changed into two special agents of the FBI who investigate the so called X-files, a collection of unsolved cases with paranormal dimensions, the first of which was allegedly initiated in 1946 by J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the FBI (as Mulder tells Scully in *Shapes*). The two agent protagonists are Fox Mulder (played by David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (played by Gillian Anderson). In the first episode (*The Pilot*) Scully is assigned as a new partner for Mulder, who has been working with the X-files alone. Scully is ordered to monitor and, if possible, to “debunk” Mulder’s findings. Gradually it becomes clear that Scully has turned away from her role as a “watchdog” and genuinely aids Mulder in the investigations.

2.1. Overview of the series

The X-Files mixes genres of science fiction, horror and police show, and it was initially classified as a “crime drama” by one advertising agency (Lowry 1995, 2). Bellon (1999, 137) remarks that in the media the series was very quickly classified as science fiction, in fact, already a week before the airing of the first episode. The first two episodes as well as numerous later episodes center around UFOs and

extraterrestrials, but the agents encounter a large array of different paranormal and mysterious phenomena that vary from poltergeists and werewolves to murderous computers and strange life forms. Most of the episodes are so called stand-alone episodes with independent storylines, but a few episodes in each production season are linked to the larger “mythology” of the series (Lowry 1995, 25), a vast governmental conspiracy aimed at hiding the existence of extraterrestrials, and a pending colonization of the earth by aliens. The exact nature of this conspiracy remains vague, and also the existence of extraterrestrials is at times questioned. The only thing that seems to be certain is that there is some kind of a conspiracy involving high government officials. This governmental conspiracy becomes such a defining characteristic of the series that it might be argued, as Pirie (1996, 23) does, that the aliens, vampires and other mysteries of the series are merely “ominous shadows, whose identities and very existence is constantly being manipulated by the far more monstrous and yet credible forces of the state itself.” It is not clear who exactly in the government are part of the conspiracy, and it must be remembered that Mulder and Scully, as federal agents, are themselves government employees, which is a fact that is discussed more closely in the section 7.1. In *E.B.E* (acronym for Extraterrestrial Biological Entity) it is suggested that there may exist “a government within the government” who is responsible for cover-ups and misconducts. Gradually the conspiracy theory expands into the global scale, with the introduction of the Syndicate, or the Elders, which is a group of obviously wealthy and influential men representing various nationalities, termed by one of its members as “a consortium with global interests” (*The Blessing Way*).

As a mixture of genres, *The X-Files* is clearly also a continuation of the long tradition of conspiracy theories with its ubiquitous paranoia towards those in power. The series includes numerous references to some of the best-known conspiracy theories in the United States, including those related to the assassination of President Kennedy, and an episode in the fourth season (*Musings of a Cigarette-Smoking Man*) provides a detailed version of the conspiracy behind the assassination. Another historical (and political) event commonly referred to in

the series is the Watergate scandal, and Chris Carter has said that Watergate was “the most formative event of [his] youth” (Lowry 1995, 12).

The atmosphere of the series is remarkably ominous. The first five production seasons were filmed in rainy Vancouver, British Columbia, and almost every episode contains gloomy scenes in which the agents are trying to find their way forward in darkness, guided by flashlights. Pirie calls features such as this the “neo-noir flavour” (1996, 23) of the series, and they can be seen as a metaphor for the agents’ continuous quest for truth. The flashlights are like the tiny fragments of information that occasionally manage to lead the agents into the right direction but as a general rule prove to be completely inadequate to uncover the ultimate larger plan of the conspirators.

In the United States *The X-Files* has currently (summer 2000) proceeded past the seventh production season, and in Finland, where the series premiered in January 1995, past the sixth season. In 1998 the series expanded onto the movie screen with *The X-Files: Fight the Future* that continued the mythology after the fifth season. Soon after its introduction *The X-Files* became a cult phenomenon (Hietala 1996) with a number of Web sites including the official site www.thexfiles.com, more or less official merchandise, such as T-shirts and novel adaptations of the episodes, and numerous fan clubs and groups. Some of the most enthusiastic fans, the so called X-Philes, established fan clubs dedicated to principal actors: David Duchovny Estrogen Brigade, Gillian Anderson Testosterone Brigade, and Mitch Pileggi Pheromone Brigade for the actor who plays Assistant Director Skinner (Clerc 1996, 43). Reeves et al. argue that one of the reasons the producers have managed to make the series such a success is that they found a balanced serial format, incorporating enough serial elements which offered rewards for regular viewers who had knowledge of previous events, but mostly relying on stand-alone episodes that welcomed also new viewers (Reeves et al. 1996, 22).

2.2. The characters

The series revolves around several key characters including the special agents Mulder and Scully, and because I will be referring to these characters repeatedly during the analysis, I will provide brief descriptions of them here. Fox Mulder is a keen believer in UFOs and paranormal phenomena, although in the final episodes of the fourth season Mulder's beliefs in the existence of extraterrestrials begin to falter. He has a degree in psychology, and because of his beliefs in "extreme possibilities" he is ridiculed within the FBI as "Spooky" Mulder. He believes that his sister was abducted by aliens when they were both children, memories of which were revived in regression hypnosis (as Mulder tells Scully in *The Pilot*), and his whole career is fueled by the quest for answers to what actually happened to her. In the beginning of the series Mulder is in his early thirties, unmarried, and very little information is provided about his social life outside his work. Mulder is constantly reprimanded by his superiors for his methods and professional conduct, which is a typical characteristic of male "lone wolves" in the genre of police films. Mulder's father Bill Mulder has worked for the State Department and in a second season episode (*Anasazi*) it is revealed that he has been somehow involved in the large conspiracy that his son is trying to uncover.

Dana Scully¹ is a special agent assigned to the X-files approximately one year after Mulder in order to make reports on his activities. Scully has a medical background, and she is always looking for a rational, scientific explanation for the phenomena they encounter in the X-files. However, her rationalistic views are constantly put to the test, especially early in the second season when she is abducted, although it is not certain whether this is done by extraterrestrials or the government. Like Mulder, she is unmarried and almost exclusively depicted through her work. She is a few years younger than Mulder. Scully's father was a US Navy officer. For each case Mulder and Scully both have their own explanations, but generally the cases remain at least partially unsolved, and "the

¹ Malach (1996, 70) draws attention to the female agent as a main character, which she says is typical to the "rewriting of the agent" in the 1980s. In reality women, together with African Americans and ethnic minorities, make up less than one fifth of the total number of FBI agents.

truth” that the agents are trying to uncover is still “out there”, as the episodes’ opening credits declare.

The immediate superior of Mulder and Scully is Walter Skinner, Assistant Director of the FBI. Skinner appears in the series only once during the first season, and not until in the 21st episode (*Tooms*). He is a Vietnam veteran who believes in doing things “by the book”. His exact position between his agents and the rulers in the government is often hard to define. Although he generally stands up for Mulder and Scully, in some cases he has to order the agents to stop their investigations. Sometimes he is also shown negotiating with the mysterious “Cigarette-Smoking Man”. The relationship between Skinner and the Cigarette-Smoking Man is ambiguous, and at times Skinner gives the latter direct orders to leave his office.

In many cases throughout the series the government and its activities can be condensed into one character, the Cigarette-Smoking Man², also known as the Cancer Man, and he is the main adversary of the agents. He is a chain smoker, probably in his fifties, whose actual official status is not revealed. He is introduced in the first episode, in which he silently observes Scully being assigned to the X-files, and later in the same episode he is shown hiding evidence in a Pentagon storage room. In later episodes he is often shown sitting in Skinner’s office, either talking to Skinner or silently following official meetings. In a fourth season episode (*Musings of a Cigarette-Smoking Man*) he is revealed to have assassinated President John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, and he is also linked to several incidents with illegal government intervention. The Cigarette-Smoking Man is a key figure in the conspiracy mythology of the series (see also Ylikitti 1999). Gradually it is revealed that the Cigarette-Smoking Man has had some kind of a personal relationship with Mulder’s parents.

Occasionally Mulder and Scully receive information from inside the government, from a man called Deep Throat. This is a direct reference to *All the*

²

As this section shows, several main characters are known only by their pseudonyms, which adds to their mystery. In the case of the Cigarette-Smoking Man, Skinner comments on this anonymity in the episode *Talitha Cumi* by exclaiming: “these men don’t have names”. (The name of the episode is Aramaic for “Little girl, arise”, words with which Jesus raises a young girl from the dead in Mark 5, 41. This Bible passage is echoed in the episode’s opening sequence.)

President's Men, the account of the Watergate scandal by reporters Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, who had a secret source of information known by the same name. Their Deep Throat was named after a noted pornographic film (Bernstein and Woodward 1994, 71). With his mysterious hints Deep Throat of *The X-Files* is remarkably similar to Woodward and Bernstein's Deep Throat. Even the secret signals that Mulder sends to Deep Throat when he wants to meet him resemble those used by Woodward and his informant (Bernstein and Woodward 1994, 242). Bellon (1999, 148) sees the significance of this intertextuality in the possibility that the (American) viewers who are aware of the corruption and unlawfulness of Nixon's administration come to realize, upon seeing another Deep Throat, that their current administration is as corrupt as Nixon's. Bellon does not, however, seem to acknowledge the fact that the viewers do not necessarily identify the government portrayed in *The X-Files* with the current government of the United States. Neither the real name of Deep Throat nor his position in the government is revealed, but he has worked for the Central Intelligence Agency in the Vietnam war and he knows the Cigarette-Smoking Man personally. Deep Throat provides Mulder and Scully with classified information in several occasions, but in *The Erlenmeyer Flask* he admits that there are limits to his knowledge. In the previous episode (*E.B.E*) he has lied to Mulder and given him fake evidence of UFOs, which shows that his assistance is not unconditional.

After Deep Throat is murdered by unidentified government agents in *The Erlenmeyer Flask*, he is followed by another informant, who is called simply "X", perhaps as an intertextual reference to an informant in Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991). In the episode 731 X admits to Scully, echoing his predecessor, that his knowledge of the government affairs is limited. X continues Deep Throat's work as the secret informant, and his position in the government is also a mystery. However, neither Deep Throat nor X is an unequivocal ally of Mulder and Scully, and sometimes it is not at all clear whether either one is helping the agents or working against them. In the beginning of the fourth season (*Herrenvolk*) X is also murdered, and before he dies he manages to lead the agents to a third informant,

this time a United Nations employee, the Special Representative for the Secretary General, who is, unlike the others, known by her name Marita Covarrubias.

An important symbol for the conspiracy tradition of *The X-Files* is a group of three men called The Lone Gunmen, also known individually as Byers, Langly and Frohike. These men also provide Mulder and Scully with information and assistance, but strictly outside the government. The Lone Gunmen, the name of whom refers to the assassination of President Kennedy, are portrayed as eccentric computer hackers and paranoids, who see conspiracy and foul play everywhere. They publish their conspiracy theories in a magazine called The Lone Gunman, or The Magic Bullet. Their office is small and dark, filled with computers and related technology. Scully, and sometimes even Mulder, finds their theorizings naive and mere paranoia.

A leading figure in the Syndicate that was mentioned earlier is the Well-Manicured Man. His identity and status is a mystery, which fits the pattern of the pseudonymic characters of the series. However, he is higher in the hierarchy than the Cigarette-Smoking Man. The Well-Manicured Man is well-dressed and speaks with careful articulation.

This brief introduction to the series and its principal characters shows that in addition to extraterrestrial and paranormal topics that it presents to its audiences, *The X-Files* is to a great extent also a series about the federal government. The various governmental agencies and institutions as well as the individual characters that they employ provide this study with rich data on the representations of the government. In this section I have also touched upon the fact that the series is also extremely fruitful for the analysis of conspiratorial interpretation of politics and political institutions. In the manner typical of conspiracy theories, several of the episodes blend fact and fiction and unify disparate events within a singular, treacherous plot. Because the object of this study is a television series, I will next turn to some general aspects of media culture which are in one way or another related to *The X-Files*.

3. MEDIA CULTURE

In this chapter on media culture I will focus on the American media and American society. *The X-Files* has spread to numerous countries all over the world and the readings of the series probably vary in different countries, but it is the American (media) culture that provides the social context for the series, and the government of the United States is one of the key elements in the stories. These are also the contexts on which my analysis is based.

3.1. Popular culture

The X-Files can clearly be labeled as a product of popular culture and media culture, or in the latter case, more particularly television culture. This must be kept in mind throughout the analysis of the series. As Fiske (1989, 23) points out, the production and distribution of commodities of popular culture reflect the economic interests of a profit-motivated industry. It is in the best interest of the networks and people in the industry to make television programs and films that attract as large an audience as possible. This inevitably influences the decisions on what issues are dealt with and how they are represented. Television programming, especially, is also largely bound by genres (Fiske 1987, 109), and each product in any particular genre generally follows the conventions of that genre. These conventions may greatly influence the way certain issues are addressed, or whether they are addressed at all. Genre may also influence the viewers' interpretations of the program by regulating and activating expectations of the program, as well as memories of other texts that belong to the same genre (Fiske 1987, 114). *The X-Files* can be defined with characteristics of several genres. It is partly a conventional police show, partly science fiction and horror, and partly drama. It is also closely connected to films with political topics, especially to films on conspiracy theories. In this thesis my discussion of genres is virtually limited to the political genre and conspiracy theories, because of my focus on the representations of the government. One central idea related to the science fiction genre should be

mentioned here though. Science fiction generally “presents its readers/viewers with a reality that is *not here*, or, at least, *not now*” (Bellon 1999, 138; italics original). If viewers read *The X-Files* mainly as science fiction, it may therefore affect the way they interpret the representations of the government in the series, and it may also interfere with the intended realistic tones of the series (see the next page).

Labeling *The X-Files* as a product of popular culture does not necessarily imply that the study of the series can only provide us with insights into popular culture or television. As Fiske reminds us, commodities of popular culture “must also bear the interests of the people” (1989, 23) in order to attract them. In the words of Kellner (1995, 105), media culture “articulates social experiences, figures, events, and practices” and it has to “resonate to social experiences”. What both writers refer to is that the products of popular and media culture reflect the attitudes, values and discourses of the society in which they are produced. A series like *The X-Files* is therefore bound to reveal something about the American culture and about the people that the series is primarily made for. However, this relationship between television and society is not unidirectional. Television does reflect the attitudes of the audiences and the images they have of the world around them, but it also constructs these images. The series in television may be fictional, commercial products, but they are nevertheless part of the American discourses that help viewers to build their perceptions of the government and the whole world. A series like *The X-Files* “taps into existing fears, hopes, fantasies, and other concerns of the day” (Kellner 1995, 105). It is not born in a social and political vacuum, circulating merely the media conventions of the genre(s) it belongs to.

For a long time, popular culture and its products were excluded from the study of arts. It was argued that popular culture was inherently escapist in nature, alienating people from reality. However, as Hietala (1992, 66) points out, many of the products of popular culture abound in social criticism, and the viewers consider them “realistic”. It must be noted though that realism in a television series does not mean that the series somehow reproduces empirical reality, but rather

that it “reproduces the dominant sense of reality” (Fiske 1987, 21), providing a discursive, mediated construction of reality. Following Watt’s definition of realism (as discussed in Fiske 1987, 22) as representing “particular events happening to individualized people in specified places and time spans”, most if not all popular television series can be considered “realistic”.

Fiske adds that realism of a television series does not exclude supernatural elements, because these elements follow the laws of cause and effect and they are logically connected to the rest of the narrative of the series (Fiske 1987, 24). This is an especially relevant comment in the case of *The X-Files* that deals with supernatural and paranormal elements, which are intertwined with more ordinary police work and with the lives of ordinary American people throughout the United States. In each episode the succession of events is illustrated by subtitles that tell the time and location for the viewer, as if each story was a narrative of a chain of events that actually took place. *The Pilot* that sets the tone for the series opens with a message “the following story is inspired by actual documented accounts”, which refers to “reality programs” such as *Cops* and *Rescue 911*, which were extremely popular at the time when *The Pilot* was filmed. According to Chris Carter, the creator of *The X-Files*, this was done because the producers felt that a dramatic program could not adequately compete for viewers with these other programs. He says that “no one could understand why someone would want to watch a show if it weren’t true” (Lowry 1995, 13), which is perhaps a slight overstatement. Throughout the series some realistic, sociohistorical tones are added by combining the fictional events with actual historical incidents, such as the assassination of President Kennedy, the clash between the federal government and the religious cult led by David Koresh in 1993, and the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. This kind of embedding of historical “facts” is also typical of conspiracy theories, which is something I will return to in the next section.

Television is a highly intertextual medium. The programs reflect not only the culture and society in which they are produced, but also other television programs. According to Allen (1987, 103), “perhaps more than any other form of cultural production, television produces texts that never ‘stand alone’”. By this he

means that our reading of a television text is “inevitably conditioned by other discourses that circulate it” (Allen 1987, 103); that is to say, texts written about it and also other texts of the same genre. I have already mentioned that the products of popular culture reflect the attitudes, values and discourses of the society in which they are produced. The range of discourses circulating a television text can therefore be extremely wide. The reading of *The X-Files* is conditioned among other things by political discourses, especially the ones related to conspiracy theories, and I shall return to these later.

3.2 Politics and popular culture

The relationship between politics and the mass media has been extensively studied (for example Berkman and Kitch 1986; Dye and Zeigler 1989), and these studies have usually focused on the news, political campaigning and elections. It is generally agreed that, especially in the United States, television has become an extremely important arena for contemporary politics, not only as a source of information about political issues, but also as a site where political battles are fought.

In a participatory democracy citizens need information about politics and politicians in order to participate, and nowadays the Americans receive a large part of that information from television. Television that started out as an entertainment medium has become an increasingly political medium. However, studies have shown that most Americans are not as well informed politically as the amount of news programs and other politically oriented broadcasting might lead us to believe (see for example Berkman and Kitch 1986, 313). According to Gronbeck (1996, 43) “the American electorate exists in the paradoxical state of drowning in political information even as it is starving for political knowledge”. Regardless of television news, talk shows on political issues, CNN and C-Span’s live broadcasting from the Congress, the lack of knowledge of current issues and political structures and processes is remarkable. Dye and Zeigler illustrate this lack of knowledge as follows:

Only about half the public knows the elementary fact that each state has two U.S. senators; fewer still know the terms of members of Congress or the number of Supreme Court justices. While most Americans can name the president, only a little over one-third can name their congressional representative. (1990, 131.)

Dye and Zeigler (1989, 7-21) establish five slightly overlapping political functions of the mass media. According to them, the media decide first of all what issues are brought to the public's attention and what are not. Second, the media provide their own interpretations of the news stories and thus can shape popular opinion. Third, the mass media convey political values and attitudes through political socialization. The fourth function, political persuasion, or the attempt to influence people's attitudes and behavior, is closely related to political campaigning. The final function is agenda setting, which means deciding which issues are given attention and which are ignored. Although these functions are primarily applicable to the news media, they can be regarded as basic premises also of this study, which is concerned among other things with the relationship of politics and the media. The fact that the media have political functions mentioned above does not mean, however, that the viewers should be considered passive recipients.

In addition to news programs, politics and government are common themes in popular media texts as well. According to Kellner (1995, 56), "struggles within everyday life and the broader world of social and political struggles are articulated within popular film, which in turn are appropriated and have their effects within these contexts." Politics has provided a great number of films and television series with storylines, starting in the 1950s when anticommunism was manifested in a number of Hollywood productions, such as *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (1951) and *Big Jim McLain* (1952). Also films that are not explicitly political in the most common sense of the word can be read politically, as Kellner does for example with the films *Poltergeist* (1982) and *Platoon* (1986) and the television series *Miami Vice* (1984-89). From the 70s onwards popular culture has also drawn on the form of political interpretation that is called conspiracy theory, and I will discuss these theories in the next section.

4. CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Thus, as an interpretive practice, conspiracy theory represents an impossible, almost utopian drive to seize and fetishize individual signs in order to place them within vast interpretive structures that unsuccessfully attempt to stop the signs' unlimited semiosis. Conspiracy theory displaces the citizen's desire for political significance onto a signifying regime in which interpretation and a narrative of conspiracy replace meaningful political engagement. (Fenster 1999, 80.)

On the basis of the extract above, conspiracy theories can be said to function in two ways. First, they have an organizing function. Through their "explanatory and organizational logic" (Fenster 1999, 109) conspiracy theories are a way of making sense of reality, of social and political complexities of (post)modern society³. Conspiratorial interpretation brings coherence, structure and order into perceived chaos by finding connections between seemingly unrelated events. Conspiracy theories are characterized by a continuous but futile search for a final interpretation (ibid., 79-80), which usually leads to overinterpretation, where historical and political signs are found to signify "far more than their conventional meaning" (ibid., 78). The second function is more explicitly political in nature. Through a "prodigious commitment to learn and know the presumed secrets of power and domination" (ibid., 86) conspiracy theories displace the need for political engagement in a system where the real power always seems to be somewhere else and chances for making a difference seem scarce.

Conspiracy theories must be distinguished from actual conspiracies. Åsard (1999) makes this distinction through terminology. According to him a *conspiracy* is by definition an *act*, referring to "an evil, unlawful, or treacherous plan formulated in secret by two or more persons". Conspiracies have characterized political life long before the French or the American revolution. There was a conspiracy, for example, behind Caesar's assassination. If conspiracy refers to an act, then according to Åsard a conspiracy *theory* refers to a *perception*, "usually one which is grossly exaggerated" (Åsard 1999).

³

A liberalist web site (<http://www.cjnetworks.com/~cubsfan/conspiracy.html>, visited on 23 Feb 2000) that makes fun of right-wing conspiracy theories by letting the visitor fill in blanks to create a new, pre-structured conspiracy theory, declares: "Confused about how the world works? Why not make sense of it all with a grand conspiracy theory!"

Exaggeration appears to be a defining characteristic of many conspiracy theories. They do have a rational basis considering the fact that there is a governing élite in the United States, an élite with interests and values not entirely matching those of the citizens. Furthermore, exaggerated or not, conspiracy theories that reflect actual events sometimes contain what Åsard (1999) calls “snippets of reality”. As Kelly (1995, 63) points out, the difference between conspiracy theories and the widespread acknowledgment of a governing élite is mostly a matter of degree.

In politics conspiracy theories represent a “political Other”, “a set of *illegitimate* assumptions that seem to question that the United States is a benign, pluralistic democracy” (Fenster 1999, xii; italics added). In political discourse these theories are therefore usually assigned pathological characteristics. According to Fenster (1999, xiii), conspiracy theories are born “when the political is interpreted within a specific, conspiratorial narrative frame”. Conspiracy theories are a productive way of constructing conspiracy out of seemingly discrete events (Fenster 1999, 131). The integration of individual events and figures is not typical to a postmodern era in which even “dominant historical explanations” and grand narratives are under constant questioning (Fenster 1999, 79). Reeves et al. have found a similar anti-postmodern attitude behind one of *The X-Files* mottoes, “the truth is out there”, which they see as opposed to the postmodern disbelief in one truth (Reeves et al. 1996, 35).

Conspiracy theories are by no means a new phenomenon, neither in the United States nor elsewhere in the world. For example, Pipes (1997) and Åsard (1999) date the origin of American conspiracy theories in the great 18th century revolutions in America and France. A secret society called the Order of the Illuminati was founded in Bavaria in 1776. After a few books about this society had crossed the Atlantic, the American Christians and Federalists started to use the threat of “an evil, foreign-controlled conspiracy” (Åsard 1999) as a political argument. The same perceived threat led to the so called Alien Enemies Act (1798) and a few decades later to relatively short-lived parties and movements, such as anti-Masonic and anti-Catholic movements. Since then the conspiracy

theories have been an essential and constant part of American political interpretation, surfacing for example in the 19th century populism (see for example Fenster 1999) and McCarthyism in the 1950s.

However, in the long history of American conspiracy theories their appeal has generally been limited to minorities and to the fringes of American society (Kelly 1995, 63; Åsard 1999). The situation did not change much in the 1960s, not even after the assassinations of two Kennedys and Martin Luther King, all of which had the potential for conspiracist interpretation that especially in the case of President Kennedy grew into massive proportions. Graham (1996, 54) points out that in the late 60s to be labeled a “conspiracy nut” was much worse than being labeled a communist or a hippie. In the 70s, after the Watergate trials, war in Vietnam, the Pentagon Papers⁴, and numerous public allegations of the CIA’s and the FBI’s misconducts the conspiracy theories started to flourish, and an important channel for them was the cinema (Graham 1996, 55). According to Graham, film director Alan J. Pakula turned the paranoia into a distinct genre with his three thrillers, *Klute* (1971), *The Parallax View* (1974), and *All the President’s Men* (1976), the last one of these based on the book on Watergate scandal by investigative journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. By the end of the twentieth century there had evolved a widespread cultural phenomenon which Elaine Showalter (1998, 112) describes as “millenarian paranoia”:

The authorities are corrupt or impotent; vast conspiracies of a New World Order take place behind the closed doors of Wall Street and in television studios, where “GNN” rules the airwaves; citizens are at the mercy of Manichean forces - an uneven clash in which the villains are large, exciting, and purposeful and the heroes are flawed, hysterical, and self-questioning.

Conspiracy theories of millenarian paranoia are widely circulated in books and magazines, radio, television, films, and the Internet news groups and Web pages, which has resulted in what Fenster (1999, 181) calls a “conspiracy community” of “like-minded souls”.

⁴ The Defense Department’s top secret study of the growth of American military involvement in Vietnam which was leaked by a government employee to the *New York Times* in 1971. The publication heated the debate over the legitimacy of the involvement in the war.

Conspiracy theories are linked to politics in that they are theories of power (Fenster 1999, xiv). No matter who the alleged conspirators are and what the exact nature of the conspiracy is supposed to be, the underlying assumption in most conspiracy theories is that some part of society, or societies in global conspiracy theories, is trying to gain more power and subordinate the rest of that society. In the United States a large part of the conspiracy theories in the latter half of the twentieth century have been related to the military-industrial complex and accusations of the federal government suppressing information about its own mischief in various issues (Pipes 1997), of which the assassination of President Kennedy is perhaps the most common. Indeed, Kelly (1995) distinguishes the political paranoia in the United States from its European counterpart that has been characterized more by conspiracies of race and religion. The American version of political paranoia is generally built around a perceived threat to the democratic ideal - the “central faith and promise of America” (Kelly 1995, 63) - a threat posed by antidemocratic elements that are in sharp contrast to the constitutional idea of the government of the people, for the people, and by the people. However, the government is not the only target of American conspiracy theories. Ethnic and religious groups, for example Jews and Catholics, secret societies like the Freemasons, communists, and large corporations are other examples of these villains. The conspirators vary, but so do the people who develop and spread conspiracy theories, and the proponents of these theories are found throughout the political and social spectrum (Pipes 1997, Kelly 1995).

Conspiracy theories are an important part of *The X-Files* that is built around a governmental coverup of the existence of extraterrestrials and a related plan to colonize the earth. The truth is out there, as the opening credits declare, and it is the constant and arduous task of Mulder and Scully to find it, although they manage to catch only glimpses of the final truth. Like many conspiracy narratives, *The X-Files* is, in the words of Fenster, a hybrid of fiction and history, built on the “notion that history refers to the ‘real’” (Fenster 1999, 110). In the case of *The X-Files* the most prominent historical elements are the assassination of President Kennedy and the Watergate scandal. I will return to conspiracy

theories that *The X-Files* presents when I analyze its representations of the government. Before entering the analysis I will discuss my research questions, methodological choices and the process of data selection.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THE DATA

The main research question of this thesis could be formulated as follows: *what kind of representations of the United States government are constructed in The X-Files?* I will explore this primary research question through two, more narrow subquestions: *how are these representations of the government constructed* and *what are the governmental actors (agencies, institutions, and individuals) represented as constituting the entity called the government?* Since simply stating or describing the various representations of the government would give the false impression of them as somehow pre-existing and static entities, I will rather analyze the ways in which these representations are constructed in order to reveal their dynamic nature, a view formulated in the first subquestion. Further, “how” in this question does not refer to the analysis of linguistic or visual strategies through which the representations are constructed but to a broader textual analysis of the different *themes* through which the government becomes constructed in the series. I will therefore confine my analysis to a more general level. The themes will be constructed inductively from the data, a process which I will describe in detail in the following paragraphs. The second subquestion refers to the analysis of the government agencies and institutions to which the various governmental activities in the series are attributed. This kind of analysis is necessary since, in practice, any governmental action generally originates in a particular subdivision of the government (e.g. in a cabinet department or a regulatory agency), not in some vague all-encompassing “Government”. The analysis of the governmental actors will grasp the full range of these activities.

The methodological approach that I will use is content analysis, i.e. a method for the classification and organization of data (Eskola and Suoranta 1998, 188). Even though content analysis has traditionally been applied quantitatively

to large blocks of data and with positivistic claims to objectivity, I will apply the method in quite a different manner. Firstly, the size of my data is rather small and my analysis exclusively qualitative in nature. Secondly, I do not claim to reveal any truth in the matter, instead I fully acknowledge the subjectivity of any cultural research and the inevitable impact of the researcher on the results.

As for the relationship between reality and *The X-Files*, I will more or less adhere to Satu Apo's formulations. According to her, all stories are stories communicated by someone to someone else in a particular historical situation (Apo 1990, 76). This is the cultural context of the story. For example, the American political system is a large part of the cultural context in which *The X-Files* is produced. Since the series refers to an entity with a real material counterpart, it uses this reality and its real people and events (e.g. the assassination of President Kennedy) as resources in constructing the representations. Also, the government in the series is *presented as the* government of the United States. Therefore a proper understanding of this representation calls for a certain amount of knowledge about the real-life counterpart, the political system, although the intention is not to determine the degree of accuracy in the episodes. Still, I do not draw any linear connection between the actual government of the United States on the one hand and its representations in *The X-Files* on the other. I want to analyze the fictional world of the series, acknowledging that the construction of this world relies heavily on social and political realities of the United States, as well as on other discourses, such as conspiracy theories. In my opinion, *The X-Files* does not reflect reality as such, but rather constructs its own versions of reality.

Since my approach will be more a thematic than a linguistic one, I will gain access to larger, semantic components of the episodes (Apo 1990, 62), and to the diversity of the represented government. Through three broad analytical categories I will move inductively from separate observations onto a more general level.

In Finland *The X-Files* has now proceeded to its seventh season, but for practical reasons I decided to concentrate on those first four seasons which had been aired in the Finnish television by the time I started my research. The episodes

from these four seasons were readily available, and since the material gathered from them proved to be sufficient for my purposes, no need to add episodes from later production seasons arose in the course of the research project. The process of collecting the data started with the viewing of all 97 episodes from four seasons in a chronological order, while taking some general notes on any references to the government. The chronological viewing seemed natural, because the “mythology” of the series is continuously moving forward, and many of the episodes refer to earlier events.

In the next phase, on the basis of my notes, I selected 24 episodes where the references to the government were most explicit. These episodes were selected rather evenly from the four seasons. By an explicit reference I do not mean the occasional, direct verbal references to “the government” as such. Usually the explicitness was determined by the involvement of governmental authorities or agencies other than the Federal Bureau of Investigation that Mulder and Scully work for. On the other hand, I did not consider the mere use of the word “government” a sufficient criterion for explicitness, if the episode contained no other signs of the government’s presence. This was the case for example in *Red Museum*, in which Scully tries to assure a farmer that a certain pesticide is harmless. The farmer replies, “Says who? The government?” It has to be noted that there were several episodes that turned out to be remarkably similar to each other as far as the plot or portrayed governmental activities were concerned. Already at this point I could thus leave out an episode, if I thought that it had nothing new to add to an image already constructed in the earlier episodes. On the other hand, during the analysis I did review some of the episodes I had already left out, and came across with issues that I had missed earlier. I will therefore occasionally refer to episodes that were not included in the original selection of episodes.

After the selection of the 24 episodes I began viewing them more closely, writing down the themes and issues that the episodes dealt with, and roughly counting their occurrences in the episodes. After this I could start outlining a few major themes that could function as main headings under which the other, minor

themes could be fitted. Eventually the most fruitful solution turned out to be to collect the themes under the categories of the federal bureaucracy, the military, and the UFOs, of which the first two actually represent governmental actors, and only the third is a thematical category in the sense I originally intended when collecting the themes. Under each category I could then start analyzing the representations of the government in the light of the current theme or actor.

This study is carried out in the form of a dialogue between theory and empirical observations (Eskola and Suoranta 1998, 83), in which I will analyze the series by drawing on relevant theories and viewpoints in literature. The theoretical background of the study consists of works in political science, media studies, popular culture, and studies on conspiracy theories. I have selected relevant ideas and writings from these works on the basis of my observations of the data, and in the dialogue I will make sense of the data and interpret it and my own observations in the light of these ideas from other writers.

I will begin the analysis with the representations of the federal bureaucracy, which includes security and intelligence agencies, for example the Federal Bureau of Investigation that is the employer of agents Mulder and Scully. Under the federal bureaucracy I will analyze three cabinet departments, and also the Congress, which is not a part of the executive branch of the government and therefore, by the most common definitions, not of the federal bureaucracy either. In the next category I will analyze the military, which includes both the Army and the Air Force. These first two categories include, in essence, the governmental actors which my second subordinate research question refers to. The third category is the UFOs, which are not governmental actors per se, but rather an overriding theme in *The X-Files*, which involves all governmental actors, and which can therefore be considered to overlap with the previous two categories. I will, however, in that category analyze the *relationship* between the UFOs and the governmental actors, and thus hope to avoid repeating my observations from the other two categories. My main task in the analysis is to find out how the different themes and governmental actors are used to construct different representations of the government as a whole.

6. THE FEDERAL BUREAUCRACY

When analyzing how the government of the United States is represented in *The X-Files*, it must be determined what that government is in structural terms, in other words, what institutions and organizations the various government activities are attributed to. Every governmental action originates in some particular part or parts of the government, be it the Congress, or a department or an agency within the executive branch. It is therefore necessary to take the concept of the government apart, and analyze how its component parts are represented. Many of the activities of the government in *The X-Files* are attributed to various American security and intelligence agencies, and most of these activities can be classified as covert. These agencies have played an important role in American political history, and novelist John le Carré sees their “secret world” as the “national subconscious”: “if you want to know the deepest longings and anxieties of any nation, then look at what its security and intelligence services are being asked to do” (quoted in Ash 1999, 45). Covert actions are by no means a product of spy stories or conspiracy theories, as Nelson states in his analysis of le Carré’s novels:

Spy stories know that covert action has become a persistent, characteristic focus of the foreign and defense politics of America and most other countries which have, on occasion, exercised a major influence on this century’s overt, official politics among nations. (Nelson 1999, 105.)

Since the two protagonists of *The X-Files* are FBI agents, the FBI is naturally the most significant of these agencies, and I will discuss it first. After the FBI I will move on to the other security and intelligence agencies, and then to the Congress and cabinet departments that are generally thought to represent the more visible side of politics.

6.1 The Federal Bureau of Investigation

SKINNER: We're not the Mafia, agent Mulder. I know it's easy to forget but we work for the Department of Justice. (*One Breath*)

Assistant Director Skinner's reprimand to Mulder for trying to take the law into his own hands after Scully is found in coma, epitomizes the controversial history of the FBI in the twentieth century⁵. Since 1908, when Attorney General Charles Bonaparte set up within the Department of Justice an unnamed corps of special agents that was soon named the Bureau of Investigation and then in 1935 the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the public discussion about the organization has often centered on the nature of its methods and activities, so much so that the line between the bureau and organized crime has at times been rather vague. Because the principal characters of *The X-Files* are special agents of the FBI, it is therefore important to take a closer look at the way the bureau is represented as one part of the government. I will begin this analysis of the representations of the FBI with a brief introductory overview of the bureau's history. Although *The X-Files* is a fictional series, the FBI does exist outside the series, and the proper understanding of the representations of the bureau calls for a certain amount of knowledge of its public images in the past.

In the early years of the bureau its time and efforts were put into investigating violations of laws connected to "national banking, bankruptcy, naturalization, antitrust, peonage, and land fraud" (www.fbi.gov). During the First World War espionage and enemy aliens were added to its tasks. In the 1930s the bureau's role was extensively widened by president Roosevelt, first to combat increased crime and later on subversive activities, especially fascism and communism. According to Fried (1990, 51), this widened role soon led to a broad violation of civil liberties, as the bureau started to compile lists of suspicious groups and individuals that were in any way considered potential threats to national security. The 1930s also mark the beginning of FBI agents' fame as

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The dates and other information about the early stages of the organization were taken from the FBI homepage (www.fbi.gov/yourfbi/history/hist.htm), where they were easily accessible. Any controversy related to that history, however, was virtually absent from this site.

national heroes fighting against gangsters and communism. As Powers points out, the bureau's director J. Edgar Hoover was a "political giant" (Powers 1983, xi) whose power rested mainly on popular support. Popular support could only be maintained by continuous projection of favorable images in radio, films and television, and Hoover worked hard to create and maintain the popular culture image he desired.

In its fight against individuals and groups that were categorized as subversives and threats to national security, the FBI incorporated so called COINTELPROs, or counterintelligence programs. The first COINTELPRO was initiated by Hoover in 1956 and it was targeted at communists, although the communists had been on Hoover's suspect lists for a long time. Fried claims that this initial program against the Communist Party was driven more by the bureau's "ideological loathing" than any actual threat to national security (Fried 1990, 190). Soon the FBI started launching similar programs against other groups, and the efforts put into these surveillance projects provide one way to interpret the following lines in *The X-Files* that appear to echo these activities:

SCULLY: The answers are there. You just have to know where to look.

MULDER: That's why they put the "T" in "FBI". (*The Pilot*)

The FBI's observant "eye" was concentrated, in addition to communists, on white hate groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, black nationalist hate groups (among whom the FBI included Martin Luther King Jr.'s organization Southern Christian Leadership Conference), New Left groups, the antiwar movement, civil rights groups, women's liberation movement, and Earth Day rallies (Fried 1990, 190). The programs incorporated covert surveillance and countersubversive tactics, such as discrediting the targeted organizations.

After Hoover's death in 1972, and after decades of celebration as the nation's defender the FBI's image turned into nation's "prime symbol of a government at war with the nation's liberties" (Powers 1983, 260). Previously such views of the bureau had been limited to the counterculture. Hoover became the symbol of the invisible government that was widely considered a serious threat

to the land of the free. (Powers 1983, 262.) The shift in image was furthered by the political disillusionment of the late 1960's and the Watergate, after which the FBI's acting director L. Patrick Gray, for example, admitted that he had destroyed some incriminating documents that belonged to the Nixon administration (Powers 1983, 264). In 1981-82 a television program called *Today's FBI* unsuccessfully attempted to restore the favorable image of the bureau, with the assumption that the viewers still regarded the FBI agents as one of "us", not "them" (Malach 1996, 68). From mid-80s a cleaner image began to gain some support with films such as *Manhunter* (1985), and it continued throughout the 90s. The new model agents are "dedicated to truth and justice, but there is constant tension between individual agents and the FBI as an institution. (Malach 1996, 69.)

The FBI is naturally a central element in *The X-Files*, which has two special agents as protagonists, although in the first episode the X-files are presented as some kind of a side project within the bureau, first distinguished from the "bureau mainstream" by a high-level FBI official, and then put down by Mulder himself after Scully has been assigned as his partner:

MULDER: Sorry, nobody down here but the FBI's most unwanted.

SCULLY: Agent Mulder. I'm Dana Scully, I've been assigned to work with you.

MULDER: Oh, isn't it nice to be suddenly so highly regarded? So, who did you tick off to get stuck with this detail, Scully? (*The Pilot*)

Unlike Scully, who is assigned to work with the files by her superiors, Mulder has begun to investigate them of his own interest. Both agents have a background that evidently falls within or at least very close to the "bureau mainstream". Scully is a medical doctor who has taught at the FBI academy, and even Mulder, who has been nicknamed as "Spooky" Mulder because of his interest in the occult, has been "generally thought of as the best analyst in the violent crimes section", where he has studied serial killers. During the first season the importance of the X-files grows with every new piece of evidence of extraterrestrial life and of the government's role in hiding that evidence, although a great deal of that evidence is seen only by viewers and Mulder. The X-files project may still be characterized as the "FBI's most unwanted", but by the time the files are shut down, it has

become clear, after repeated efforts to obstruct the investigations of the agents, that Mulder and Scully are considered a significant threat at the higher levels of power. The importance of the X-files is increased by the contrast to the tasks that the agents are assigned to after the X-files are temporarily shut down at the end of the first season. Scully teaches students at the FBI and Mulder transcribes wiretap records. Shutting the files down does not prevent them from encountering the same kinds of cases as before, but especially Mulder is frustrated by the tasks that he thinks are a waste of time, such as being sent to investigate what first appears to be a homicide victim that has been found in a sewer:

SKINNER: Is there a problem, Agent Mulder?

MULDER: Yeah, there is.

SKINNER: Then make an appointment.

MULDER: It's kind of hard to make an appointment when you're up to your ass in raw sewage, being jerked from one meaningless assignment to another.

SKINNER: Excuse me?

MULDER: What's my next punishment, scrubbing the bathroom floors with a toothbrush?
(*The Host*)

Skinner counters Mulder's complaints with rather unflattering evaluation of the X-files:

SKINNER: Certainly, agent Mulder, given your recent history here, you're not one to judge what is or is not a waste of the bureau's time or manpower. (*The Host*)

This does not necessarily mean that Skinner actually thinks the X-files are a waste of time. Indeed, his harsh remark may be due to the presence of other FBI officials who are clearly observing the scene in Skinner's office.

The relationship between the agents and the FBI as an institution is not straight-forwardly antagonistic nor collaborative. In most of the cases Mulder and Scully do have to struggle not only against criminals or paranormal powers, but also against a rigid, hierarchical bureau that either directly obstructs their investigations or denies them the information or resources they need in order to solve the case. Still any clear-cut antagonism is denied for example by Bellon, who argues that the criticism that the series directs towards the government is more like a flow than a binary opposition (Bellon 1999, 148). By this he means that the

agents are not complete outsiders who fight against the federal government. They are federal agents who usually follow the orders they receive from Skinner, and they make constant use of bureau's technological resources and manpower in their efforts to solve the cases. Access depends on their submission to the authority, as Kubek (1996, 172) remarks. In *Paper Clip* Scully acknowledges this dependence on the resources that they can access as federal agents:

SCULLY: We are operating so far outside of the law right now, we've given up on the very notion of justice. We've turned ourselves into outsiders. We have lost our access and our protection. (*Paper Clip*)

The announcement "we're with the FBI" that the agents make to criminals and witnesses alike serves as a constant reminder of the fact that they encounter all the crimes and paranormal mysteries just because they are FBI agents. This may be one of the reasons why the writers have chosen two FBI agents as the protagonists. The jobs as federal investigators give the protagonists, and hence to the audience as well, a level of access that "ordinary" citizens would not have. The FBI, or more precisely the FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C., is the place where Mulder and Scully literally start off in most of their cases. The agents are very clearly "with the FBI" in situations in which they are fighting against criminals or terrorists (*Lazarus; Shadows*), religious cults (*The Field Where I Died*, an episode which includes several direct references to the conflict between the Branch Davidians and the federal government in Waco, Texas⁶) or militias (*Tunguska; Unrequited*). The latter two groups have important roles in antigovernmental conspiracy theories which see federal law enforcement agencies, such as the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF), as tools of a multinational conspiracy to overthrow "traditional American sovereignty at the local, state, and national levels" (Fenster 1999, 25). Mulder and Scully teaming up with the FBI in such cases, and in *The Field Where I Died* also with

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The confrontation between the federal government (primarily the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms) and a religious cult led by David Koresh at Waco, Texas, in 1993. Koresh and about 80 of his followers were killed in the fire that ended the siege that had lasted 51 days.

the BATF, would again suggest firm connections between the agents and the federal government.

The situation is, however, more complex than that. In *Unrequited*, for example, Mulder and Scully first go to arrest a militia leader who believes in “empowering the individual over a corrupt and corrupting federal government”. The leader first raises the main issue of the episode, namely the belief that there are still American soldiers alive in Vietnam as prisoners of war and that the government wants to keep this a secret. Scully denies this belief as ungrounded, citing the Department of Defense that in 1973 “determined that there were no more POWs in Vietnam”. Mulder, however, believes that there exists a “secret policy of denial about POWs”. It becomes evident later in the episode that the militia leader and Mulder were right, which on the one hand strikes common ground for Mulder and militias, and on the other adds to the credibility of the latter.

In the series outsiders generally identify Mulder and Scully strongly with their institution. This is the case especially with Native Americans. An elderly Navajo man refers to Mulder and Scully repeatedly as “FBI man” and “FBI woman” (*The Blessing Way; Paper Clip*), and in *Shapes*, in which Mulder and Scully are investigating killings at a Trego Indian reservation, Mulder is called metonymically “FBI” by an elderly man called Ish:

MULDER: Anyone, uh, know Charlie Tskany?

ISH: Go home, FBI.

MULDER: How’d you know?

ISH: I could smell you a mile away.

MULDER: Well, they told me that even though my deodorant’s made for a woman, it’s strong enough for a man.

ISH: I was at Wounded Knee in 1973⁷. What I learned fighting the FBI is you don’t believe in us and we don’t believe in you.

MULDER: I want to believe. (*Shapes*)

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Ish refers to the confrontation between the federal government and approximately 200 Native Americans who occupied the village of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, for over two months. Two people died in the confrontation, much fewer than in the infamous massacre at the same location in 1890, when the US Army killed approximately 300 Sioux, including women and children.

The man has clearly had negative experiences with the bureau, and for him Mulder and Scully represent first and foremost a bureaucratic institution rather than law or justice. A similar comment is made a few moments later by a young woman, also a Trego, who says angrily:

GWEN: And I hate suits who are always here when they need something from us, but when we need help, they're nowhere to be found. (*Shapes*)

In the light of this remark Mulder and Scully are again mere bureaucrats, "suits" who represent an investigative arm of the federal government. In the course of the episode this tension between the agents and the Tregos slightly eases, apparently because of Mulder's openness to extreme possibilities, which in this case involve werewolves:

ISH: I sense you are different, FBI. You're more open to Native American belief than some Native Americans. You even have an Indian name - Fox. You should be "Running Fox", or "Sneaky Fox". (*Shapes*)

But this courtesy does not extend to the FBI as an institution. On the contrary, it takes us back to the question about the separation of Mulder and Scully from the bureau. What Ish senses, after all, is a difference between Mulder and the bureau.

Assistant Director Skinner has an important role as a mediating agent between Mulder and Scully and the bureau. Skinner states his position himself in the second season episode *F. Emasculata*, in which a pharmaceutical company with ties to the government has intentionally caused an outbreak of a lethal disease, and Mulder and Scully have tried in vain to make someone take the responsibility for this:

SKINNER: You never had a chance, Agent Mulder. For every step you take, they're three steps ahead.

MULDER: Well, what about you, where do you stand?

SKINNER: I stand right on the line that you keep crossing. (*F. Emasculata*)

The line that Skinner stands on is the line that separates Mulder and Scully from the institution. It separates two agents, with their individuality and occasional insubordination, from the bureaucratic and secretive organization and its leaders,

from men who value “order over law, control over freedom, and power over truth” (Malach 1996, 73). Skinner’s insistence on following the bureau protocol is symbolically highlighted in scenes that take place in his office. On two opposing walls there are the portraits of President Clinton and Attorney General Janet Reno, who heads the Department of Justice. These federal icons suggest that at least in his own office Skinner’s hands are tied by the bureau procedure. Skinner’s role is still ambiguous. As the closest superior of Mulder and Scully he gives out orders, restricts their actions and assigns them to other tasks. He is also shown in several occasions negotiating in his office with the Cigarette-Smoking Man, the principal Nemesis of the agents. It is frequently apparent that Skinner takes orders from the Cigarette-Smoking Man, and sometimes it even seems that Skinner must know more about the conspiracy than the agents. There are times, however, when Skinner strongly opposes the Cigarette-Smoking Man’s policies and gives orders to him. He also risks his career and sometimes even his life for Mulder and Scully. Occasionally Skinner is unable to help Mulder and Scully even when he wants to do it, as happens after the files have been closed for a while and Mulder and Scully are not free to investigate a case that could clearly be classified as an “X-file”:

MULDER: You know, you had a pair of agents that could have handled a case like this. Agent Scully and I might have been able to save that man’s life, but you shut us down.
 SKINNER: I know. This should have been an X-file. We all take our orders from someone, Agent Mulder. (*The Host*)

Four episodes later, however, Skinner suddenly appears to have the authority to reopen the X-files after Scully has disappeared, and when it is quite obvious that the Cigarette-Smoking Man and the government have something to do with her apparent abduction:

SKINNER: There’s nothing you can do.
 MULDER: What can you do about it?
 SKINNER: There’s only one thing that I can do, Agent Mulder. As of right now, I’m reopening the X-Files. That’s what they fear the most. (*Ascension*)

Mulder and Scully have no illusions about Skinner’s power in the bureau, as Scully directly states at the end of the following dialogue. The dialogue takes

place in a situation in which it is Mulder who has disappeared and the bureau is investigating the disappearance but also his activities prior to it.

SCULLY: Who are these people?

SKINNER: These people are doing their job.

SCULLY: What they're doing is putting an official stamp on the perpetuation of a lie.

SKINNER: These people have a protocol to follow, which is something you and Agent Mulder did not do.

SCULLY: What about the people who were poisoning Agent Mulder's water? Whose protocol was that?

SKINNER: The investigation will...

SCULLY: The investigation will be an exercise! The men who killed Agent Mulder⁸, the people who killed his father, they aren't meant to be found.

SKINNER: We will find them.

SCULLY: With all due respect, sir, I think you overestimate your position in the chain of command. (*The Blessing Way*)

Following protocol is the central issue in the agents' confrontations with all of their superiors, not only with Skinner. Especially Mulder finds it difficult to work according to bureau procedures, which at first puzzles even Scully:

SCULLY: I don't understand you Mulder. Why you're always defying protocol. Ignoring jurisdiction... (*Fallen Angel*)

In several occasions the agents are subjected to hearings at the Office of Professional Conduct where their alleged insubordination is the main issue. This happens for example in *Fallen Angel*, in which Mulder has witnessed an alien abduction that the military denies:

SECTION CHIEF: ...as well as insubordination and misconduct. How do you respond to these allegations, Agent Mulder?

MULDER: Over a dozen men lost their lives and you want me to respond to issues of protocol?

SECTION CHIEF: You failed to obtain proper authorization for your actions.

MULDER: Because I knew it wouldn't be forthcoming.

SECTION CHIEF: You also violated a federal quarantine....

At this point both men raise their voices.

MULDER: The man was abducted. We all know it. Everybody in this room knows it.

8

At this point in the series everyone believes, as should the viewers as well, that Mulder has died in a fire set by the Cigarette-Smoking Man in *Anasazi*, the final episode of the second season.

SECTION CHIEF: Colonel Henderson's written testimony states that Fenig's body was found two hours later in a cargo container.

MULDER: Then what can I say? How can I disprove lies that are stamped with an official seal?

SECTION CHIEF: That will be all Mr. Mulder.

MULDER: You can deny all the things I've seen. All the things I've discovered. But not for much longer. Because too many others know what's happening out there. And no one, no government agency has jurisdiction over the truth. (*Fallen Angel*)

The constant frustration of the agents at the rigid bureau that thwarts all their efforts to find the truth about extraterrestrials is transferred also onto viewers who have seen even more of the evidence than Mulder. In addition to its bureaucratic approach, the FBI above Mulder and Scully is, or at least its highest officials are part of the vast alien conspiracy. At least some of the lies are clearly stamped with the FBI's seal. At times it seems astonishing that Mulder and Scully are allowed to continue with their work at all, and reinstated relatively soon after the files are closed. One explanation for this is provided in a dialogue between the bureau official who has led the hearing in the previous example, and Mulder's informant Deep Throat:

SECTION CHIEF: Why did you countermand my decision? Mulder's conduct was in clear violation not only of bureau procedures but of federal law.

DEEP THROAT: Yes.

SECTION CHIEF: I don't understand. The committee's case was airtight. You've ruined the last best chance we had to get rid of him.

DEEP THROAT: I appreciate your frustration, but you and I both know that Mulder's work is a singular passion. Poses a most unique dilemma. But his occasional insubordination is in the end, far less dangerous.

SECTION CHIEF: With respect sir, less dangerous than what?

DEEP THROAT: Than having him exposed to the wrong people. What he knows - what he thinks he knows. Always keep your friends close, Mr. McGrath... but keep your enemies closer. (*Fallen Angel*)

The only logical reason for the bureau's willingness to get rid of Mulder must be its reluctance to bring certain things to light. In contrast to the various activities that the government is engaged in, this may be considered an example of the government's *inactivity*, or more accurately, its attempts at *inactivation*. The government sees the activities of Mulder and Scully as a threat, and therefore attempts to hinder their investigations.

Even though Deep Throat tells Mulder and Scully in *The Erlenmeyer Flask* to trust no one, the viewers are expected to trust Mulder and Scully,

whereas the FBI as an institution mostly arouses suspicions. There are episodes in which the bureau is represented as the federal law enforcement agency that protects the nation from criminals and terrorists (not anymore from communists), but the overriding image is that of a rigid and bureaucratic organization that does not care about the rights and liberties of the American people. The contrast between the agents and the unfavorable images from the 70s is satirized in the episode *Jose Chung's "From Outer Space"*, which is a parody of the whole UFO phenomenon and the misconduct of government agencies. A witness who has seen a UFO refers to Scully and Mulder who have arrived at the scene as "men in black", "one of them disguised as a woman". He also claims that after the incident Scully has grabbed him by his collar and said:

SCULLY: You never saw this. This didn't happen. You tell anyone, you're a dead man.
(*Jose Chung's "From Outer Space"*)

This is something the viewers know neither Scully nor Mulder would say. It might be concluded that "while the image of the FBI agent as an individual has been recuperated, the image of the institution remains ambiguous at best" (Malach 1996, 72).

6.2 Other security and intelligence services

DEEP THROAT: There are limits to my knowledge, Mr. Mulder. Inside the intelligence community, there are so called "black organizations". Groups within groups conducting covert activities, unknown at the highest levels of power. (*The Erlenmeyer Flask*)

Information, knowledge, and truth are central concepts in *The X-Files*. It is therefore not surprising that the so called intelligence community has a prominent role in the series. The intelligence community consists of various government agencies and bureaus "involved in gathering information about the capabilities and intentions of foreign governments and engaging in covert activities to further American foreign policy aims" (Bardes et al. 1990, 488). In addition to the FBI that is also one of the members, the best-known agencies in the community are probably the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency, and

these are also the ones most conspicuous in *The X-Files*. In this section I will analyze the role of these agencies in the series, because they often represent the governmental authority in the series. Because information and secrecy are so closely related to these agencies, I will also discuss these themes.

Government agencies such as the CIA and the NSA conduct intelligence activities which consist mainly of overt information gathering and covert actions. In other words, they are spy organizations. As Bardes et al. point out, covert actions are by definition carried out secretly and therefore, as a general rule, the public that does know about the agencies is unaware of these actions (Bardes et al. 1990, 489). The logic of this secrecy is explained by Nelson (1999):

What is secret might well not be known by the enemy, and probably should not be. But in the world of spy versus spy, it definitely is not and should not be known by a public - even on your own side. (Nelson 1999, 109.)

Secrets are not kept from the public only because public knowledge may eventually reach also the enemy, which is something that the public can generally understand and also accept. Another reason, as Nelson points out, can be drawn from the cold war argument that the secret agencies of the government are expected to “do things exactly counter to the overall ethos, the atmospherics and principles, of democratic regimes” in order to protect the democracy “in hard and dangerous times” (Nelson 1999, 109). This means that the agencies may have to rely on actions that “cannot be decent in democratic terms” and that are therefore better kept secret. This kind of logic would suggest that an agency such as the CIA is not to be judged according to strictly democratic principles.

What I have said about covert actions so far is not to be interpreted in the way that secrecy and democracy are two entirely incompatible terms. The central point is rather that governmental secrecy in a democracy is at least supposed to be limited. In Bobbio’s words, in contrast to an autocratic state in which “the secrecy of state matters is a rule”, secrecy in a democracy is “an exception regulated by laws which do not permit it to be extended unduly” (Bobbio 1987, 92). There are several occasions in *The X-Files* where secrecy about certain issues is defended by various characters, including Deep Throat, who is ironically the

secret informant who provides Mulder and Scully classified information about the government's activities:

DEEP THROAT: There still exists some secrets that should remain secret – truths that people are just not ready to know.

MULDER: Who are you to decide that for me?

DEEP THROAT: The world's reaction to such knowledge would be far too dangerous.

MULDER: Dangerous? You mean in the sense of outrage like the reactions to the Kennedy assassinations or MIAs or radiation experiments on terminal patients, Watergate, Iran-Contra, Roswell⁹, the Tuskegee experiments¹⁰, where will it end? Oh, I guess it won't end as long as... men like you decide what is truth. (*E.B.E*)

The men at the higher levels of power are not the only defenders of secrecy. Even Scully defends secrecy in cases in which she sees it as an acceptable or even a necessary exception to the rule of publicity:

MULDER: Okay, listen, Scully. I need to know how this happened. I want you to start documenting everything you can get your hands on. People have to know about the cover-up.

SCULLY: The public?

MULDER: It's a public health crisis.

SCULLY: Mulder, we can't leak this, not until we know more. The fugitive that you're looking for... he might not even be infected.

MULDER: Yeah, but what if he is?

SCULLY: If this gets out... prematurely, the panic is going to spread faster than the contagion. Mulder, we can't let this be known.

MULDER: What if someone dies because we withheld what we knew?

SCULLY: What if someone dies because we didn't? There'll be a time for the truth, Mulder, but this isn't it. (*F. Emasculata*)

Surprisingly, Scully appears to be sharing the policy of the Cigarette-Smoking Man in this episode, in which two men have escaped from prison, both of them carrying a deadly disease:

CIGARETTE-SMOKING MAN: In 1988, there was an outbreak of hemorrhagic fever in Sacramento, California. The truth would have caused panic. Panic would have cost lives. We controlled the disease by controlling the information.

⁹ Refers to the alleged crash of a UFO near Roswell, New Mexico in 1947, of which the government was said to have hidden all evidence. This event is generally considered the beginning of UFO narratives.

¹⁰ Governmental research project in Tuskegee, Alabama begun in the 1930s, in which the effects of syphilis were studied by denying black men who suffered from the disease proper treatment (Fenster 1999, 223).

MULDER: You can't protect the public by lying to them.

CIGARETTE-SMOKING MAN: It's done every day. (*F. Emasculata*)

The episode can be said to contrast the people's right to know and the people's right to be saved. "Protecting the public by lying to them" arouses the image of strong governmental patronage, and it also sounds very much the same as the Vietnam war's "destroying the village in order to save it". When the government decides what is right, there is nothing the uninformed public can do.

The reliance of government's agencies on covert actions can be summarized in two key issues. First, secrecy is antithetical to the image of democratic politics that emphasize visibility: democratic decision-making presupposes that the citizens know enough about what is going on in the nation's politics (Nelson 1999, 109). Second, when the covert actions of an agency such as the CIA have been uncovered as in the Senate investigations during the mid-1970s, they have turned out to be not only covert but also illegal. The committee headed by Senator Frank Church found out, for example, that the agency had spied on American citizens which was strictly prohibited for it since it was supposed to be confined to foreign intelligence operations. The agency had also targeted antiwar groups by launching the so called operation CHAOS in 1967 in much the same way as the FBI had done to other groups with its own programs (Fried 1990, 191). As far as foreign operations are concerned, the CIA's role in coups and revolutions around the world in countries such as Iran, Guatemala and Vietnam has become common knowledge. The public discussion after revelations such as those by the Church committee has turned into the "dark side" (Bardes et al. 1990, 489) of the agencies, feeding both general mistrust and full-fledged conspiracy theories.

In a manner similar to spy stories *The X-Files* has got anchored on "the political excitement of covert action" (Nelson 1999, 105). A great deal of these activities in *The X-Files* cannot be identified explicitly with any government agency, which only adds to the "excitement" of the actions. Furthermore, without any certainty of *who* is doing any particular "thing", it is often not clear *what* the "thing" actually is. Whenever one of these agencies is involved besides the FBI,

it is either the CIA or the NSA, and even in these cases their involvement is usually merely implied without substantiation. In *Paper Clip*, for example, Mulder and Scully are chased and shot at by a group of men that Mulder describes to Skinner as a “some kind of hit squad driving what looked an awful lot like CIA fleet sedans.” No further comment about the CIA’s role in the events of the episode is made. Mulder’s secret informant Deep Throat reveals in *E.B.E* that he worked for the CIA during the Vietnam war, but his current ties to the agency are not explicated. Both CIA and NSA are, however, also more explicitly portrayed in the series.

In *E.B.E* Byers, a member of the Lone Gunmen, tells Mulder and Scully that the CIA, “the most heinous and evil force of the twentieth century”, is secretly operating in Russia and trying to put into power Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the leader of the Russian Social Democrats, in an attempt to reinforce its own political power:

BYERS: You don’t believe that the CIA, threatened by a loss of power and funding because of the collapse of the cold war, wouldn’t dream of having the old enemy back?

SCULLY: I think you give the government too much credit. I mean, the government can’t control the deficit or manage crime...what makes you think they could plan and execute such an elaborate conspiracy?

BYERS: We’re not talking about the bunch of idiots up on the hill trying to bone the capital pages. We’re talking about a dark network, a government within a government, controlling our every move. (*E.B.E.*)

The alleged conspiracy is a reference to similar CIA operations throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. Scully appears to equate CIA operation with government operation, whereas Byers sees the CIA as an independent operator furthering its own aims by covert international activities but which is also in possession of great domestic powers. The theory proposed by Byers comes very close to Nelson’s characterization of the intelligence services that

become “agencies” in a very peculiar sense that can escape the western politics of representation and the rational-choice accounts of agency. They become highly autonomous operators; worse, they end up becoming the tails that wag the dogs. They are supposed to be governmental means; they are supposed to be instruments of the people, to protect us from international intrigues. To impressive extents, however, they end up conducting their own foreign and military policies. (Nelson 1999, 129.)

The dark side of the CIA is perhaps most poignantly expressed through Deep Throat, who at least in the past has been on the agency's payroll. He reveals to Mulder in *E.B.E* that he has "been a participant in some of the most insidious lies and witness to deeds that no crazed man could imagine", and describes his work in the agency as something that he deeply regrets:

DEEP THROAT: I was with the CIA in Vietnam. A UFO was sighted for five nights over Hanoi. The marines shot it down and brought it to us. Maybe... it didn't know what a gun was or perhaps they don't show emotion but that... innocent and blank expression as I pulled the trigger has haunted me... until I found you. That's why I come to you, Mr. Mulder, and will continue to come to you to atone for what I've done. And maybe sometime, through you, the truth will be known. (*E.B.E*)

Deep Throat's earlier remark about truths that are not to be known by the public must be remembered here, but the hidden past of the agency is nevertheless depicted as dubious.

The National Security Agency's role is most visible in the first season episode *Conduit*. In the episode a teenage girl disappears, allegedly abducted by UFOs. Mulder and Scully meet the girl's eight-year-old brother, who communicates with the aliens through television (cf. Tobe Hooper's 1982 horror film *Poltergeist*, in which the little girl communicates with evil spirits through television) and writes down a long list of binary code. This is where the NSA steps in, claiming that the boy has managed to intercept a defense satellite transmission. There is an immediate conflict between Mulder and the NSA as the latter party expects full cooperation from the FBI agents and Mulder denies it:

MULDER: Unless they tell me otherwise, I'm not accountable to anybody outside my subcommittee. I don't care if it's the NSA or the Vatican Police. (*Conduit*)

Scully, however, takes a different stand on the issue and tells the NSA what they want to know, the boy's whereabouts.

MULDER: You shouldn't have told them. They have no jurisdiction.

SCULLY: Mulder, they're NSA. They think the boy may be a threat to national security.

MULDER: Come on, how could an eight-year-old boy, who can barely multiply, be a threat to national security? People call *me* paranoid. (*Conduit*)

After the NSA agents get the information they want, they go to the boy's home and virtually destroy it while searching for more evidence. They also separate the crying boy from his mother, taking them both away for interrogations. The episode portrays the NSA as a group of bureaucratic bullies who can legitimate their actions with any perceived threat to national security.

The representations of the intelligence community are not entirely unfavorable. In *Shadows* two agents from an unidentified government agency ask Mulder and Scully for their assistance in a case in which an American arms manufacturer is selling weapons to a terrorist group. The two agents do not identify themselves and Mulder and Scully can only guess who they work for:

SCULLY: Who do you think they were?

MULDER: NSA, CIA, some covert organization that Congress will uncover in the next scandal. (*Shadows*)

The two unidentified agents barely answer any of the questions that Mulder and Scully make regarding the case, and their cooperation seems to come to an end:

MAN: Well, thank you very much for your time Agent Mulder, Scully. If any inquiry as into this meeting be made, we request full denial.

MULDER: I'd say you people already suffer from full denial. (*Shadows*)

Mulder and Scully have to find out for themselves what has happened, but in the end the other two agents are willing to cooperate, when they realize that without Mulder and Scully they cannot solve the case. They tell the agents what they know, but they still remain unidentified. Even though the agency that they work for, most likely either the CIA or the NSA, again controls the information, it is not involved in any illegal activities, and it cooperates with the FBI.

As the final example of the NSA I will mention the episode *731*, in which Mulder has sneaked into a train in which the government transports a possible alien or an alien-human hybrid. He is almost strangled to death by a man who claims, after Mulder has got the upper hand over him, that he is an NSA agent:

AGENT: You have no idea what you're dealing with here.

MULDER: Well, maybe you should've filled me in before you tried to kill me. Now, who are you?

AGENT: No. Who are you?

MULDER: Answer me!

NSA AGENT: I work for the National Security Agency.

MULDER: The NSA? Since when did they start issuing you guys piano wire instead of guns? (731)

Mulder has certain presuppositions of the way the NSA conducts its activities, and he does not believe the man really works for the agency. No other employer is indicated, however, and the issue remains unclear.

It can be concluded that *The X-Files* constructs very unfavorable images of the CIA and the NSA. Especially in the case of the CIA the series draws on the controversies and scandals that the agency has been involved in throughout its existence after the Second World War. This approach of the series to the intelligence community is perhaps mostly attributable to the covert aspects inherent to these organizations, and to the “politics of lying” (Nelson 1999, 127) that is a central theme in spy stories and *The X-Files* as well. In the next section I will move on to the representations of a more visible side of politics, namely the Congress and the cabinet departments.

6.3 The Congress and cabinet departments

AGENT: This area’s always been known for it’s criminal element.

MULDER: Especially when Congress is in session. (*Wetwired*)

The American political system is based on representative democracy, in which “the people hold the ultimate power over the government through the election process, but policy decisions are all made by national officials” (Bardes et al.1990, 10). In practice, this means that the people elect their representatives into two houses of Congress, which are called the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Congress constitutes the legislative branch of the federal government, the other two being the executive branch and the judicial branch. The Congress has several functions. It makes the laws, represents the diverse interests of constituents, oversees the way the laws are implemented (this is done through hearings and investigations, and the control over budgets of different agencies), keeps the public informed of national issues, and resolves various social conflicts. (Bardes

et al. 1990, 316-320.) The oversight function has a crucial role as far as the balance of power between the legislative and executive branches is concerned, and the Congress has had an important role in investigating executive conduct and exposing misconduct of the intelligence community, including the CIA, the FBI, and the NSA (Greenberg 1989, 273).

The majority of the employees of the federal bureaucracy work in the executive branch. The major institutions of the executive branch are 14 cabinet departments, various independent establishments, and government corporations. (Bardes et al. 1990, 395-396.) I will restrict my analysis to the institutions that are relevant for *The X-Files*, and since I have already analyzed the security and intelligence services in the previous section, this section will cover, in addition to the legislative branch, only the cabinet departments, and of these only the Defense, Justice, and State Department. All cabinet departments are directly accountable to the president of the United States, and they are the major service organizations within the federal bureaucracy. The president controls the cabinet departments through the power to appoint or fire the top officials of the departments, but as Bardes et al. point out, each department employs also thousands of individuals who are not under the president's control (Bardes et al. 1990, 396).

Nelson remarks that in western democracies politics is usually understood as representational, and that "we want to treat political actors as our agents, our operatives, our representatives" (Nelson 1999, 129). He adds, though, that representativeness can entail "considerable latitude" about the things that are done and how they are done, and this has been the case especially with the security and intelligence services. The Congress, or rather its individual members are supposed to be the most direct representatives of the people, described by Bardes et al. as "brokers between private citizens and the imposing, often faceless, federal government" (Bardes et al. 1990, 317). How then are these "brokers" portrayed in *The X-Files*, and how "representative" of the people are they?

The closest ties between the Congress and Mulder and Scully are related to the questions of the existence of extraterrestrial intelligence. I will therefore return to the Congress again in the section on the UFOs. In *The Pilot* Mulder

reveals to Scully that he has made connections in Congress and this has helped him in investigations into the UFOs:

MULDER: There's classified government information I've been trying to access, but someone has been blocking my attempts to get at it.

SCULLY: Who? I don't understand.

MULDER: Someone at a higher level of power. The only reason I've been allowed to continue with my work is because I've made connections in Congress. (*The Pilot*)

Having a connection in the Congress has thus helped Mulder, at least to some extent, to overcome government's interventions. Mulder's Congress contact is Senator Matheson who is introduced in *Little Green Men*, the first episode of the second season. The senator's powers in helping Mulder are limited, however, as the senator himself admits in the same episode. In a later episode this is made clear also by Mulder's secret informant X, when Mulder seeks help in trying to find Scully who has disappeared:

X: You've wasted a trip, Mr. Mulder. There's nothing the senator can do for you now.

MULDER: What?

X: Not without committing political suicide.

MULDER: Why? Do they have something on him?

X: They have something on everyone, Mr. Mulder. The question is when they'll use it.

MULDER: I need his help.

X: No one can help you now. Your channels of appeal and recourse are closed.

(*Ascension*)

The senator's powers may be limited, but the omnipotent government which in this case excludes the senator, has "something on everyone". No conclusions should be drawn from the representations of Senator Matheson as to the role and attitudes of Congress as a whole. In *Little Green Men*, for example, Mulder's voice-over reveals that "first-term Nevada Senator Richard Bryan" has initiated the termination of NASA's project on the search for extraterrestrial intelligence. Another example of the Senate's activities is found in *Tunguska* (and continuing in *Terma*), in which Scully appears at a hearing before the Senate Select Subcommittee on Intelligence and Terrorism.

SCULLY: I left behind a career in medicine to become an FBI agent four years ago, because I believed in this country. Because I wanted to uphold its laws, to punish the guilty

and to protect the innocent. I still believe in this country. But I believe there are powerful men in the government who do not. (*Tunguska*)

At this point we see a shot of The Cigarette-Smoking Man who is present in the courtroom, a shot that clearly implies that he is one of the “powerful men” that Scully refers to. Scully continues:

SCULLY: . . . men who have no respect for the law and who flout it with impunity.

CHAIRMAN: Miss Scully. . .

SCULLY: I have come to the conclusion that it is no longer possible. . .

CHAIRMAN: Agent Scully - this is not a soapbox, Miss Scully. Your statement will be entered into the record. (*Tunguska*)

What follows is a scene similar to one in *Fallen Angel* (see page 36), in which Mulder has to defend himself before the FBI’s Office of Professional Conduct. Here Scully has come to tell the committee about what she thinks is the real issue, but the officials at the subcommittee only want to hear about the issue that they consider the most important - Mulder’s conduct. Mulder and Scully have intercepted a diplomatic pouch containing a black rock that is apparently of extraterrestrial origin. The agents try to find out why the rock has been brought to the United States and why people are killed because of it. The Cigarette-Smoking Man also wants to have the rock in his possession. Without authorization from the bureau Mulder flies to Russia where the rock has been brought from, in order to find out more about its purpose. After Mulder’s disappearance Scully is summoned before the subcommittee to explain his whereabouts. The story continues in the next episode, *Terma*, in which Scully analyzes the subcommittee’s actions to Skinner:

SCULLY: Several of the men on this committee are lawyers. It is my experience that lawyers ask the wrong question only when they don’t want the right answer.

SKINNER: Unless Agent Mulder has already found the answers they’re looking for.

SCULLY: Or someone wants to make sure that he doesn’t find out.

SKINNER: These are congressmen we’re talking about, Agent Scully.

SCULLY: I know that, sir. And it is my natural inclination to believe that they are acting in the best interest of the truth...but I am not inclined to follow my own judgement in this case. (*Terma*)

Scully’s “natural inclination” as well as Skinner’s implicit claim that congressmen would not want to hide the truth are strongly questioned in the two episodes. In

Terma, when Mulder finally appears before the subcommittee with evidence of a conspiracy related to the rock and extraterrestrial biotoxin that it contains, the hearing is suddenly terminated.

MULDER: Why is this so hard to believe? When the accepted discovery of life off this planet is on the front page of every newspaper around the world? When even the most conservative scientists and science journals are calling for the exploration of Mars and Jupiter? With every reason to believe that life and the persistence of it is thriving outside our own terrestrial sphere? If you cannot get past this, then I suggest this whole committee be held in contempt, for ignoring evidence that cannot be refuted.

SENATOR SORENSON: This is NOT why we are here today.

MULDER: Then why are we here today?

CHAIRMAN: I will suggest that we recess here until the evidence can be properly evaluated. (*Terma*)

This is another example of the government's attempts at inactivating Mulder and Scully (see page 36). In the last scene of *Terma* one of the members of the subcommittee, Senator Sorenson, hands a report on the case to Cigarette-Smoking Man, neither one of them uttering a single word and it appears that the senator is clearly participating in the conspiracy.

It is thus not clear whose interests the Congress represents in *The X-Files*. Senator Matheson is the only congressman who assists the agents in their "search for the truth", whereas others who appear in the series are in one way or the other hindering that search and participating in the conspiracy the agents are trying to uncover. Mulder's quip about the Congress as a "criminal element" (*Wetwired*), quoted in the beginning of this section, thus gains implicit support.

Besides singular references only three cabinet departments are present in the episodes that were analyzed. They are the Justice Department, State Department and the Defense Department. They are all known as "inner departments", since their primary purpose is serving the president of the United States (Bardes et al. 1990, 396). In comparison to government agencies and the Congress which are represented through their individual members and employees, the cabinet departments are mainly represented in *The X-Files* as administrative entities. Perhaps the most significant exception to this form of impersonal representation is Mulder's father Bill Mulder who is a former employee of the State Department.

It would at first seem self-evident that the Department of Justice was frequently present in *The X-Files*, being the department under which the FBI operates. It has, however, the fewest direct references of the three departments. The department is implicitly present in every scene in Assistant Director Skinner's office where a portrait of Attorney General Janet Reno hangs on the wall together with a portrait of president Clinton, as if reminders of the bureau's position in the federal bureaucracy. The most straightforward reference is found in the scene in which Mulder wants to know where he can find the Cigarette-Smoking Man who is apparently behind Scully's disappearance. Skinner has to remind Mulder of the fact that the basis of bureau's activities is in the law and justice:

MULDER: Oh, you can have it all, you can have my badge, you can have the X-files, just tell me where he is.

SKINNER: And then what? He sleeps with the fishes? We're not the mafia, Agent Mulder. I know it's easy to forget but we work for the Department of Justice. (*One Breath*)

There are no instances in which the Department of Justice is portrayed independently of its investigative arm, the FBI. At least some of the critique of the FBI executives may be thought to apply to the rest of the department, though, unless one assumes that the executives in *The X-Files* operate independently of the departmental leaders like the tail wagging the dog.

On a personal level there is a close connection between Mulder and the State Department, the oldest of the cabinet departments, although this relationship is not discussed until at the end of the second season in *Anasazi*. The episode begins when a hacker hacks into the Defense Department's computer system and downloads files that describe a governmental conspiracy to hide the existence of UFOs. The Cigarette-Smoking Man visits Mulder's father Bill Mulder, and it is revealed, besides the fact that the two men know each other well, that Bill Mulder has had a central role in the conspiracy when he worked at the State Department. Later it is Mulder's turn to pay his father a visit and hear his unclear confession of the things he has done while working for the government.

BILL MULDER: It's... It's so clear now. Simple. It was so complicated then. The, the choices that needed to be made.

MULDER: What choices? Dad.

BILL MULDER: You're a smart boy Fox. You're smarter than I ever was.

MULDER: About what?

BILL MULDER: Your politics are yours, you've never thrown in. The minute you do that, their doctrines become yours and you can be held responsible.

MULDER: You're talking about your work in the State Department.

BILL MULDER: You're going to learn of things... (*Anasazi*)

In a way Bill Mulder sees himself as the government's victim, but he also acknowledges that he made the choices himself, whatever they were. At the end of the episode Mulder is left for dead by armed troops led by the Cigarette-Smoking Man, and as Mulder hovers between life and death in the next episode, his father appears to him in a dream and continues his confession:

BILL MULDER: The lies I told you were a pox and poison to my soul and now you are here because of them. Lies I thought might bury forever a truth I could not live with. I stand here, ashamed of the choices I made so long ago, when you were just a boy. You are the memory, Fox. It lives in you. If you were to die now, the truth will die. And only the lies survive us. (*The Blessing Way*)

These words bear close resemblance to those uttered by Deep Throat in *E.B.E* (see page 43). Both cases are examples of what Graham describes as a "transference of guilt", by which Mulder is turned into a "memory bank", the "custodian of America's secret postwar history" (Graham 1996, 58). As a matter of fact Bill Mulder's work in the State Department tells the viewers very little about the Department itself. It tells more about the rejection of paternalistic authority that is evident in the series. Bill Mulder has been a part of the conspiracy when he worked in the State Department, and the Cigarette-Smoking Man warns Mulder in *Anasazi* that if Mulder were to expose the conspiracy, he would also expose his father. In addition both Deep Throat and the Cigarette-Smoking Man can be seen as paternalistic authority figures¹¹. As the focus shifts via Bill Mulder from the public sphere of government to the private sphere of the Mulder family, the private sphere proves to be a part of the government's conspiracies (Kubek 1996, 179), and as much as the truth can be said to be found "in there" in the

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The episode *Talitha Cumi* hints that the Cigarette-Smoking Man has had an affair with Mrs. Mulder when Fox was a child, and then during the fifth season (not included in this analysis) it is actually insinuated that he might be Fox Mulder's real father.

recesses of American society (Graham 1996, 57), it can also be found in the family.

Before moving on to analyzing the representations of the military, I will mention the Defense Department, which is not present in the series as much as the previous two departments. This department might also have been incorporated in the section on the military, but I decided to discuss it here with the other two cabinet departments. The first allusion to the department is made at the end of *The Pilot*, when the Cigarette-Smoking Man hides the evidence gathered by Mulder and Scully in a storage in the Pentagon, the department headquarters which Mills describes as “the most dramatic symbol of the military edifice” (Mills 1981, 186). The same thing occurs again at the end of the first season in *The Erlenmeyer Flask*. From the beginning, therefore, the Defense Department’s role in the vast UFO conspiracy is made clear. Further proof is provided in *Anasazi* by a hacker, a friend of The Lone Gunmen, who manages to break into the Defense Department’s computer system and download top-secret UFO intelligence files that he hands over to Mulder.

SKINNER: What is on this tape?

MULDER: Defense department files that weren’t supposed to exist. The truth about our government’s involvement in a global conspiracy of silence about the existence of extraterrestrial life. (*Paper Clip*)

In the final episode of the fourth season, and therefore also the last episode covered in this thesis, Mulder and Scully meet a man working at the Pentagon, who claims that the Defense Department has been lying to the American people throughout the Cold war period.

KRITSCHGAU: I was just like you, Agent Mulder, suspicious of everything but what you should be. I ran the DOD’s [Department of Defense] agitprop arm for a decade. I can show you records of disinformation dating back to the Korean War, before you were even born. (*Gethsemane*)

Virtually all the episodes that the Defense Department appears in link it to the extraterrestrials, and I will return to the department in the section on UFOs. Next,

however, I will continue in the field of defense by moving on to the representations of the military.

7. THE MILITARY

MULDER: Well, the military already sent troops to radioactive mushroom clouds, I guess they figured they had to top themselves, right? (*Sleepless*)

In *The Power Elite* (first published in 1956) sociologist C. Wright Mills analyzes the American power elite consisting of the leading men in three different domains of power: in politics, large corporations, and the armed forces. He calls the leaders of the last domain the “warlords”, generals and admirals who “have gained and have been given increased power to make and to influence decisions of the gravest consequence” (Mills 1981, 171). Mills has not been alone in paying attention to military power in policymaking, nor was he the first one. In the 1930s Roosevelt was concerned about the military influence in the domestic economy, and in 1961 Eisenhower warned the nation of the power of the military-industrial complex and the “immense military establishment” (quoted in Bardes et al. 1990, 492). The military has also been the target of conspiracy theories and, for example, Oliver Stone’s *JFK* (1991) begins with an excerpt of Eisenhower’s warning. Some of the most recent conspiracy theories concerning the military have been related to the so called Gulf War Syndrome that has been reported to ail American and British soldiers who fought in the Gulf war (Showalter 1998, 133-143). In this section I will discuss the representations of the military in *The X-Files*.

Some of the episodes of *The X-Files* revolve entirely around the military (e.g. *Deep Throat*, *Sleepless*, *Unrequited*) and in many others the armed forces have an otherwise important role. One thing common to the representations of the military in the series is that the military is portrayed as a fairly autonomous and secretive entity which is not willing to disclose anything about its actions. This is made clear at an early stage in the series in the second episode, when Mulder and Scully start investigating the disappearance of an Air Force pilot. In his first appearance in the series *Deep Throat* advises Mulder not to take the case:

DEEP THROAT: Leave this case alone Agent Mulder.

MULDER: What?

DEEP THROAT: The military will not tolerate an FBI investigation. (*Deep Throat*)

Contrary to Deep Throat's advice Mulder and Scully start making inquiries into the pilot's whereabouts, and they are faced with an institution that really does not tolerate these inquiries. They do manage to find out that the Air Force is flying top-secret planes that are based on UFO technology, and that this technology is making the pilots severely ill. In order to keep this a secret the Air Force is kidnapping its own pilots and making them forget everything they know about their work in the base. The issue of national security that was discussed in the section on security and intelligence services is raised by the military and also by the agents themselves:

SCULLY: Doesn't the government have a right and a responsibility to protect it's secrets?

MULDER: Yes, but at what cost, when does the human cost become too high for the building of a better machine?

SCULLY: Look, these are questions we have no business asking. (*Deep Throat*)

What makes Scully's opinion interesting is that earlier in the same episode she has told the wife of the disappeared pilot that there is no reason why she should not get information about her husband:

SCULLY: You know the government is not above the law. They cannot withhold information. (*Deep Throat*)

One might wonder whether these two comments made by Scully reflect a difference between principles and practice. In the first example Scully talks to her partner, and in the second to an outsider, possibly in an attempt to project a more favorable image of the government. There is, however, an obvious difference between secret military technology and the fate of a pilot, but the point is Scully's comment on the withholding of information. By protecting its secrets the government, or the military, is in essence withholding information. Some of the methods by which the military is protecting its secrets are shown very early on in the episode. The agents are followed and Mulder's phone appears to be tapped.

Later a group of men in suits stop the agents on a back road, pull the film out of their camera and empty Scully's briefcase. When Mulder asks why they were stopped, he is punched and told:

AGENT: National security. Now get in your car. You'll be escorted back to your motel. You will pack and leave town immediately, or assume the consequences of intense indiscretion. (*Deep Throat*)

The military's control extends much further than just withholding information. It is also shown controlling the human body and the mind. In the same episode, when Mulder gets too close to the secrets of the airbase, he is captured and subjected to the same procedure as the pilots, which Mulder calls the "selective memory drain", and all the memories of the things that he has seen in the base are erased from his brain. When Mulder is released from the base one of the security officers says to him:

SECURITY OFFICER: I just wanna say, everything you've seen here is equal to the protection we give it. It's you who have acted inappropriately. (*Deep Throat*)

Another form of bodily control is revealed in *Sleepless* with a military experiment dating back to the Vietnam war. Army scientists have done surgical operations to a group of American marines during the war, removing a small part of the brain in order to "induce a permanent waking state". As a result of these lobotomy-like operations the few veterans still alive have not slept at all in twenty-five years.

MULDER: What is this?

X: Data from a top-secret military project. Born of the idea that sleep was the soldier's greatest enemy.

MULDER: Grissom was conducting sleep deprivation experiments on Parris Island¹².

X: Not deprivation, eradication.

MULDER: Why?

X: Why else? To build a better soldier. Sustained wakefulness dulls fear, heightens aggression. Science had just put a man on the moon. So they looked to science to win a losing war. (*Sleepless*)

In addition to the traumatic effects of the war itself the surviving veterans are ravaged by the effects of the experiment as one of them tells Mulder in tears:

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A basic training site of the Marine Corps in South Carolina.

COLE: I'm tired.

MULDER: I know.

COLE: No man, you don't know. You have no idea.

MULDER: One minute is all I'm asking.

COLE: One minute is more than I can give. Blood's boiling in my veins. I can feel the air stinging on my skin.

MULDER: What the military did to you was wrong, but maybe your testimony can help.

COLE: They cut out a piece of my brain. They made me into somebody else. I can never get back what they took away from me, but I can stop them from taking anything more.
(*Sleepless*)

Soon afterwards the man is killed and a report containing the evidence of the experiment is stolen from Mulder's car. The doctors in charge of the operations are also killed, but the higher military leaders and the institution are left untouched.

Like several other episodes, *Sleepless* closely connects science and the military. In *The X-Files* science is indeed "the handmaiden of the military" (Jones 1996, 90). Actually in *731* a member of the multinational Syndicate, or The Elders, says to Scully:

ELDER: The ruler of the world is no longer the country with the bravest soldiers, but the greatest scientists. (*731*)

The science in *731* involves experiments carried out on civilians in order to develop immunity to nuclear and biological weapons, although these tests are combined with research on alien-human hybrids, which is a theme closely related to the so called mythology of the series.

NSA AGENT: Ask yourself, my friend. What could be more valuable than Star Wars? More valuable than the atomic bomb or the most advanced biological weapons?

MULDER: A standing army immune to the effects of those weapons. That's what Doctor Zama did, didn't he? He came up with an immunity to those weapons... and he was trying to smuggle that thing back to his own country to share the science, only our government isn't in the mood to share, right? They've been doing experiments since World War II, tests on innocent civilians... but Zama succeeded where the others had failed. (*731*)

Whether the creature hidden in the train is an alien-human hybrid or a result of inhuman immunological experiments remains inconclusive, but the immunity tests are a significant part of *731*. These experiments form strong links between the United States government, Japanese and Nazi scientists, and the Holocaust. Scully

finds in the woods a Hansen's disease facility where a group of civilians with leprosy are hiding from armed troops who eventually execute these experimental victims in a scene that brings to mind the concentration camps of the World War II. Nazi connections are also a part of the hybridization tests. The episode *Paper Clip* reveals that Nazi scientists that were provided a refuge in the United States after the war have been conducting genetic experiments to create alien-human hybrids in a project that Mulder calls "our deal with the devil". All this sheds new light to a comment made by a medical doctor in *Fallen Angel* who calls authoritarian army troops "fascists".

The military is also linked to the assassination of president Kennedy in *Musings of a Cigarette-Smoking Man*, in which the military is shown to be responsible for the assassination. The Cigarette-Smoking Man, then a captain of the United States Army, shoots Kennedy at the request of his superior officers. The officers are embittered by Kennedy's refusal to provide air support during the Bay of Pigs operation in Cuba¹³, and one of them introduces the issue with the following brief monologue:

GENERAL FRANCIS: Now, most people, common people really, can barely manage to control their own self-centered, myopic existence. They command armies of lawyers armed with paper weapons, attacking with spiteful, vengeful, cowardly litigation. Others operate within elephantine bureaucracies. And then, captain, there are extraordinary men who must identify, comprehend, and ultimately shoulder the responsibility for not only their own existence but for their countries and the world as well. (*Musings of a Cigarette-Smoking Man*)

Here the ultimate power lies in the hands of the military and its "extraordinary men", not of the elected representatives of the people.

As the final example of the representations of the military I will discuss the question of prisoners-of-war in *Unrequited*. The episode begins with a shot of the flag of the United States. Near the Vietnam war memorial in Washington D.C. a US Army general is delivering a speech to a large crowd that is waving more flags. Many of the listeners seem to be veterans. The general's eloquent speech about

¹³ The unsuccessful attempt by Cuban exiles, backed up by the Kennedy administration and trained by the CIA, to invade Castro's Cuba in 1961.

honoring the soldiers who fought for their country is met with constant cheers.

GENERAL BLOCH: That many of you here tonight came home not to a hero's welcome but to the hostility of the American people is a shameful fact of history. One that I will never understand or forgive. But it also underscores our sacred duty, not just today but forever, to honor those who served with honor and to remember those who fell, men and women whose ultimate sacrifice must never be forgotten. (*Unrequited*)

The atmosphere may be described as very solemn and patriotic. Next we are shown Assistant Director Skinner, Mulder, Scully, and other agents who are trying to find a man in the crowd, a man who is armed and moving towards the general with the obvious intention of killing him. After the opening credits the episode moves forty-eight hours back in time, and as the story begins to unfold, we learn that the man attempting the assassination is a Vietnam veteran who has been reported missing in action and declared dead by high-ranking military officers, but he has in fact been a prisoner-of-war until a paramilitary group has rescued him from Vietnam. As the leader of the group says, the veteran was "left for dead by the same government that created him". As an example of the intertextuality of the series, *Unrequited* connects *The X-Files* with the film *Rambo* (1985), in which the central themes were the betrayal of American soldiers by their government, the existence of living prisoners-of-war in Vietnam, and a secret agenda of hiding the truth about them. The belief in the existence of living POWs is a natural element among the conspiracy theories of *The X-Files*, considering that, for example, Kellner describes the belief as the "paranoia of contemporary conservatism" (Kellner 1995, 64). Also in the light of Warner's description of the phenomenon as "popular fiction, only slightly less fantastic than belief in UFOs" (Warner 1992, 674) it fits the series that makes such an extensive use of the UFOs and alien abduction.

The representations of the military in *The X-Files* bring out an authoritarian and autonomous institution that is not willing to disclose anything of its activities. In the name of national security it operates almost unbridled, showing no respect for citizens or other than military authority. It also has a significant role in the government's relationship to UFOs, and in the conspiracy

of hiding their existence from the public. In all of the preceding sections I have touched upon the UFOs, and now I will move on to a more detailed analysis of this theme.

8. UFOS

MULDER: They're here, aren't they?

DEEP THROAT: Mr. Mulder, *they*'ve been here for a long long time. (*Deep Throat*)

In *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (1998, 5) Showalter analyzes UFOs and alien abduction together with chronic fatigue syndrome, Gulf War syndrome, multiple personality disorder, recovered memory of sexual abuse and satanic ritual abuse, calling all of these phenomena “hystories”, or “cultural narratives of hysteria” that “multiply rapidly and uncontrollably in the era of mass media”. Of these hystories the ones about UFOs are especially relevant to a study of *The X-Files*, although the series contains references to others as well.¹⁴ The origin of UFO narratives is generally dated to the summer of 1947, when after several UFO sightings across the United States newspapers alleged that a flying saucer had crashed near Roswell, New Mexico, and that the government had promptly hidden all evidence pertaining to that incident. The mass media, especially television and cinema, have been essential in the development of these narratives. The extraterrestrial threat was a popular element in cinema already in the 1950s, when the aliens provided films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) a convenient symbol for the communist threat.

Like NBC's short-lived television series *Dark Skies* (1996-97) that was in many ways remarkably similar to *The X-Files*, the latter makes active use of the UFO history, and Lavery et al. (1996, 7) explain why:

tales of alien abduction are unrivaled in contemporary America for their ability to combine the most terrifying aspects of paranormal experience with various cultural elements: science fiction; New Age obsessions with channeling, reincarnation, near-death experiences, and spiritual advancement; Byzantine government conspiracy stories, which include secret

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Sometimes these hystories are connected - in *E.B.E.* Mulder suggests to Scully that the Gulf War syndrome may have been caused by UFOs.

medical experiments upon unsuspecting citizens; and concerns with sexual abuse and genetic engineering.

What makes the UFOs especially important for this particular study of *The X-Files* is the fact that they are an essential element in the representations of the government: of the total of 97 episodes in the first four production seasons only 30, less than a third, dealt with UFOs, but of the 24 episodes that were selected for the closer analysis because of the centrality of government in them, as many as 17 episodes (70 percent) involved UFOs and aliens. The close relationship between the UFOs and government may be interpreted in the light of Nummelin's (1998) remarks about the connection between Romantic ideology and the strong belief in UFOs. The Romantic philosophers, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau in America, claimed that society and civilization had a repressing and alienating effect on human beings. In *The X-Files* and many other UFO narratives the repressiveness of civilization is manifested in the fact that the government denies knowledge about UFOs and hence alienates the people from contact that would be crucial for their identities. (Nummelin 1998.) In the satirical episode *Jose Chung's "From Outer Space"* one believer sees the possibilities that UFO contacts entail:

BLAINE FAULKNER: I know how crazy this is going to sound, but... I want to be abducted by aliens.

JOSE CHUNG: Why? Whatever for?

BLAINE FAULKNER: I hate this town. I hate... people. I just want to be taken away to someplace where I... I don't have to worry about finding a job. (*Jose Chung's "From Outer Space"*)

In *The X-Files* as a whole, however, the UFOs do not offer liberation from the repressive civilization. They only pose another threat and ultimate repression in the form of total apocalypse and the colonization of the earth. As was already mentioned, the UFOs and the government are extremely closely intertwined in the *The X-Files* episodes, and although Jones (1996, 81) distinguishes storylines with UFO topics from those dealing with governmental conspiracies by grouping the episodes respectively into categories "There's something in the woods" and "There's something in the government", she admits that some episodes must be

assigned to both of these categories. The classification proposed by Jones is still useful, because the focus of individual episodes differs, and not all episodes make charges against the government.

The agents Mulder and Scully investigate the UFOs and all the paranormal phenomena that they encounter from very different starting-points. Mulder, who has a picture of a flying saucer on his office wall declaring “I want to believe”, is eager to accept the supernatural explanations and rely on intuition which is traditionally considered a feminine characteristic, while Scully tries to promote the rational, scientific logic usually associated with men (on the reversed gender roles in the series, see for example Wilcox and Williams 1996). Still, both agents want to know the truth behind the things they encounter¹⁵. The difference between the agents may be illustrated with an example from the first season episode *E.B.E.* The episode begins with a scene in which an Iraqi air force pilot shoots down a UFO near a NATO surveillance station located in Turkey. After the episode’s opening credits an American truck driver sees another UFO in Tennessee and agents Mulder and Scully start investigating this sighting. Mulder automatically assumes that the driver really saw what he thinks he saw, while the sceptical Scully offers several other possible explanations.

SCULLY: From the trucker’s description, the shape he fired upon could conceivably have been a mountain lion.

MULDER: Conceivably.

SCULLY: The National Weather Service last night reported atmospheric conditions in this area which were possibly conducive to lightning.

MULDER: Possibly.

SCULLY: It is feasible that the truck was struck by lightning, creating the electrical failure.

MULDER: It’s feasible.

SCULLY: And you know, there’s a marsh over there. Those lights the driver saw may have been swamp gas.

MULDER: Swamp gas?

SCULLY: It’s a natural phenomenon in which phosphine and methane rising from decaying organic matter ignite, creating globes of blue flame.

MULDER: Happens to me when I eat Dodger Dogs. How can a dozen witnesses including a squad of police vehicles in three counties become hysterical over swamp gas? (*E.B.E.*)

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A new twist to the relationship between Mulder’s beliefs, Scully’s scientific logic, and the “truth” is added by Nelson’s (1998, 290) remark that in modern West the truth is regarded as “an impersonal re-presentation between words (logic) or between words and the world (fact)”, although the word “truth” is derived from the Old English root meaning (good) faith. Can either one of the agents therefore be said to come closer to the truth than the other?

The same pattern recurs in other episodes, although perhaps during the third season these roles become less clear-cut. Usually Mulder also gets to see things that prove his assumptions were correct, while Scully conveniently misses the spectacle in question. Mulder's strong belief in UFOs is based on a memory of his sister's abduction by aliens when they were both children. This memory haunts him throughout the series and fuels his quest for the truth about the UFOs. In *Little Green Men* the abduction is shown as a flashback, initiated while Mulder is sitting in his car in the garage of the Watergate Hotel. The Watergate scandal that the series' creator Chris Carter has called "the most formative event of [his] youth" (Lowry 1995, 12), is closely linked to Mulder's crusade-like search for the truth and thus to the whole "mythology" of the series. The flashback shows Mulder and his sister alone at home on November 27th, 1973. They are playing a board game and the television's on with a report on the Watergate and Nixon's missing tapes. The two disappearances that are reported in the scene, Mulder's sister and Nixon's tapings of his conversations, again connect the UFOs and governmental misconduct, and also highlight the great inspiration of *The X-Files*, Richard Nixon, whose career in politics "virtually defined the golden age of American conspiracy theory" (Graham 1996, 58).

The different views of the agents are significant considering their initial respective relationships with their employer, the federal government and more specifically the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Mulder is a classic lone wolf who is not very highly regarded by his superiors, perhaps mostly because of his "consuming devotion" to work "outside the bureau mainstream", as one FBI official describes Mulder's activities to Scully in *The Pilot*. In the same episode Mulder introduces himself to Scully as "the FBI's most unwanted". With her scientific methods Scully is clearly more orthodox and more in tune with her superiors than Mulder, and her initial task is to "debunk" Mulder's findings. However, gradually also Scully begins to have a more open mind to paranormal explanations, and Malach (1996) argues that since virtually every episode deals with paranormal issues, the agents have a clear advantage to their superiors.

Mulder and Scully's "ability to cross the boundaries set up by convention" makes them trustworthy for the viewer who witnesses the same things as the agents (and often more), and this ability also makes the superiors who try to hinder the agents inevitably suspicious (Malach 1996, 72).

The gradual development of the relationship between the UFOs and the government starts in the very first episode, *The Pilot*. From the beginning this relationship is defined through governmental secrecy and interference in the investigations, as Mulder fills his new partner Scully in on his previous work with the files (the same discussion cited earlier on page 47):

MULDER: There's classified government information I've been trying to access, but someone has been blocking my attempts to get at it.

SCULLY: Who? I don't understand.

MULDER: Someone at a higher level of power. The only reason I've been allowed to continue with my work is because I've made connections in Congress. (*The Pilot*)

The obscure "higher level of power" serves as a general description for the conspiratorial agents that are covering up the existence of extraterrestrials. Different episodes point to different directions in the government, be it the intelligence community, the military, the State or Defense Department, or even the Congress itself. In *The Pilot*, for example, it is the Pentagon storageroom where the Cigarette-Smoking Man hides the only piece of evidence that Mulder and Scully have managed to gather on the UFOs. The conspirators are therefore found in the various subdivisions of both the executive and legislative branches of the government.

Mulder's connection in Congress is revealed in *Little Green Men*, the opening episode for the second season. In the first season finale, *The Erlenmeyer Flask*, the X-files were shut down and Mulder and Scully reassigned to tasks that could perhaps be considered a part of the "bureau mainstream". Now, a man appears at Mulder's door one evening, saying laconically: "We're going to the Hill". On Capitol Hill Mulder meets Senator Matheson, who is playing in his stereo Bach's Brandenburg Concerto number two, "the first selection of music on the Voyager spacecraft" sent to space in 1977 in hopes of contact with extraterrestrial intelligent life. Mulder apologizes for what he seems to consider

his personal failure with the X-files and acknowledges the assistance that the senator has provided:

MULDER: I know I've let you down. You've supported me at great risk to your reputation. I realized when they shut us down, there was nothing you could do. All I can say is, I think we were close. To what, I don't know.

At this point the senator hands Mulder a note that reads: "They may be listening", clearly referring to the ubiquitous government. As the senator plays the concerto again, this time louder to drown their conversation, the following dialogue takes place:

SENATOR: I take it you're familiar with the high-resolution microwave survey?

MULDER: The search for extraterrestrial radio signals. They shut it down.

SENATOR: You have to get to the radio telescope at Arecibo, Puerto Rico. I'll try to delay them as long as I can but my guess is you'll have at least twenty-four hours. After that I can no longer hold off the Blue Beret UFO Retrieval Team. And they have been authorized to display terminal force.

MULDER: What am I looking for?

SENATOR: Contact. (*Little Green Men*)

The senator appears to be a fellow believer who wants Mulder to find evidence of UFOs. However, his power in this respect is limited. He could not prevent the X-files from being closed and he cannot guarantee Mulder's security. Firstly, it must be noted that one senator alone could hardly have those powers. Secondly, it is not certain whether the senator's inability to stop the retrieval team depends on his lack of power or on his unwillingness to make his personal beliefs public.

Both Mulder and the senator refer repeatedly to "them". This is an important aspect of the representations of the government in the light of UFOs. The pronoun is indiscriminately used to refer both to UFOs and the government and at times it is very uncertain which one of them is being referred to. In the conversation between Mulder and Senator Matheson "they" refers to that indefinite "higher level of power" that has shut down the two links to the existence of extraterrestrials, namely the X-files and the radio telescope, has possibly bugged the senator's office, and that the senator with his political powers is not able to control. Little of the term's obscurity is lost even though the UFOs are ruled out. Occasionally in the series the referent of the pronoun changes within the

same scene. For example, this is the case in the second season episode in which Scully is abducted first by a man called Duane Barry, who claims he is an abductee himself, and then by what first appear to be UFOs:

MULDER: Where is she? Where'd you leave her?

DUANE BARRY: They took her.

MULDER: Who?

DUANE BARRY: Them! I told you they were going to take somebody else. They did!

Mulder does not believe Barry's story about Scully being abducted by aliens, believing rather that Barry himself has done something to her. Barry tries to convince Mulder that there was a spaceship that took Scully and that they both saw:

MULDER: What ship?

DUANE BARRY: You saw it.

MULDER: I saw a helicopter.

DUANE BARRY: They were here. I'm not lying to you!

At this moment Barry sees a few men in suits observing him and Mulder through the window and there is an abrupt shift in focus:

DUANE BARRY: There they are. Ask them. They know what happened! (*Ascension*)

Duane Barry's account of the events that preceded Scully's disappearance follows the pattern of many abduction narratives that, according to Showalter (1998, 194-195), involve surveillance and harassment by government agents, often in the form of men in black or black helicopters. Barry's pleas also reflect the polarity "Us versus Them" (Kelly 1995, 62) that characterizes the millenarian, or in Kelly's terms, fusion paranoia. The UFOs and undefined government agents are so closely intertwined in *The X-Files* that it does not really matter which one of them is harassing the victim at any given time. As it turns out, Scully's abductors could have been either UFOs or someone in the government, and the question is left unanswered. But if "Them" refers to either UFOs or governmental conspirators, who then are "Us"? The episode *Little Green Men* begins with Mulder's monologue in which he says: "We wanted... to believe. We wanted to call out"

and a little later: “We wanted to listen.” He goes on to describe the search for extraterrestrial intelligence with two Voyager spacecraft launched to space and NASA’s radio telescopes. “Our” search is then interrupted by “Them”:

MULDER: The X-Files have been shut down. They closed our eyes. Our voices have been silenced... our ears now deaf to the realms of extreme possibilities. (*Little Green Men*)

In the general *X-Files* terminology “Us” may be interpreted as the American people, but here it becomes clear that “Us” does not exclude the government. NASA is, after all, a government agency whose purpose is to explore “the peaceful use of space” (Bardes et al., 398), and it has also been interested in finding out the same “extreme possibilities” as “we”. Therefore it would be too simplistic to equate this polarity with that of people versus the government. Mulder’s comment on the denial of “extreme possibilities” again reflects Nummelin’s remarks about the repressive features of civilization.

In the episodes *Jose Chung’s From Outer Space*, which is actually a parody of the whole genre (and is discussed below), and *Gethsemane*, the fourth season finale, this dyad between UFOs and the government is approached from a slightly different angle. The former episode suggests that the reported alien abductions have been faked by the military, and in the latter episode an employee of the Department of Defense claims that UFOs were a cold war hoax, orchestrated by the military-industrial complex in order to “create a diversion of attention from itself and its continued misdeeds by confabulating enough believable evidence” (*Gethsemane*). As Bellon (1999, 140) points out, if these claims turned out to be “true”, that is to say if they were adopted by the producers as the ultimate explanation for the mythology of the series, the audience’s view of the series would probably change drastically. But they are not “true”. The first claim fails to survive any longer than one episode because *Jose Chung’s “From Outer Space”* is an outright parody that, at least on the surface, rejects the standard approach of the series. Even the reliability of Mulder and Scully is questioned in a way that it usually is not, as in the dialogue between Scully and a novelist who has come to interview Scully for his new book on UFOs:

SCULLY: Well... just as long as you're attempting to record the truth.

JOSE CHUNG: Oh God, no. How can I possibly do that?

SCULLY: What do you mean?

JOSE CHUNG: I spent three months in Klass County and everybody there has a different version of what truly happened. Truth is as subjective as reality. That will help explain why when people talk about their "UFO experiences," they always start off with "well, now, I know how crazy this is going to sound... but."

SCULLY: So you're here to get my version of the truth?

JOSE CHUNG: Exactly. (*Jose Chung's "From Outer Space"*)

The claim that the Department of Defense is behind all UFO sightings is left open as the fourth season ends in *Gethsemane*. The story continues in the first two episodes of the fifth season, and the claim is again nullified by evidence to the contrary, evidence of the existence of extraterrestrials.

The parody and irony in *The X-Files* is not restricted to *Jose Chung's "From Outer Space"* that effectively parodies the alien abduction phenomenon. Because the UFOs may well be that element of *The X-Files* that is most susceptible to ridiculing (although conspiracy theories may come in a good second), the beliefs in "visits from small grey ETs" being perhaps "a little over the top" (Showalter 1998, 189), I will briefly discuss some other instances of parody here, even though they are not related to UFOs and aliens.

The Lone Gunmen, Mulder's source of classified information about governmental misconduct, are ridiculed in several occasions, even by Mulder himself. In *Anasazi* The Lone Gunmen knock on Mulder's door in great panic:

FROHIKE: I don't think we've been followed.

MULDER: Who would follow you?

BYERS: Multinational black ops unit. Codename Garnet.

LANGLY: Trained killers. School of the Americas' alumni.

MULDER: Have you boys been defacing library books again? (*Anasazi*)

The series contains ironical remarks that draw attention to some of its paranoid elements that border on absurdity. For example in *Colony* Mulder and Scully are debating whether a CIA worker that Mulder has met is a reliable source of information, and Mulder tends to believe the man:

SCULLY: Whatever happened to "trust no one", Mulder?

MULDER: (smiling) Oh, I changed it to "trust everyone". I didn't tell you? (*Colony*)

Some viewers may consider the entire series a conspiracy spoof on the basis of the sheer magnitude of the conspiracies and coverups that it portrays. There are two things, however, which in my opinion resist this way of reading the series. First, the parodic elements are clearly distinguished from the overall mood of the series. *Jose Chung's "From Outer Space"*, for example, is an obvious aberration from the rest of the episodes. Second, the parody is often undermined by graver tones, as in *E.B.E.*, in which Scully laughs at the paranoia of the Lone Gunmen, saying:

SCULLY: Did you see the way they answered the telephone? They probably think that every call that they get is monitored and they're followed everywhere they go. It's a form of self-delusion. It makes them think that what they're doing is important enough that somebody would... (*E.B.E.*)

Scully is suddenly interrupted when she finds a minute listening device hidden in her pen. Ten minutes earlier a woman at an airport has borrowed it for a while, apparently switching pens. Scully's finding efficiently turns the episode back on the "right track" after a brief attempt at criticism of paranoia. The scene also echoes film director Oliver Stone stating that "paranoids have the facts" (quoted in Åsard 1999).

The UFOs and other themes related to science fiction are very important for *The X-Files*, whether one categorizes the series as science fiction or not. Science fiction is the categorization that for example Bellon (1999) rejects when he refers to the way the series leaves most of its questions without any definite answers, even the existence of the UFOs:

To suggest that the revelations of *The X-Files* are science fiction is thus not simply to deny their existence or the possibility thereof; it is to suggest that their possibility is so ridiculous as to represent a drastic anomaly for the viewer. Given the show's unwillingness to come to a conclusion regarding Mulder's perceptions, such a suggestion seems unwarranted. (Bellon 1999, 140.)

Since the aim of this thesis is to study the representations of the government in *The X-Files*, it is not really important whether the UFOs exist in the world of the series. What really matters is that in either case the government is closely connected to the *question* of their existence. If extraterrestrial intelligent life

exists, as seems to be the case in *The X-Files*, the government has been taking extreme measures to keep it a secret from the people. If the UFOs are a hoax, as is argued in *Gethsemane*, it is a hoax orchestrated by the same government.

9. DISCUSSION

SCULLY: How high does it go, Skinner? Who's pulling the strings? (*The Blessing Way*)

The aim of this thesis was to analyze the representations of the government of the United States in the fictional television series *The X-Files*. Anyone familiar with the series knows that the central idea in it is a vast intergovernmental conspiracy to hide the existence of extraterrestrial life from the people. I tried not to pay too much attention to this fact, but started off simply by analyzing what governmental institutions the series presents to the viewer, and what activities and issues these institutions are engaged in.

The series contains occasional references to “governments within governments”, covert groups operating rather autonomously, and a “higher level of power”, but it is nevertheless my opinion that the series presents a largely cohesive entity called the government of the United States, although the dynamics and the political processes through which that government operates are extremely ambiguous. This government includes the agencies that are by definition covert, but also the legislative branch that is supposed to be representing the interests of the people in an overt fashion. This government is involved in misdeeds and conspiracies that go far beyond the scandals witnessed in the twentieth century United States, including the Watergate that has remarkably influenced the series. On several occasions the government is represented as an authoritarian, bureaucratic complex, and these representations are constructed especially in relation to the FBI and the military. Mulder and Scully are FBI agents, but most of the time they are clearly separable from the rigid bureau. Especially through other security and intelligence services the government is constantly criticized of being secretive and obsessed with the control of information. Bellon (1999, 148) sees the phrase “government denies knowledge”, which is included in the opening

credits of each episode, as an “imperative statement, the answer to the question of government’s identity and function. What does government do? Government denies knowledge.” Of course, this is not all that the government does, but it may well be its most dominating feature.

On the basis of the analysis these representations can be divided into two basic types: those in which the government or any of its component parts was in any way acting against Mulder and Scully, and those in which Mulder and Scully were clearly a part of that government, operating as its representatives enforcing federal laws. In the latter type of representations *The X-Files* was closest to the conventional police series, in which the FBI, or any law enforcement agency for that matter, has to fight against criminals or terrorists. In situations in which the relationship between the agents and the government was characterized by antagonism, that is to say in most of the episodes, the series employed the conventions of conspiracy narratives.

One may wonder why the two protagonists who are trying to uncover a governmental conspiracy actually work for that same government, why they are agents for the Federal Bureau of Investigation that has often been seen as a symbol of the invisible government trampling on civil rights. It is evident that only as federal agents Mulder and Scully have easy access to the phenomena of the X-files and hence to the roots of the conspiracy. As federal agents they also have access to the resources of a federal law enforcement agency. They are situated at the center of political action in Washington D.C., and although their access to higher levels of power is always limited, Mulder and Scully are clearly inside “the system”. This adds to the credibility of their assertions of conspiracy, although the “insider’s” viewpoint does not seem to be a necessity to conspiracy narratives (the paranoid protagonist played by Mel Gibson in the film *Conspiracy Theory*, for example, is a taxi driver, and his theories prove to be as warranted as those of the agents). As law enforcers the agents are in a position in which they often, at least implicitly, have to question their own motives and actions and the motives and actions of their employer, the federal government. This was the case for example in the episode *F. Emasculata*, in which the agents dispute on how much information they should give out to the public (see page 40). I think that in this

way, through two federal agents, the series manages to explore the various issues related to the government and its power more thoroughly than it could without them.

As the analysis shows, the conspiracy theories are a crucial part of *The X-Files*. The series is an obvious continuation of the American tradition of conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories must be distinguished from other, milder forms of cynicism and mistrust towards the governing élites. Conspiracy theories may be described as “a more extreme form of political cynicism” (Fenster 1999, 71). When writing about this distinction Kelly (1995, 63) refers to less radical cynicism as the “legitimate view of reality”, in contrast to “surrealism” of conspiracy theories. The difference, which also Kelly himself claims to be “only a matter of degree” (Kelly 1995, 63), is not always clear-cut as is evidenced by the following brief exchange between Mulder and his informant X:

MULDER: He believes the government is out to get him.
X: It's tax season, so do most Americans. (*Soft Light*)

Mulder is talking about paranoia, whereas X refers to a general popular mistrust of the government.

Besides the (assumed) conspiracies, the political and historical events that figure most prominently in the series include assassinations, the Holocaust, experiments in eugenics, and scandals such as the Watergate. It is therefore fair to say that the politics in the series echo what Grossberg calls “mood politics”, in which “politics is relocated from the realm of social conditions to that of the affective and the scandalous” (Grossberg 1992, 277). In such a “politics of scandal”, as Fenster adds,

political debate and action focus on and equate real or imagined, meaningless or horrifying political scandals, stripping them of context. Scandal becomes the issue around which candidates, political parties, and the political system itself are identified. (Fenster 1999, 70)

Mood politics is, in turn, fertile soil for conspiracy theories. All this explains why the series describes the politics of major American institutions as primarily

characterized by lies and deception. The government that the series constructs is in most cases evil, criminal, secret, ubiquitous, obscure, and often omnipotent.

The X-Files is a fictional series, and I do not want to claim that the series has the power to influence the viewers' perceptions of the government of the United States even to the degree that the news media and political campaigning in television are often argued to have. Also *The X-Files* pays attention to such a unidirectional model of communication in which the passive viewers take in whatever representations are offered to them :

MULDER: So you think that because Patnik saw this war criminal on television, he was somehow inspired to go out and murder these people?

SCULLY: Well, recent studies have linked violence on television to violent behavior.

MULDER: Yeah, but those studies are based on the assumption that Americans are just empty vessels ready to be filled with any idea or image that's fed to them like a bunch of Pavlov dogs and go out and act on it. (*Wetwired*)

The X-Files does, however, construct representations of a government that it clearly compares with the existing government of the United States. The significance of such representations lies in the fact that they "constitute the political image through which individuals view the world and interpret political processes, events, and personalities" (Kellner 1995, 60). The series offers a model for the interpretation of American political system, and that model is largely conspiratorial. But as Åsard (1999) points out, the conspiratorial interpretation of politics, or what he calls "conspiratorial style" is not confined to the fringes of society, it can be found in the mainstream as well. He adds that conspiracy theories have intellectual and social roots, and a more thorough understanding of contemporary American culture can be achieved by uncovering those roots. Even though the aim of this study was to analyze different representations of the government in *The X-Files*, and not to study solely the way conspiratorial conventions are used in the series, the study shows how essential these conventions are for the series which has achieved enormous popularity and a cult status.

10. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to explore the government of the United States in *The X-Files*. The main research question was what kind of representations of the government are constructed in the series. This question was explored with the help of two subquestions: *how*, or through which themes, are these representations of the government constructed, and what are the governmental *actors* that constitute the government in the series. The main data consisted of 24 episodes that were selected from the first four production seasons.

The research questions were answered by constructing three broad categories, under which the representations of various governmental actors in relation to different themes were analyzed. The analysis showed that in representing the government *The X-Files* draws heavily on the tradition and conventions of American conspiracy theories, as well on some of the most popular conspiracy theories circulating in American culture. The representations of the government were thus mostly unfavorable, depicting a rigid, authoritarian, secretive government that was antithetical to the democratic ideal of government of the people, for the people, and by the people. The representations were not, however, entirely negative. Especially in cases in which the two protagonists, FBI agents Mulder and Scully, were to be seen as representatives of that government confronting criminals, terrorists, or religious cults.

The themes through which the government's representations were constructed covered extensively the latter half of the twentieth century United States, ranging from governmental experiments and military interventions to the war in Vietnam and alien abduction. The actors that were constructed as constituting the government included various institutions and agencies in the legislative and executive branch of federal government.

Although *The X-Files* is a fictional series, it does circulate the discourses of the society in which and for which (primarily) it is produced. Without making any judgments as to the power of the media representations of politics and government I argue that *The X-Files* constructs representations that reflect not only the attitudes of its producers and writers, but of the audiences as well, at least

to some extent. Negative attitudes towards the government are not only the products of popular culture, and neither are conspiracy theories.

The textual analysis of different themes provided a thorough picture of the diverse activities of the represented government. The study could have been carried out with other methods as well, and for example a closer analysis of the linguistic and narrative means of representation might have provided a more detailed account of the ways a fictional television series such as *The X-Files* constructs images of social and political realities of the society in which the series is produced. Besides linguistic analysis also the analysis of visual means of constructing particular representations were ignored within the scope of the study. The overall visual atmosphere of the series was acknowledged for being remarkably ominous and gloomy, but any further analysis of visual discourse was left out. Incorporation of such analytical tools might have been fruitful for the analysis of representations, offering information of the subtleties of representation, but it would also have widened the scope of the study significantly. Intertextuality of the series was not ignored in this thesis but it could have been more fully explored.

In this thesis my central task has been to explore the representations of the United States government in one popular television series. As I have shown, in this series these representations have mostly relied on conspiracy theories, scandal, and suspicion. Because conspiracy theories are as widespread a form of political interpretation as they currently are, it would be extremely interesting to expand the exploration of the same theme to other texts in popular culture. A central task for further study might be to find out *what exactly happened to the government "of the people, for the people and by the people"*.

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- *The Pilot (1X79)
- *Deep Throat (1X01)
- *Conduit (1X03)
- *Shadows (1X05)
- *Fallen Angel (1X09)
- *Eve (1X10)
- Lazarus (1X14)
- *E.B.E (1X16)
- Shapes (1X18)
- Tooms (1X20)
- *The Erlenmeyer Flask (1X23)
- *Little Green Men (2X01)
- *The Host (2X02)
- *Sleepless (2X04)
- *Ascension (2X06)
- *One Breath (2X08)
- Red Museum (2X10)
- Colony (2X16)
- F. Emasculata (2X22)
- *Soft Light (2X23)
- *Anasazi (2X25)
- *The Blessing Way (3X01)
- *Paper Clip (3X02)

*731 (3X10)

*Jose Chung's "From Outer Space" (3X20)

Wetwired (3X23)

*Talitha Cumi (3X24)

*Herrenvolk (4X01)

The Field Where I Died (4X05)

*Musings of a Cigarette-Smoking Man (4X07)

Tunguska (4X09)

Terma (4X10)

*Unrequited (4X16)

*Gethsemane (4X24)

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