Trust no truth:

an analysis of the visual translation styles in the conspiracy film

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Summary

This study investigates the manner in which cinematic visual translation styles can be used to incorporate dominant and subversive historical versions in fictional narratives constructed within the conspiracy film genre. Fictional characters in a conspiracy film are often tasked with a mission to discover the alternative historical accounts, accounts which for all intents and purposes are regularly kept hidden from the public eye. These accounts are presented as a plausible and often unconventional narrative which challenges the dominant version of events. A visual translation style is a term used to describe the various methods in which a film can be shot and edited in order to create a specific aesthetic and communicate a specific idea. These styles can consist of camera movements, shot sizes or editing techniques, all of which aid in communicating a specific idea in a film. This study analyses the conventions of the conspiracy film, with regard to the manner in which the alternative and dominant versions of historical accounts are constructed. Furthermore, the study explores how these alternative and hegemonic historical events are presented and communicated through the use of visual translation styles. Theorists such as Jean Baudrillard and David Bordwell are referenced when discussing the meaning and application of terms such as "truth", "narrative" and "history" and to problematise these notions in the context of this particular genre. Other key notions investigated include aporia, metalanguage and object-language and notions of genre theory. The conceptual and theoretical framework regarding visual translation styles is further complemented by writers such as Don Fairservice and Ken Dancyger.

List of key terms

- Aporia
- Classical Hollywood narrative
- Conspiracy narrative
- Convention
- Genre

- Hero's journey
- Historical fact
- History
- Metalanguage
- Narrative hooks
- Object-language
- Truth
- Visual translation styles

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contextualisation and aims of the study

I was introduced to conspiracy stories at a young age watching the television series *The X-Files* (Carter & Spotnitz 1993-2002). This series inspired my fascination with the 'conspiracy genre' and how it is able to destabilise and subvert certain ideas and notions that I have been guided to accept as 'historical facts'. 'Conspiracy genre' is a term I use to define a specific type of narrative or film that uses historical facts and manipulates them to create a fictional conspiracy based on an altered history. This definition is drawn from sources such as Kelly (2007) and Millikan (2004), which I will elaborate on in more detail shortly. Regarding the conspiracy genre, *The X-Files* (1993-2002), for example, creates an elaborate alien conspiracy that stretches from the United States Government to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Series showrunner Chris Carter and his collaborators took popular events in American history, such as the Kennedy assassination, Area 51 and the Roswell crash, and incorporated and adapted the alleged 'facts' surrounding these events into a fictional conspiracy. This was done in order to create a narrative that was closely tied to notions of 'truth', but that presented an 'altered' version thereof. The construction of these narratives was done in such a way as to suggest to the viewer that these modified 'facts' could be construed as a new possible truth, one which is attractive, plausible and authentic, hence a 'conspiracy'. This conspiracy version is one possible alternative to the dominant version of the events in the narrative.

In light of tensions between dominant and alternative versions of 'truths', I aim to analyse the conspiracy genre with regard to visual translation styles used to suggest or represent historical 'facts' or 'truths' as well as the alternative versions thereof. To do this, I will investigate how histories are denoted in the narratives of the conspiracy film. Once I have analysed the conspiracy film as well as the way in which it incorporates history for its own politically

subversive aims, I will analyse various translation styles that can be employed to communicate the historical facts. I use the word 'translation' to denote the manner in which the narrative is communicated on screen in ways that both serve a dominant 'truth' and a subversive 'truth', effectively playing the one off of the other. For the purpose of this study, the term 'visual translation styles' refers to the various cinematic techniques that can be used to portray or communicate an idea. Fairservice (2001) and Dancyger (2002), amongst others (to be discussed later), define these techniques as the manner in which a specific scene is edited or the way in which a particular shot is framed, pertaining to specific editing techniques and notions of montage. This use of techniques refers to the notion of metalanguage in that the narrative can be self-referential as it calls attention to its own construction as a created cultural artefact through its utilisation of certain techniques (Hayward 2000:227). I will show how these techniques are often used to problematise notions of 'fact', 'truth' and 'real' within the conspiracy film. The terms 'historical fact', 'conspiracy film' and 'conspiracy genre' require considerable conceptual clarification.

The relationship between 'fact', 'truth' and 'real' is abstract. The word 'fact' problematically suggests notions of universalism and absolutism. 'Fact' is sometimes assumed to be the opposite of 'fabricated'; yet, Baudrillard (1983b:3) sees no difference between 'truth' and 'fabrication' as 'truth' can be reproduced numerous times and therefore becomes fabricated or imagined. For Baudrillard (1983b:3), there is no referent based in an objective reality to which visual media can refer. Media is now positioned as simulation, and not as an authentic or accurate representation (an oxymoron in itself). It is therefore problematic to distinguish between 'truth' and 'fabrication' in various forms of media or history in a postmodern era where absolutism carries no credibility and the boundaries between 'truth' and 'fabrication' are blurred (if, indeed, those boundaries are presumed valid). Furthermore, in a postmodern era a certain futility, specifically as related to political uncertainty and a lack of a clear direction or a set outcome, is evident (Lyotard 1997:vii). Constable (as cited in Connor 2004:45) mentions that the loss of the real or the authentic in political life – seeing as simulations exist only in themselves – is

"demonstrated by attempts to interpret the meaning of political events" such as the Watergate scandal, which was seen as a conspiracy against Nixon. However, such a historical event can be framed from a Baudrillardian position as a moment of fabrication and simulation where there is no 'real' involved. For Baudrillard, there is a "crisis in the relation between reality and image" (Constable 2006:238) in that escape from the "universe of simulation" is impossible (2006:239) and, significantly for visual representations of the past as provided by film narratives, that "any attempt to preserve or recreate the real is always doomed to failure" (2006:242) because any assumed 'real' cannot ever be presented by cinematic techniques in any type of totality. In this light, there can be no discussion of 'truth' in film or of 'truthful' representations of historical events. The focus on the fabrication of 'truth' creates an awareness of alternative truths and elaborate conspiracies (Connor 2004:45).

'Truth' is clearly a problematic notion. It is impossible to measure, and the term 'real', with which notions of 'truth' are so often associated, is no longer absolute. Baudrillard (1983b:3) mentions that "the real is produced from miniaturised units, from matrices, [and] memory banks". Baudrillard (1983b:3) further states that with these, the 'real' "no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance". If the 'real' is no longer rational, then it can be whatever it desires and can simulate whatever it wishes and so any notion of an objective reality disappears. Here Baudrillard (1983b) reiterates the earlier point on the absence of an objective reality to which media refers. If this objective reality is non-existent, it follows that there is nothing to measure or assess the simulation against. In addition, if the 'real' or 'truth' can be reproduced an indefinite number of times, it is being infinitely simulated and is considered hyperreal.

With reference to the hyperreal, "nostalgia assumes its full meaning" (Baudrillard 1983b:12) and leads to a proliferation of second-hand truths that are constructed from nostalgia-tinted memories, or in short, second-hand simulated accounts of events that do not have to be personally experienced to be remembered as relating to oneself. Taking his cue from Baudrillard's

discussion of simulation, Conley (1997:31) mentions that "the collapse of the space between referent and representation or, rather, the collapse of the referent into what is no longer called representation *but simulation*, the order of the hyperreal, does away with the traditional sense of allegory that informed earlier representations of the world" (my italics). Referent is defined as that which can be referred to in the outside, so-called objective, world according to semiotics (Jackson 1987:147), while allegory is a myth, story or literary interpretation of "supposed facts" (Pentecost 1964:4). Conley (1997:31) is suggesting that the manner in which stories are told about the 'facts' of the world is no longer viable as that which the stories referred to is a mere representation and simulation. Cinematic representation, even in the cases of documentaries, might in this way be said to call attention to the absence of such an objective reality.

Both Baudrillard and Conley's comments on simulation lead me to believe that it is unfeasible to attempt to attach any set or fixed meaning to the notion of 'truth', for its meaning, as has been pointed out, is derived from fallible and fluid constructs such as memory and simulation. This simulation of 'truth' links with the notions of 'history' and 'facts', their problematic construction and its 'reproducibility'. Within the framework suggested above, this thesis aims to problematise and investigate the conspiracy genre from a clearly articulated postmodern perspective that opposes modernist thinking and a notion concerned with a "quest for truth" (Slob 2002:170) in favour of the plurality of perspectives and acute criticism of grand narratives. From this perspective, conspiracy films are positioned as potentially subversive texts that may undermine 'set' ideas (Connor 2004:14). In this sense, while the conspiracy film may seem to adhere to modernist thought concerning notions of 'truth' (I will show how the narratives in the conspiracy film portray the quests of the characters to discover the truth), the idea that 'truth' exists only in various versions and simulations is rather aligned with postmodernist thinking, and in negotiating the tension between its latent modernist and postmodernist aims, the conspiracy film does not present clear cut answers as much as rupture existing dominant narratives that lay claim to 'truth' and 'fact'. With reference to my research aims, these notions will be discussed as related to the notion

of visual translation and the pursuit to represent historical figures and events on screen.

Baudrillard (as cited in Malpas 2005:94) mentions that the postmodern Western society can be characterised as having reached a point where "things [events, readings, interpretations] happen too quickly to make sense". He claims that a "degree of slowness, a degree of distance and a degree of liberation are required to bring about the kind of condensation or significant crystallisation of events we call history". According to Baudrillard, history has been lost in contemporary hyperreal culture (Malpas 2005:94). This idea relates to what Jarvie (as cited in Rosenstone 1995:26) mentions about film being unable to accurately portray history because of the limitations of its medium conventions wherein histories are condensed and conveyed in order to serve linear narratives. The medium offers no "degree of slowness" that allows one to make sense of the contents. In this light, attempts to study 'history' and 'fact' are complicated as hyperreality defies attempts to investigate anything resembling an 'origin'. The word 'fact' invites negative connotations of fixed meaning; I use it here only to describe that which has taken place in history as vindicated and legitimised by dominant discourses. In investigating the use of 'historical fact' in the conspiracy film, I will first examine the narrative 'hooks' that contribute to narrative cohesion.

Conspiracy films 'hook' audiences into a certain approach to narrative. Bordwell (2008:[sp]) refers specifically to transitional 'hooks', the mechanisms used to carry the audience from one scene to the next. These hooks make use of both visuals and audio to create smooth and seamless transitions between scenes (Bordwell 2008:[sp]). These hooks include sound or dialogue from one scene that links to the visuals or sound in the next scene. In this same way, conspiracy films make additional use of 'historical facts' as transitional hooks. This manner of narrative 'stitching' can also be referred to as a visual translation style; a term used to describe the various methods in which a film can be shot and edited in order to create a specific aesthetic and communicate a specific idea. As mentioned, these styles can consist of camera movements, shot sizes or editing techniques, all of which aid in

communicating a specific idea in a film. Visual translation styles can also create various narratives within narratives, resulting in embedded narratives. Hayward (2000:227) mentions that embedded narratives are metalanguages. Metalanguage is a discourse on other discourses and can also be a discourse that is formed from within the same discourse, the narratives within narratives in a film (Hayward 2000:227). The notion of metalanguages will be explored in more detail shortly.

Visual translation styles can be very effective when attempting to communicate these narratives within narratives. Metalanguage in novels comments on the object-language, which refers to narration (Bordwell 1985:18). The way in which the object-language is framed, or the perspective implicit in it, refers to the metalanguage of film. In film, the metalanguage (specific techniques in the use of the camera and other cinematic codes) is not as visible to the viewer as the object-language, and as such assumes the position of the 'truth' in the film. The metalanguage forms the framework against which the viewer measures all other discourses presented in the film (Bordwell 1985:18). This narration or object-language is formed in part by the dialogue spoken by the characters; the metalanguage then comments on the dialogue and presents the reader with clearer understandings of what the characters are saying. The metalanguage could even, for example, suggest to the reader that the character is lying, and in this way the metalanguage is providing the reader with another version of what is being said. An example of metalanguage revealing alternative versions is in *The Da Vinci Code* (Howard, Calley & Grazer 2006), where Fache assures Langdon that he has been summoned to help with the investigation of a murder. As Langdon moves away the shot cuts to a close-up of Fache as he carefully watches Langdon, suggesting that he lied about Langdon's summoning and that Langdon is in reality a suspect in the murder case.

Cinematic codes and genre conventions serve as the metalanguage that shows the audience the supposed truth beyond the object-language. The camera, codes and conventions destabilise what is known and assumed about characters and events (Bordwell 1985:18). This connection between

metalanguage and object-language problematises notions of objectivity and history (as discussed on the following page). In films such as *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), one particular scene depicts the character of Robert Langdon discussing the history of the Knights Templar with his female companion, Sophie Neveu, in a park after a high-speed car chase. A second chase ensues directly after this scene and so the historical facts serve as narrative hooks between the action scenes. There are numerous ways in which these historical facts can be depicted in the conspiracy film while inevitably rendering 'historical event' as a fabrication for which no referent exists in so-called objective reality. For Baudrillard (as cited in Constable 2006:242), cinematic attempts at recreating history offers "an imaginistic reconstruction", i.e. without objective historical basis, "that simply serves as a reminder of the impossibility of returning to the past" (except maybe through a false nostalgia) and, as mentioned earlier, of the impossibility of 'accurate' historical representation. Perhaps it is more valid to refer to the construction of history in film as opposed to the representation thereof. Part of the dynamic of the conspiracy film is that it presents one fabricated narrative to reveal yet another fabricated narrative or explore counter discourses as maybe equally fabricated, both standing on dubious claims to 'fact'.

The interface between 'fact' and 'fiction' varies in each conspiracy story. Too much 'fact' could turn the story into a history lesson, which may lean towards the documentary genre, even though authors such as Tomaselli (1989:92) see the documentary genre as part of fiction. Too much fiction may make the conspiracy seem unbelievable, as with the recent *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (Spielberg & Marshall 2008), where even within the film's fantastical context the notion of alien ancestors seemed absurd. In forthcoming chapters I will discuss how a conspiracy story succeeds if it establishes the plausibility for a conspiracy, indicating that an intersection between 'historical fact' and fiction needs to be maintained in order to demonstrate the validity of the alternative narrative as much as the assumed validity of the dominant narrative. *The X-Files* (1993-2002) manages to provide different versions of and approaches to central narrative events – dominant versions and counter-dominant versions – in order to create a

conspiracy narrative that is successful in presenting an intersection between 'fact' and fiction. In another example, *Titanic* (Cameron & Landau 1997) is based on historical events and portrays these historical events intertwined with a fictional love story. The narrative manages to seemingly present new information that challenges what has come before but is made to seem plausible.

Rosenstone (1995:26) quotes Ian Jarvie when he mentions that history does not primarily consist of "a descriptive narrative of what actually (sic) happened". He mentions that history consists mostly of "debates between historians about just what exactly did happen, why it happened, and what would be an adequate account of its significance" (1995:26). This type of debate is greatly determined by ideological influence. Jarvie suggests that this 'historical debate' is only possible when history is viewed in the form of the written word, where one can reflect and form opinions on what has been read (Rosenstone 1995:26). This is a problematic idea, for the values associated with the written words originate from a specific culture, time and ideological mode. Barzun and Graff (1977:40) are of the opinion that written history "holds its place in our [Western] civilization [sic] because we know that it reports things that actually took place". Problematically, these authors are logocentrically biased to view the written word as a reliable source of historical facts; a notion that is dispelled by conspiracy films, which holds that there is always at least one alternative version to the established, dominant version of events.

With this in mind, Rosenstone (1995:35) mentions that "the narratives which historians write are verbal fictions" and that "written history is a representation of the past, not the past itself". Here, Rosenstone suggests that the written word cannot be treated as an accurate account of past events because it is merely a version of those events and therefore can hold no claim to notions of objectivity and 'truth'. Carr (as cited in Arnold 2002:17) supports this by saying that documents are "essential to the historian" but "they do not by themselves constitute history". Film, like the written word, cannot claim to possess or present any 'truth' other than revealing the dominance of established

narratives. Gaddis (2002:2) quotes Edward O. Wilson who sees history "best delivered the same way it was discovered, retaining a comparable vividness and play of the emotions". This statement acknowledges subjectivity, for the historical account is based upon the 'discoverer's' viewpoints, which may differ significantly from another individual's experience of the events under discussion. This links with earlier discussions in which Baudrillard mentions 'truth' and 'history' as being fabricated from memory, in part, as subjectivity is merely a reproduction of one's individual nostalgia and is therefore fabricated and not absolute. As mentioned earlier, postmodern research supports multiple narratives (Connor 2004:14) and so subjectivity's occasional claims to superior positions or singular viewpoints on 'truth' for written histories are problematic in this context. Even oral histories (histories communicated through word of mouth) can surface among written histories, often rupturing grand historical narratives as presented in some texts. Such challenges to existing versions of history can foreground ways of reading, shaping and interpreting the past. In terms of the conspiracy film, rupturing grand narratives by positioning these narratives in relative tension to alternative versions of the events in question negates the possibility of a 'single accurate account' of any histories[1].

From the above, a single version of history is not 'reliable'. For the purpose of this study, the term 'historical fact' is a descriptive term designated to refer to 'documented history', and is not supposed to suggest notions of 'objective truth'. 'Documented history' for current purposes suggests varied documentations of key events in history. It is documented that certain events did happen. For example, it is agreed (in the dominant version of the event) that John F. Kennedy (JFK) was assassinated (McAdams 2008:[sp]). The events leading up to this assassination and the reasons behind it may be

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[1] References to the subversion of the dominant resonate with key ideas in post-colonialism. Gilbert and Tompkins (1996:16) mention that "the post-colonial writer unveils and dismantles the basic assumptions of a specific canonical text by developing a 'counter' text that preserves many of the identifying signifiers of the original while altering, often allegorically, its structures of power".

open to interpretation, but that JFK was shot and killed is undisputed. This can therefore be seen as an event of dominant historical consensus. The death of JFK and the infamy of its images of death can be linked to Baudrillard (1983b:12), who states that these images of history have been reproduced in so many various ways to highlight different aspects of the historical event that it has become simulated and cannot represent an actual event anymore. I have articulated the conspiracy film's position in relation to key terms that prove important to the study; however, before the implementation of history in conspiracy films through visual translation styles can be investigated, an overview of the conspiracy film is necessary.

This study discusses the conspiracy genre in order to investigate the relevant narrative conventions that serve to construct expectations and inform readings of the conspiracy film. There is limited literature on the genre conventions of the conspiracy film. Perhaps the reason for this is that it is not delineated as one of the major Hollywood mainstream film genres (Kelly 2007:54). Genre refers to categories of films that share common themes, actions or characteristics (Tudor as cited in Grant 1977:17). A film belonging to a certain category or genre operates within a previously defined world (Grant 1977:17). Each genre contains certain conventions and involves certain ideologies, depending on the context of the film. Some of the existing genres in cinema include the gangster film, the musical, the horror film and the Western film (Neale 2000:9). One can differentiate between these genres by looking at the unique characteristics that each contains. For example, the gangster film would contain more violence and gunplay as opposed to the musical, which is shaped by its inclusion of song and dance (Neale 2000:9). Tudor (as cited in Grant 1977:17) discusses how the term genre suggests that in order for a film to be classified as a Western, for example, it requires certain characteristics such as a Western American setting during 1860 to 1900. However, he goes on to mention the redundancy of such classifications by saying that "any film fulfilling these requirements is a Western, and a Western is only a film fulfilling these requirements" (Grant 1977:17). I find this problematic, for even though a film may contain requirements belonging to the Western genre, it does not necessarily mean that the film should be

categorised as a Western; an approach that simplifies a film to its iconography and may not always consider the ideological motifs and stylistic innovations of a film.

It is problematic that the conspiracy film is frequently categorised into other genres purely because it contains elements or requirements belonging to those genres. It is this that leads to the absence of recognition of the conspiracy film as a sub-genre that can shift genre positions to accommodate additional conventions of the major genres such as the action genre. Indeed, even though the conspiracy film may not be recognised as a mainstream genre on its own, as mentioned earlier, it could very easily form part of any of the major genres mentioned by Neale (2000:9). The term 'sub-genre' refers to the combinations of the before mentioned genres, such as romantic comedy or suspense drama (Neale 2000:9). Numerous searches in existing literature in English, in print as well as on the Internet, did not yield a source that addresses conspiracy film genre conventions in detail. *Genre and Hollywood* (Neale 2000), for example, does not list the conspiracy film as a genre at all. However, movies that could well be termed 'conspiracy films', such as *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) and *The Manchurian Candidate* (Demme & Herzberg 2004), abound. To further complexify what is meant by 'conspiracy film', the term 'conspiracy genre' alludes to the notion that there exists a genre in film that mainly consists of conspiracy stories or narratives containing conspiracy theories. This idea is drawn from key titles in available scholarship, including *The Age of Anxiety: Conspiracy Theory and the Human Sciences* (Parish & Parker 2001) and *The Conspiracy Thrillers of the 1970s: Paranoid Time* (Millikan 2004).

Millikan (2004:1) suggests that the 1970s was when the conspiracy film began mirroring the political context of the time: a time of mistrust, paranoia and lack of trust in figures of government and authority. This period included films such as *All the President's Men* (Pakula & Coblenz 1976) and *Chinatown* (Polanski & Evans 1974). *The X-Files* (1993-2002) also contains references to famous political events such as the assassination of JFK and Watergate. From this, topicality is a possible requirement that can be added to the definition of the

conspiracy genre. A conspiracy film will address topical issues of the time in order to create a familiar setting for the narratives to take place in. This familiar context also serves to ground the fictitious conspiracy in a dominant social and political environment that enhances the interaction between the hegemonic and alternative accounts of events. The narrative becomes more plausible when placed in this context.

Often the conspiracy film will follow the dominant classical Hollywood narrative, as the case studies will demonstrate. Bordwell (2008:94) explains that this type of narrative positions individual characters "as causal agents". Characters are placed in a narrative based on cause and effect and end with closure as "these films seek to complete their causal chains with a final effect" (Bordwell 2008:96). The conspiracy film may sneak in some subversive measures to undermine the dominance of the narrative. One such subversive measure includes the open ended result of Sophie Neveu's closure regarding her bloodline at the end of *The Da Vinci Code* (2006). While the audience is presented with answers pertaining to the existence of Christ's bloodline, these answers are not conclusive and carry more question marks as the Holy Grail still needs to be found to provide proof. In Kelly's (2007:54) view, conspiracy films are "[e]asily ridiculed and frequently dismissed"; however, "films like *JFK* (Stone & Townsend 1991), *Interview with the Assassin* (2002) or even *Slacker* (1991) all hint at a fascinating 'secret' history unfolding just beneath our noses". The conspiracy film includes alternative readings of history and makes use of selective positioning of information. Kelly (2007:54) goes on to mention that a conspiracy film should "hint(s) at possibilities and alternatives" and should "make(s) us wonder if we're witnessing the full story", implying that there are plausible alternatives to what is known about historical events and the knowledge imparted by authority figures. The conspiracy genre can therefore be explained as containing narratives that consist of alternative histories that serve to rupture the narrative of a dominant, 'established' historical narrative.

It can be argued that the conspiracy film is a sub-genre belonging to any larger genre. A sub-genre refers to traditions or groupings within the main

genres such as 'romantic comedy' or 'gothic horror' (Neale 2000:9). A conspiracy film could be a thriller, horror or an adventure film: *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) and *National Treasure* (Turteltaub & Bruckheimer 2004) are examples of a thriller and adventure film respectively. Both of these narratives also contain suggestions of alternative histories. The films *National Treasure* (2004) and its sequel, *National Treasure: Book of Secrets* (Turteltaub & Bruckheimer 2007), contain narratives that deal with the uncovering of secrets to reveal an alternative American story. These texts manipulate accepted 'facts' slightly in order to create a plausible alternative conspiracy narrative. In these films, dominant and alternative versions of history help provide the answers to the clues which lead to the discovery of the lost treasure. In this study, both these films will be viewed as conspiracy films even though they contain narrative elements derived from adventure plots. Indeed, on IMDB.com *National Treasure* (2004) is labelled as an action/adventure (IMDB 2009:[sp]). This broad popular genre categorisation of films supports Kelly's (2007:54) view that the conspiracy film does not receive the attention it deserves because the sub-genre disappears into larger genre contexts.

Certain schools of thought have moved away from discussing genre at all. Frow (2005:125), for example, denies the existence of "a single system of film genres or literary genres" and argues that individuals only identify a genre because "we [audiences] are at some level aware of other genres it is not". He also states that genres "may themselves become exhausted" (Frow 2005:66). This absence of systematic classification and possible exhaustion of genres further serves as motivation for my study and for including a discussion of the conspiracy film's genre conventions. At the very least, genre should be seen as "mutable" not "static" (Hayward 2000:167), which supports the idea of a sub-genre that reconstructs itself, to a certain degree, in the context of major genres and in light of varying socio-political contexts. In the same way the sub-genre can reconstruct itself in the context of larger genres, the conspiracy film can reconstruct dominant narratives in order to present an alternative version of events within varying socio-political contexts.

Genre theory finds its origins in literary theory in that it was established to

divide the literary world into types (Chandler 1997:[sp]). The conspiracy film can share many similarities and convention origins with detective fiction, which itself follows the classical Hollywood narrative, as both narrative types deal with the search for clues and answers. According to Chernaik, Swales and Vilain (2000:xii), "the detective story is the very paradigm of the 'rattling good story'; the reader cannot put the book down (as the saying goes) because of the sheer compulsion to find the explanation of 'whodunit'". Conspiracy films can operate in the same manner in looking for explanations, for just as one may wish to discover the identity of the murderer in detective fiction, there could also be a need to uncover the alternative versions to the dominant narrative revealed in a conspiracy film. The detective story ends with a promise of solace and upliftment (Chernaik *et al* 2000:xii), that is, a definite resolution, the closure that Bordwell (2008:96) refers to above. The conspiracy film presents a possible subversion of hegemony at the end of the story, albeit as an open ending, providing a resolution that offers further questions and counter-truths but still with a promise of closure.

As mentioned, in the conspiracy film, these subversive notions suggest an alternative lens to the dominant one. As Irvine and Beattie (1998:33) put it, "we turn to conspiracy theory as a means of understanding…we hope against hope for revelation, for a sign that the intellectual chaos which marks the present moment will be forever banished by the return of certainty". Irvine and Beattie (1998:33) speak to the postmodern condition wherein some contemporary Western societies find themselves framed by uncertainty. As suggested by 1970s movies (Millikan 2004:1) such societies no longer receive comfort from those in leadership positions. The alternative is to seek out ideas not yet known, to reveal something abstract or concrete which may provide a sense of certainty. However, this apparent 'certainty' mainly serves to suggest that anything 'certain' or dominant can be overturned; the conspiracy film utilises multiple narratives and multiple views which present more uncertainty.

According to Irvine and Beattie (1998:33), there is a voyeuristic element involved in watching conspiracy films, as the viewer has the opportunity to eavesdrop on certain historical happenings framed by the film and to witness

the subversion of those dominant happenings, the "behind-the-scenes" story, if you will (Rosenthal 1999:6). To be sure, this revealed 'truth' remains fictional and is a fabrication. Film dissolves outmoded boundaries between 'truth' and fabrication because the 'dominant and alternative truth' depicted on the screen are a fictitious illusion. In line with Baudrillard's ideas on contemporary media representation, no distinction is made between truth and fabrication. The conspiracy replaces one fabricated version of events with another equally fabricated one.

Considering the destabilisation of 'truth', conspiracy films are especially relevant to American modes of filmmaking. I highlight American film because my focus in this study concerns Hollywood narrative cinema. The paranoia, fear and anxiety contained within the conspiracy film's narratives are representative of tensions and anxieties in the reception of American history (Woidat 2006:457). Recent events in the American political arena, from 9/11 to the controversies of Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantanamo, seem to have destabilised confidence in figures of authority, particularly in terms of the narratives spun by some of these figures to promote a specific political aim. A large amount of terrorist-driven paranoia exists within the United States of America (Woidat 2006:457). American history has been rife with the fear of ambush, whether it be by Indians in Puritan New England, anarchists such as Sacco and Vanzetti, missiles from Cuba or terrorists who are ready and able to strike at any time (Woidat 2006:457). The events of September 11, 2001, fuelled this fear, which in turn gave rise to uncertainty and perceptions of threats of the unknown, which may have motivated an increased interest in conspiracy theories in American society. Parish and Parker (2001:1) support this view when she mentions that "conspiracies beset [American] popular culture". She quotes Beck who questions whether "conspiracy theorizing today (is) simply an age-old solution to the present anxieties of an uncertain world" (Parish & Parker 2001:1), although this idea is somewhat naïve in light of impossibility of "age-old solutions" and the suggestion that to live in "an uncertain world" is somehow a negative state of affairs.

In this "uncertain world", the conspiracy film is seen to perpetuate uncertainty

and instability without presenting solutions to tie together the loose ends of socio–political life, thereby encouraging the notion of living with ambiguity in a world without certainty. The visual translation styles used in the conspiracy film can aid in promoting this ambiguity as they can choose to show certain elements and 'hide' others, leaving an audience uncertain. Nonetheless, conspiracy films may be perceived to provide the audience with alternatives to the dominant narrative, which may also help abate their fears, even if those alternatives are fictional and framed in an escapist trope. Furedi (2002:127) mentions that "the fear of strangers and of risks is proportional to the decline of trust". He criticises the idea of fear mongering by mentioning that "the promotion of fear and the propagandist manipulation of information is often justified on the grounds that it is a small price to pay to get a good message across to the public" (2002:25). With this in mind, conspiracy films seek to discover the alternative narratives that are being manipulated and kept from the public. Conspiracy films suggest an unspoken, unsanctioned 'alternative truth' and in doing so there may no longer be a need to fear the unknown.[2] That which was 'hidden', even repressed, is now exposed. It is not only the audience who experience these alternative narratives; the characters in the conspiracy film also have a reaction to the subversive version of events. Their search for 'truth' brings them to alternative narratives that they might not have expected to find.

Although he uses juvenile imagery, Allen (1972:7) presents a useful metaphor when he compares the search for the "truth" to the search for the "hidden picture within another picture in a children's magazine". He mentions that one would view a picture of a landscape containing trees, bushes, flowers and other bits of nature with the aim of finding "a donkey pulling a cart with a boy in it". It would be near impossible to find this image until it is revealed that the landscape was painted in a way to conceal the "hidden picture". The conspiracy film uses a similar mechanism. This is evident in films such as *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), wherein the main characters are involved in a quest or

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[2] In this way, the conspiracy film is also very relevant to a South African audience as our society constantly perceives itself in a time where there is an absence of political certainty and a fear of the future (Campher 2009:[sp]).

'game' to seek the 'hidden' histories. *National Treasure* (2004) also makes use of this same mechanism in an explicitly visual sense: on occasion, the image seems to be literally layered, with a primary image resting on a secondary image that was previously unseen, demonstrating one of the visual translation techniques that I will refer to and investigate throughout this study.

Using the above technique of layering images, conspiracy films such as *National Treasure* (2004) set out to 'disillusion' individuals by creating the impression that, simply put, things are not what they seem to be. This causes doubt and uncertainty because there is not one definitive image or answer, and some sense of intangible 'truth', if that word may be used, exists somewhere in-between. The notion of aporia refers to "the deliberate expression of doubt and uncertainty" (Macey 2000:18). The term is also used to "describe the undecidability of terms that cannot be reduced to a play of binary opposition" (Macey 2000:18). In addition to this, Hawthorn (2003:15) explains that aporia, when applied to the reading of a text or in this case a film, provides the reader with "the freedom to play with the text" while its "irresolvability" is maintained. I choose to investigate the notion of aporia because it promotes ambiguities and multiple views (Macey 2000:18). The notion of aporia can serve as a theoretical reference because this expression of doubt and uncertainty is exactly what the conspiracy film aims for. The conspiracy film, through adapting so called 'historical facts' and by layering metalanguage and object-language, allows for various interpretations that straddles certainty and uncertainty while providing alternatives to hegemonic readings of key (historical) events. In a 'postmodern condition' where futility in terms of political uncertainty and the lack of a clear direction is evident (Lyotard 1997:vii), the aporic nature of the conspiracy film undermines viewers' ideas of 'truth' and results in an oscillation from one version of events to another and back, never settling on a 'final' single account. In light of the above, for the purposes of this study, the term "conspiracy film" will refer to a film or genre wherein the narratives contain the uncovering of secrets that lead to alternative histories within a specific dominant social/political context without providing any specific clarity on either the dominant or alternative version of events.

In order to best communicate these aspects concerning the genre of the conspiracy film, it is important to choose the best suited visual translation style to 'hook' the audience into the narrative, encouraging the plausibility of the 'illusion'. In investigating visual translations styles of the conspiracy film and how they promote the 'illusion' of authenticity, for example, certain main ideas have been identified.

I have highlighted the following key ideas regarding the conspiracy film:

- The conspiracy film follows adopted and adapted conventions, accommodating the conventions of larger, related genres;
- The conspiracy film regularly follows the narrative structure of the classical Hollywood narrative, even as a sub-genre of various larger genres;
- Both metalanguage and object-language are functional in commenting on and incorporating historical narratives into the conspiracy film; and
- The conspiracy film encourages the experience of aporia in light of the impossibility of clearly differentiated 'truth', 'fact' and 'fiction', thereby highlighting the tension between dominant narratives and alternative narratives.

I will utilise these concepts in my investigation of the visual translation styles (which are appropriate to both meta- and object-language, as I will show). These visual translation styles function specifically in the conspiracy film genre to destabilise and subvert dominant narratives. This is achieved by promoting alternative narratives that are of an equally fabricated nature and cannot be disentangled from Baudrillard's account of simulation and hyperreality.

1.2 Problem statement

As Kelly (2007:54) has stated, not enough attention is devoted to the

conspiracy film. It is also often not classified as a genre of its own, as mentioned in the previous section. There is a paucity of scholarship that describes and investigates the specific conventions and visual translation style possibilities which the conspiracy film may contain. For this reason, I decided to analyse the conspiracy film and its conventions, inclusive of historical narratives, which are all shaped and informed by visual translation styles.

This study will be addressing the following sub-questions in an attempt to answer the main research question:

1   What are the genre characteristics of the conspiracy film? I will analyse the conspiracy film genre with regards to character, plot, setting and narrative structure conventions as well as various camera framing devises and editing styles that make up the visual translation styles and metalanguage of the conspiracy film.

2   How are historical narratives used in conspiracy films and how are they challenged by the subversive narrative? To answer this question I will investigate the ways in which history is and was portrayed in film as well as the use of historical 'facts' in the conspiracy film with reference to the exploitation of object-language in *The X-Files* (1993-2002), with *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) and *National Treasure* (2004) as cinematic complements.

3   What visual translation styles are used in order to incorporate dominant and alternative historical data into film? I shall analyse the visual translation styles used in conspiracy films like *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), *National Treasure* (2004) and *The X-Files* (1993-2002) with regard to the object-language being challenged by the subversive metalanguage.

1.3 Research approach and aims

To optimally investigate the above aims and questions, I will concentrate on printed sources in English and Afrikaans as part of the review of scholarship. In addition, I will interrogate key film texts in investigating conspiracy film sub-

genre conventions. In terms of the visual material used for this study, I will reference *The X-Files* (1993-2002) together with *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) and *National Treasure* (2004) with regard to the characteristics associated with the sub-genre. This will aid me further in developing an understanding of the conspiracy film's conventions and how dominant histories are challenged by alternative narratives in the conspiracy film.

When discussing the various visual translation styles that can be used, a descriptive research method will be utilised to describe the way in which these styles form part of the conspiracy film with regard to the subversion and ambiguity of 'facts'. Descriptive research concerns "evidence of interesting and significant patterns in existing or new data or new trends in existing data" (Mouton 2005:113). Such a descriptive research approach is based on notions of qualitative research that promotes explanation building, where data is organised and certain themes and patterns are investigated, which in turn generate subject-specific hypotheses (Whitley 2002:292–293).

Qualitative research methods consist of the gathering of information from various sources. In this study's case, the sources consist of literary texts, theoretical texts, articles as well as films and television productions. Certain patterns and parallels are then drawn between these various sources of information, and from these parallels one can create a hypothetical model, definition, analyses or conclusion concerning the specific subject matter that is being studied (Whitley 2002:292–293). This approach best suits my intentions of analysing the conspiracy film.

1.4 Outline of chapters

Chapter One: Introduction
This opening chapter contextualises the study. By drawing on existing literature it features an introduction to the conspiracy film and problematises notions of history while linking the conspiracy film to introductory notions of meta- and object-language as well as aporia.

Chapter Two: Reading the Conspiracy Film

Chapter Two will expand considerably on the theoretical frame that informs my reading of conspiracy films, including critical discussions on the notions of 'truth', 'fact' and the conspiracy genre. I will refer to Baudrillard's notions of simulation and hyperreality as well as further develop the functions of meta- and object-language in film.

Chapter Three: Conventions and Visual Translation Styles of the Conspiracy Narrative

This chapter will establish the genre conventions of the conspiracy film and use these conventions in a critical discussion of the use of historical facts in the conspiracy film. I will frame *National Treasure* (2004), *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) and *The X-Files* (1993-2002) as case studies in this discussion.

This chapter will also interrogate visual translation styles and explore the manner in which historical 'facts' are challenged through these translations. This chapter aims to articulate the ways in which visual translation styles operate within the conspiracy genre and its conventions. Having introduced these films, I will use *National Treasure* (2004), *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) and *The X-Files* (1993-2002) as case studies to demonstrate how visual translation styles are used to present alternative narratives in these films.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

This chapter will contain a critical summary of the research results as well as suggestions for further research.

1.5 Clarification of concepts

The following is a list of concepts which will be used in this particular study:

Aporia: a theoretical term that encourages audience participation in a film. The notion of aporia refers to "the deliberate expression of doubt and uncertainty" (Macey 2000:18). The term is also used to "describe the undecidability of terms that cannot be reduced to a play of binary opposition"

(Macey 2000:18). In addition to this, Hawthorn (2003:15) explains that aporia, when applied to the reading of a text or in this case a film, provides the reader with "the freedom to play with the text" while its "irresolvability" is maintained.

Classical Hollywood narrative: a particular structure for narrative elements and conventions that consists of the hero's journey. The classical Hollywood narrative refers to a particular structure used to depict narratives. This structure is widely used in Hollywood mainstream films and suggests a formula known as the hero's journey, which describes the trials and tribulations that the hero must face in order to achieve the narrative goal (Campbell 2008). These narratives also 'hook' the audience with visual translation styles and scene transitions and also include closure and resolution for the characters and events in the narrative (Bordwell 2008:96).

Conspiracy narrative: a conspiracy narrative should "hint(s) at possibilities and alternatives" and should "make(s) us wonder if we're witnessing the full story" (Kelly 2007:54), implying that there are plausible alternatives to what is known about historical events and the knowledge imparted by authority figures. The conspiracy genre can therefore be summarised as containing narratives that consist of an alternative history or histories that serve to rupture the narrative of a dominant, 'established' history.

Convention: a characteristic or requirement that a certain type of film contains. These characteristics can be based in the narrative or medium. These conventions are also linked to genre characteristics, which are requirements of certain categories which films can be slotted into (Neale 2000).

Genre: categories for films or works of literature that share common characteristics or requirements (Neale 2000).

Hero's journey: a narrative structure that describes the journey a protagonist must take as well as the obstacles he must face in order to obtain his goal. A concept made famous by Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2008). This concept of the hero's journey describes what

the main protagonist of any story, whether myth or modern narrative, goes through in order to obtain his or her goal.

Historical fact/History: a term given to hegemonic historical accounts forming part of a consensus through either the written word or other documentation (Rosenstone 1995:26). As discussed in this chapter, for the purpose of this study, the term 'historical fact' is a descriptive term designated to refer to 'documented history', and is not supposed to suggest notions of 'objective truth'.

Metalanguage: a language used to describe or refer to the object-language. Metalanguage describes the use of embedded narratives and how they reveal the truth behind what is being communicated in the object-language (Hayward 2000:227).

Narrative hooks: narrative hooks are used within a narrative to carry the audience from one scene to the next. They serve as a transitional mechanism and can therefore form part of visual translation styles (Bordwell 2008:[sp]).

Object-language: the basic core of language. The object-language is the ordinary or original or basic form of language that may or may not refer to other entities (Silverstein as cited in Lucy 1993:33). It is that which is referred to by the metalanguage. In a literary sense, the object-language is presented through dialogue or character actions and presents one particular version of events. This version of events may be challenged by the metalanguage, which comments on the object-language and provides it with alternative or deeper meanings that serve as embedded narratives (Hayward 2000:227).

Truth: as hypothesised in this chapter, for the purpose of this particular study, a term used to describe dominant versions of events as well as subversive alternatives to the dominant versions of events.

Visual translation styles: the cinematic techniques that can be implemented to create visual communication in a film. These techniques can consist of

cinematography, editing or sound design (Dancyger 2002).

CHAPTER TWO: READING THE CONSPIRACY FILM: A THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter (Chapter One: Introduction) I outlined the basis of my study, which aims to analyse the visual translation styles used to suggest and destabilise historical facts in the conspiracy film genre. I also outlined the key terms I will be investigating and applying, including: conspiracy narrative; genre; conventions; truth; historical fact and visual translation styles. I will interrogate these terms in more detail in the following chapters, within a theoretical framework to optimally investigate the conspiracy genre with regards to use of history within conventions and visual translation styles. Furthermore, I will also be able to problematise and complexify the concepts of truth, fact and fiction within a theoretical framework.

In Chapter One: Introduction, I described the conspiracy film as having intertwined fabricated narratives, alternating dominant versions and impressions of certain historical events with subversive 'hidden' versions thereof. The conspiracy film blurs the boundaries that traditionally distinguish 'truth' and fabrication and reiterates the notion that 'fact' or 'truth' is false. Notions of truth, fact, history and simulation are prevalent when discussing the conspiracy film and its narratives. In order to utilise these concepts in a theoretical framework, I will refer to the work of Jean Baudrillard.

Baudrillard discusses the notions of simulation and fabrication, which refer to the reproduction of 'truth' and the rendering of any idea of 'fact' or 'truth' as imaginary and ungrounded and therefore simulated and fabricated (Baudrillard 1983b:3). Baudrillard see no difference between fabrication and truth (1983b:3). He also mentions hyperreality, which is his description for the world in which this simulation and fabrication takes place and how truth is

manufactured (Baudrillard 1983b:3). Additionally, when discussing the conspiracy film as a sub-genre of larger genres and when analysing the conventions of the conspiracy film, I will be referring to the classic Hollywood narrative as a model. The texts used as case studies follow this particular mainstream narrative structure; this necessitates a detailed analysis of the Hollywood narrative.

The classical Hollywood narrative refers to a particular structure used to depict narratives. This structure is widely used in Hollywood mainstream films and suggests a formula known as the hero's journey, which describes the trials and tribulations the hero must face in order to achieve the narrative goal (Campbell 2008).

In order to place the notion of visual translation styles within a theoretical context, I will be referring to metalanguage as well as object-language. Metalanguage describes the use of embedded narratives and how they reveal the 'truth' or alternative behind what is being communicated in the object-language (Hayward 2000:227). This can be linked to the use of visual translation styles because cinematic techniques are used to portray the narrative in a specific manner. They reveal aspects of the characters and story that are not visible in the object-language.

In view of the aims set out above, this chapter will subsequently be divided into the following sections:
- Section 2.2: Baudrillard's 'truth'
- Section 2.3: Genre theory
- Section 2.4: The Hollywood narrative
- Section 2.5: The notion of aporia
- Section 2.6: Meta- and object-language
- Section 2.7: Conclusion

The chapter's conclusion will integrate the above notions.

2.2 Baudrillard's 'truth'

The conspiracy film challenges dominant (grand) narratives by presenting alternative approaches to narrative events, which is often positioned in some version of history. The idea of a dominant narrative suggests that there is a truth and that history is based on empirical, objectively measured facts. 'Truth' and 'fact' suggest, as mentioned in Chapter One: Introduction, the existence of an absolute and universal approach to historical narratives and events. This idea of universalism and absolutism proposes a distinction between what is 'real' and what is 'false', or what is simulated or fabricated. Baudrillard (1983b:3), however, is adamant that no such distinction exists. Baudrillard supports his hypothesis by stating that "truth can be reproduced numerous times" (1983b:3) and therefore exists only in fabrication and simulation, and hence, there is no 'original' 'truth'. Baudrillard (as cited by Beeton 2005:176) also mentions that "the real is not only what can be reproduced, but that which is already reproduced, the hyper real (sic). Copies or representations of objects, referred to as 'simulacra' constitute this reality [of Baudrillard's]." Baudrillard (as cited by Beeton 2005:176) insists that the real, or 'truth', is in itself already reproduced. This reproduction remains a potentially infinitely occurring simulation.

Baudrillard and Poster (1975:7) furthermore state that the sign, the smallest unit of meaning in semiotics, "no longer designates anything at all". The sign approaches "in its truth its structural limit which is to refer back only to other signs" (Baudrillard & Poster 1975:7). For Baudrillard and Poster (1975), there is no 'original', for the sign to refer to at all. Baudrillard (1983b:3) has the same hypothesis concerning the visual media and its presentation of the real or 'truth'. He declares that there is no referent based in an objective reality to which visual media can refer (Baudrillard 1983b:3).

There is a complete lack of cause, or origin, for this simulated truth. Baudrillard (1983b:98) states that it is pointless to ponder the origin of the hyperreality. It is useless to wonder if it is the loss of communication that causes this escalation in the simulacra, or if simulacra come first, with its

dissuasive finality, since it short-circuits in advance all possibility of communication (precession of the model that puts an end to the real). Simulation is based on a circular process that involves a hyperreality of communication and of meaning, more real than the 'real'. As a result, the objectively-founded real is abolished. Baudrillard (1983b:3) further maintains that "[t]he media and the official *news service* (author's italics) are only there to maintain the illusion of an actuality, of the reality of the stakes, of the objectivity of facts" (Baudrillard & Glaser 1994:38). It follows that the media, while aiming to reveal the 'truth', is doing nothing more than amplifying a fabrication or illusion.

Baudrillard and Glaser (1994:38) state that the meaning of supposed 'truths' presented by visual media has long been exhausted. Baudrillard and Glaser (1994:38) further states that these media 'truths' succeed each other without logic and that any possible meaning that they might carry has become exhausted through their spectacular promotion. The information presented cannot be read as a dominant narrative, one which claims to present 'truth'. Baudrillard (1983a:97-98) mentions the following concerning information:

> Information devours its own contents; it devours communication and the social…Instead of causing communication, it *exhausts itself in the act* of staging the communication; instead of producing meaning, it exhausts itself in the staging of meaning. It is a gigantic process of simulation with which we are very familiar (author's italics).

Meaning and communication are staged in order to create meaning and communication. This reproduction causes exhaustion of the information and renders it fruitless. The 'truth' is merely a term used to describe the fabrication and simulation that takes place when the information, as Baudrillard (1983a:97-98) puts it, devours its own contents.

Notions of reproduced 'truth' also link with the terms 'historical fact' and history. As mentioned in Chapter One: Introduction, there may be opposing or conflicting versions of events and so 'history' operates as and within simulation(s), as fabricated from particular points of view that determine its

course. This is not to say that each version has its own distinct author and instead promotes multiple variations (the search for 'truth' remains a decidedly modernist endeavour) (Slob 2002:170). Baudrillard (1983b:3) argues that the search for truth is pointless; even if one were to pinpoint something approaching some notion of 'truth', this notion will simply and problematically enter into a cycle of adaptation and reproduction.

Concerning the notion of history and historical facts, Baudrillard (as cited in Malpas 2005:94) views history by examining the postmodern condition wherein events and occurrences happen too rapidly to make any sense. He suggests that a "degree of slowness, distance and liberation" are vital in bringing about a clear understanding of the events that construct history (Malpas 2005:94). Here, slowness denotes the pace at which information is received, and distance and liberation refers to the freedom and 'space' that should be given to the historical account in order to better understand and interpret it. According to Baudrillard, this required degree of slowness, distance and liberation cannot occur because of the rapidity of events in hyperreality (Malpas 2005:94). Conley (1997:31) also describes the hyperreal as containing the collapse between the referent and representation or simulation. The traditional sense of allegory or fable that informed past representations of the world and its events has been discarded in Baudrillard's hyperreality (Conley 1997:31). The distinction between truth and simulation is obscured and it is therefore not viable to attach meaning to the terms 'history', 'fact' and 'truth'; a point that conspiracy films such as *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) emphasises.

To be sure, Baudrillard (1987:70) thinks that history should be thought of as having more to do with faith than objective existence. To this, Baudrillard (1987:70) asks: "But then, what does it mean 'to believe'?" This would imply maintaining some sense of subjectivity as a criterion of the validity of things. If 'truth' is to be determined through a measure of belief, then a degree of subjectivity will be involved when interpreting the meaning of 'truth' because personal beliefs varies. This method of determining truth through belief ensures that truth is trapped in the imaginary because its meaning remains in

the minds of varied 'believers'. Baudrillard maintains above that one cannot accept that 'fact' exists for no other reason than the 'fact' is 'believed'. If something is believed to be 'true', it is not rendered absolute. For Baudrillard (1987:70), the issue of faith remains located in the realm of the imaginary.

In this section, I have examined and problematised notions of 'truth', 'fact' and 'history' as seen through the simulated eyes of Jean Baudrillard. In this study, I use the term 'historical fact' to describe reported or documented history, although I am aware of the potential biases inherent to the term. I use the term 'historical fact' because the conspiracy film has to do with alternate versions of 'truth' histories. I will analyse and investigate the conventions of the conspiracy film in more detail in Chapter Three: Conventions and Visual Translation Styles of the Conspiracy Narrative.

2.3 Genre theory

To reiterate what was stated in Chapter One: Introduction, the term 'genre' refers to categories of films that share similar themes, characteristics or conventions (Tudor as cited in Grant 1977:17). To say a film belongs to a particular category or genre is to imply that the film exists in a previously defined world with rules by which that world operates. Each genre contains conventions and ideologies which are specific to that genre (Grant 1977:17). Tudor (as cited in Grant 1977:17) states that the term genre suggests that any film wishing to belong to a particular genre needs to fulfil the requirements and characteristics of that genre. This process becomes redundant as any film that happens to contain certain elements or requirements of a particular genre is automatically classified as that genre, even though it was not the film's original intended category (Grant 1977:17). In Chapter One: Introduction, I proposed that this redundancy undermines the conspiracy film as its own genre. By containing certain characteristics from other genres, the conspiracy film is slotted into a category other than its own.

Chandler (1997) investigates genre theory in considerable detail and his conclusions, which I will discuss shortly, can be applied to the conspiracy film

as an unrecognised mainstream sub-genre. Chandler (1997:[sp]) cites Fowler and Wales when deliberating over genre theory. He mentions that many theorists do not necessarily accept the genre system of classification of literary works. Literary theorists' argument is that while many names exist for many types of genres, there are also genres and sub-genres that are not classified or given a particular name (Chandler 1997:[sp]). Chandler (1997:[sp]) also quotes Miller who suggests that the amount of genres depends wholly on the complexity and diversity of the given society.

Although Chandler (1997) refers to literary theory, in cinema, too, there are many types of films that are not allocated specific genre positions or classes. The conspiracy film is one of these types. Depending on the varied preferences of a particular and admittedly heterogeneous society, there are many genres that exist outside of the dominance of mainstream Hollywood cinema and the classical Hollywood narrative machine. The term 'mainstream genres' refers to the main commercial genres as defined by Hollywood cinema (Bourget as cited in Grant 1977:62). The mainstream genres as presented by Hollywood each contain conventions, and this conventionality is where the Hollywood film obtains its narrative basis (Bourget as cited in Grant 1977:62). The notion of the classical Hollywood narrative in particular will be discussed in more detail in a following section.

For now, the notion of genre needs to be problematised to demonstrate the complexities of the notion. Genre theory is complicated by numerous disputes and disagreements as to what the meaning of the term genre exactly entails. On these differences Chandler (1997:[sp]) notes that "one theorist's *genre* may be another's *sub-genre* or even *super-genre",* and he also suggests that "what is *technique, style, mode, formula* or *thematic grouping* to one may be treated as a *genre* by another" (author's italics). Taking my cue from Chandler (1997) it would seem unwarranted to classify films into a particular category, as there is no set model for what that categorisation entails. This is motivated by Chandler's statements above, which suggest that there exists dispute amongst scholars concerning the exact definition of what genre specifically might entail. These differences of opinion advocate that there is no set genre

model and little consensus even on the markings of genre. Bordwell (1989:147) adds to the discussion by mentioning that even themes are not adequate to classify a genre, as any theme can appear in any genre. He supports his argument by stating that there are no set rules or conditions with which to separate genres or categories that will appease both expert theorists and film-goers (Bordwell 1989:147). Despite the disagreements and hesitations concerning genre and its classifications, Chandler (1997:[sp]) provides a conventional and superficially consensual definition of the term. He states that "conventional definitions of genres tend to be based on the notion that they constitute particular conventions of content (such as themes or settings) and/or form (including structure and style) which are shared by the texts which are regarded as belonging to them".

Overall, genre denotes understandings of content and form and how these two elements intertwine in a film or work of art. The above definition proposes that genre refers to categories of films wherein each category contains works with similar conventions and characteristics. This definition, however, does not acquit the term from being problematic in that genre still undermines certain films by automatically classifying them into groups they are not necessarily intended for. Chandler (1997:[sp]) suggests that genre can serve as a useful frame of reference by which the reader or audience can better interpret or understand the text. Indeed, Chandler (1997) proposes that genre constructs the audience. Referring to Fiske (1987), Gledhill (1985) and Neale (1980), Chandler (1997:[sp]) arrives at the conclusion that genre has the ability to construct the audience by producing different positionings of the subject and contributing to the regulation of desire and expectation (Chandler 1997:[sp]). The audience has been instructed to expect certain conventions because they have been exposed to these conventions in other films or texts of the same genre. They are anticipating these conventions and are satisfied when they experience the genre's characteristics in a film.

In order to understand and interpret a particular genre, it is necessary that the audience or reader is familiar with that particular genre as well as the conventions contained within that genre. Chandler (1997:[sp]) mentions that

one needs to encounter sufficient examples of a genre in order to recognise its characteristics, conventions and shared features. Chandler (1997:[sp]) also quotes Fowler who states that an audience gains knowledge of the various types of genres gradually over a period of time through unconscious familiarization. It can be argued that audiences learn the conventions and characteristics of a given genre through the intertextual links between films from similar genres. This notion of intertextuality links to Kramsch's (1993:124) proposal that in order to understand certain texts, readers need to draw on a level of experience and knowledge as well as on other texts. Kramsch (1993:124) calls this background knowledge "frames", "scripts" or "schemata", and it allows the anticipation of incoming information and the possibility to "relate it to previous knowledge and thus make global sense of the text as it unfolds" (1993:124). Chandler (1997:[sp]) suggests that this framework of reference can be linked to psychology. Genre theorists draw parallels with *schema theorists* in psychology. Just as genre is a framework within which to make sense of films or texts within a category, a schema is a template within which to make sense of related experiences in everyday life. When analysed through schema theory, genres are textual schemata (Chandler 1997:[sp]).

The more types of films an audience sees, the more familiar they become with the conventions of those films. It is interesting to note then that genre becomes something that an audience needs to repeatedly experience in order to fully become acquainted with the conventions and the characteristics of each genre. Furthermore, it is possible for a film that contains particular characteristics of a specific 'overexposed' genre to be better interpreted than one that does not. A link can be drawn here with Bordwell's (2008:[sp]) notion of narrative "hooks". As mentioned in Chapter One: Introduction, "hooks" can be used within a narrative to carry the audience from one scene to the next. They serve as a transitional mechanism (Bordwell 2008:[sp]) to 'hook' the viewer from one scene to the next. The conventions within a genre serve as the "hooks" that an audience comes to expect from that genre. These hooks can also construct visual translation styles that in themselves serve as elements of genre convention. Certain films might have visual translation

styles that are specific to a genre and so the visual translation styles become a genre convention.

By having previous knowledge of genres and what their separate characteristics are, a film can be better interpreted by referencing back to the genre and other genre texts to which it belongs and is similar to. Chandler (1997:[sp]) actually refers to 'cultural capital' that all texts require from the audience in order for the audience to make sense of it. In elaboration, Allen (as cited in Chandler 1997:[sp]) mentions that generic knowledge is one of the 'cultural capital' competencies required in order to make sense of and interpret a text. This same knowledge is required in order to read a specific genre.

The key ideas in this section consisted of the following:

- The term genre refers to categories in film and literature.
- There are conflicting ideas regarding the purpose and validity of classification within film as this process of classification can become redundant when films are automatically placed within a category purely because of certain characteristics that they may contain.
- This redundancy may help explain why the conspiracy film does not receive the same attention as other mainstream genres; it is automatically categorised into genres other than its own.
- It is necessary for an audience to be familiar with a genre before they can recognise that genre in a work of fiction.
- There are arguments which suggest that the idea of genre is flawed, for there is no set model with which to compare a film's characteristics.

In this section, I investigated genre theory and the various notions concerning genre and its functionality, indicating some contradicting views concerning the necessity of genre and classification. The conventions of the conspiracy film are conventions that can also be found within any Hollywood mainstream genre, and so a discussion of the classical Hollywood narrative, which can

frame numerous genres within its form, will prove as a useful reference when investigating the conspiracy film's conventions.

2.4 The Hollywood narrative

In the previous sections, I mentioned the terms 'Hollywood film', 'Hollywood narrative' and 'classical Hollywood'. I use these terms to refer to the narrative structure and conventional characteristics contained in mainstream Hollywood films. I am referencing the Hollywood narrative and using it as a model when discussing the conspiracy film. *National Treasure* (2004), *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) and *The X-Files* (1993-2002) all contain and follow elements of the Hollywood narrative structure, particularly the hero's journey, which will be discussed shortly.

The term 'Hollywood film' refers to the dominant style in cinema, a particular style that follows a set of rules and regulations on how films should be put together (Hammitt 2006:[sp]). In this sense, the Hollywood film can also be framed as a broad genre in itself because the notion of genre consists of rules and regulations, as mentioned in the previous section. The narrative of the classical Hollywood film is "fictional, but it resembles the world we know", present or past (Hammitt 2006:[sp]). The commonly accepted structure of the Hollywood film is structured according to three consecutive acts that unfold as follows:

- It presents a problem at the start of the narrative;
- As the narrative progresses, the characters logically work through the problem to find a solution; and
- At the end of the narrative, after all obstacles have been overcome, the characters manage to obtain a solution to the problem (Hammitt 2006:[sp]).

In addition to the above structure, the editing and camera shots in the classical Hollywood narrative also follow a pattern. The priority in the editing

of a Hollywood film is continuity (Hammitt 2006:[sp]). Editing also serves to provide seamlessness and invisibility in a film, which provides a sense of narrative cohesion (Hammitt 2006:[sp]). The camera shots and angles introduce the audience to the scene and characters and the camera follows them through various plot developments (Hammitt 2006:[sp]). This character and event movement is the main focus of the camera. The camera and editing techniques are not limited to providing character and event movement and can also be used for many effects such as flashbacks, slow motion, jump cuts and depictions of character thoughts or discussions. These visual translation styles are effective when depicting historical 'facts' and other information in a Hollywood narrative. The Hollywood narrative is dependant on the "hero's journey", a concept made famous by Joseph Campbell in his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2008). This concept of the hero's journey describes what the main protagonist of any story, whether myth or modern narrative, goes through in order to obtain his or her goal. This journey is as follows:

- The protagonist is drawn, possibly by chance, into a world he does not understand (Campbell 2008:41);
- The protagonist accepts the call for adventure and encounters an aid, often someone elderly or more wise who provides him with tools to complete the task (Campbell 2008:57);
- The protagonist crosses from the known world into the unknown. There is often a guardian that he must face between these two worlds (Campbell 2008:64);
- Once past the threshold, the protagonist or hero encounters a new world, one with many obstacles that he needs to overcome (Campbell 2008:81);
- The hero encounters temptations that may divert him from his main quest (Campbell 2008:101);
- The hero's ego is disintegrated and he as able to see things from a larger point of view (Campbell 2008:105);
- The hero is now fully prepared to obtain his goal and find what he seeks (Campbell 2008:148);

- The hero's return to the original world might come against opposition and a chase or pursuit needs to ensue before the hero can return (Campbell 2008:178);
- The hero returns to the original world (Campbell 2008:188); and
- The hero and his fellow man are now enriched and can live better lives because of the acquisition of the goal and the completion of the quest (Campbell 2008:205).

The hero starts with a goal in mind and leaves his world of comfort in order to obtain the goal. He encounters many obstacles as well as aid along the way and by the end of the process the hero has become enlightened and is able to obtain the goal. This structure of goal attainment and overcoming of obstacles is what the Hollywood narrative is based on[3]. Hence, when speaking about the Hollywood narrative or the classic Hollywood film, I am referring to this formulaic structure that has shaped the conventions and regulations for writing a screenplay in Hollywood. This structure of the classic Hollywood narrative can be problematic. As with genre, it can be argued that the concept of Hollywood narrative is restricting and limiting. Bordwell (2007:[sp]), however, has the following to say about this:

> The term implies a standard of craft competence, along with a dimension of collective decision-making. Norms are preferred alternatives within a tradition. A norm isn't a single and inflexible law; it's best seen as a roughly bounded set of options. Within any cluster of norms, there are always different ways to do anything.

Here Bordwell (2007:[sp]) implies that even though the classic Hollywood film contains a preferred or standard narrative structure, the manner in which certain elements occur within that structure may differ between narratives. In

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[3] Vogler was a successful promoter of this template and remembered Campbell's work when films such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Spielberg, 1977) obtained massive financial success. Vogler took Campbell's hero's journey and wrote a seven page memo, applying the structure to classic and current films. This became so popular that studios and production offices all over Hollywood were asking for the memo and Vogler's structure, which transformed Campbell's synthesis into a plot outline guide and became a norm for writing films in Hollywood (Bordwell 2006:34).

order to advance the plot, the hero will always accept the call for adventure and will always embark on an epic quest in order to obtain a goal. This quest is often accompanied by visual translation effects such as editing and camera techniques that help push the movement of the characters and events forward. The manner in which the hero accepts the quest and the specific type of goal can be vastly different from a previous narrative of the same structure. The order of events within the structure may also be shuffled in order to create diversity, for example, the hero might start his quest already having obtained the goal. The loss of the goal might then pose as the actual solution. Bordwell (2007:[sp]) also mentions film scholars who argue that mainstream Hollywood films are not as tightly unified as the rules or structures suggest they should be. The argument is that the norms governing the action film, for example, do not aim at any form of unity: action movies are viewed as "loose assemblies of chases, fights, explosions, stunts, and CGI effects, with little narrative coherence" (Bordwell 2007:[sp]).

Bordwell (2007:[sp]) himself counters the above view by arguing that action films contain more unity than one might think: story and character goals can be achieved and fulfilled through action scenes and spectacle, and not in spite of them. An explosion can be a solution to a problem or it can pose as an obstacle for the protagonist, and the protagonist is enduring the action and spectacle in order to achieve his goal. The hero's journey is still firmly in place in the action and adventure films (Bordwell 2007:[sp]). In order to depict this journey, visual translation styles are required. Film is a visual medium and the events and character growth need to be portrayed in a competent visual manner that communicates the journey or narrative of the characters, regardless of the order in which events may occur. Visual translation styles not only aid with the spectacle of action sequences but also with the depiction of event and character progression.

As mentioned earlier, the three films I have selected as my primary case studies all incorporate the hero's journey structure and this is the reason for using the classic Hollywood narrative as a theoretical framework and reference. My aim is not to argue that the conspiracy film is specifically

tailored to the classic Hollywood narrative 'rules', but my case studies contain goal attainment and problem solving that the characters need to endure and so I will analyse the conspiracy film conventions and visual translation styles with the Hollywood narrative in mind.

In an earlier section I included a discussion by Bordwell (1989:147) in which he argues that there is no set "rules or conditions" in genre. Above, Bordwell (2007:[sp]) makes a similar comment when discussing the portrayal of the hero's journey in Hollywood action films. Even though the norms and conventions are in place, there is space to 'play' with their narrative possibilities. In spite of the presence of some type of 'formula' or 'generic form', the audience can be allowed to form their own opinions about the text that is presented to them. There are no 'rules' or 'conditions' by which an audience needs to interpret the conspiracy, thus allowing a flexibility of interpretations.

2.5 The notion of aporia

In the conspiracy narrative dominant versions of history are destabilised and even framed as false, resulting in suggestions of doubt and uncertainty regarding the finality and actuality of given historical events. In reference to notions of destabilisation, the term aporia is defined as the "deliberate expression of doubt and uncertainty" (Macey 2000:18). Macey (2000:18) also states that the notion of aporia is used when describing the "undecidability of terms that cannot be reduced to a play of binary opposition". Beardsworth (1996:32), in discussing Derrida and postmodernism, describes aporia in detail:

> An aporia is something which is impracticable. A route which is impracticable is one that cannot be traversed, it is an uncrossable path. Without passage, not treadable. For the Eleatic Zeno, who, it is generally recognized, was the first to use the term consistently, aporia implied the suspension (*epokhe*) of judgement. At the point where the path of thinking stopped, judgement was suspended. This definition of aporia was inherited by the presocratic sophists who called an aporia two

contradictory sayings of equal value.

In referring to the unattainable and the suspension of judgement, aporia promotes uncertainty and impracticability. In addition, Hawthorn (2003:15) maintains that when aporia is applied to the reading of a text or film, it allows the reader or audience to play with the text freely and interpret it in various ways, even though the text remains irresolvable. As shown in this study thus far, terms cannot be reduced to absolute descriptions based on binary oppositions. 'Truth' and 'fabrication' cannot receive universal descriptions based on their dominant status as binary opposites, and this ambiguity of terms is what the notion of aporia refers to. This also links with historians having varied and subjective views on specific events, which is why one dominant narrative (as a version of events) is not viable.

Based on the above, aporia entails the expression of uncertainty and doubt; the 'undecidability' of terms, impracticable and 'uncrossable' paths and the suspension of judgement. It also allows the audience to 'play' with the text and create subjective interpretations. This can be linked with the manner in which visual translation styles can allow the audience to play with the meaning of the text by making use of various cinematic techniques to promote uncertainty. This uncertainty has to do with, amongst other things, the tension between the dominant and the alternative, the hegemonic and the subversive.

Visual translation styles can reveal certain elements in the film while the characters, through dialogue and actions, can reveal other elements. It is the meta- and object-language that allows for these subversive and alternative narratives to coincide; the metalanguage reveals a version of events that is contrasted or varied to the version that the object-language is aiming to portray. When these opposing narratives clash, it creates uncertainty and allows the audience to form personal interpretations. An example of this is a scene in *The X-Files* (1993-2002) in which Mulder receives documents containing information about a government cover-up. As Mulder discusses the validity of the documents, the scene transitions to a shot of a man burning identical documents. This visual translation style creates doubt about the

documents' authenticity and why a possibly false document was produced in the first place – even the characters' motives are shrouded in uncertainty. The image of the documents is also an effective narrative hook (in Bordwellian terms) that places this narrative in the realms of the classic Hollywood narrative. The documents, though subversive, serves as a transitional hook that moves the classical Hollywood structure of the narrative forward. It is subversive in itself that, of all narrative models, the Hollywood narrative would offer such subversive anti-dominant narratives that create uncertainty in terms of character motives and historical events.

As mentioned before, the conspiracy film's narratives contain alternative approaches to dominant notions of history. When faced with such an alternative narrative, the characters in conspiracy films experience feelings of uncertainty and doubt. For example, in *The X-Files* (1993-2000), Mulder and Scully are faced with a government plot which threatens the dominant historical narrative. This leaves them uncertain of what to believe or who to trust. This links again with aporia's invitation to uncertainty, possibly to both the audience as well as characters in the narrative as well.

With reference to how aporia allows for free interpretations (Hawthorn 2003:15), the conspiracy film often contains specifically open endings. The moment of crisis introduced during the narrative exposition remains irresolvable. This allows the audience to 'play' with the text because there are no concrete solutions presented in the narrative (Hawthorn 2003:15). The solution remains vague despite interpretation. Audiences play with the text throughout the narrative as they balance and weigh clues, red herrings and possible deceptions just as much as where the ending presents the traditional point of resolution and closure as a confirmation of aporia. This occurs at the end of *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) where it is suggested that the female lead character might be part of the bloodline of Christ. The validity of this claim is never determined with certainty and so the possible doubt that remains allows the audience to determine their own answers and 'play' with the text by, for example, mentally rereading the possible cues and clues related to this point as provided in the film.

In this section, I defined aporia and determined how this notion can be applied to the conspiracy film's narratives. The conspiracy film encourages the experience of aporia, especially considering the impossibility of truth, fact and history in the conspiracy film's narratives. The conspiracy film highlights the tension between dominant and alternative narratives, which often runs parallel to the tension between the metalanguage and the object-language.

2.6 Meta- and object-language

As mentioned earlier, metalanguage refers to the object-language in that it provides a deeper meaning or alternative aspect to what the object-language is communicating. Metalanguage implies that the narrative can be self-referential and often calls attention to its own construction through the use of certain techniques (Hayward 2000:227). The narratives are therefore embedded within one another and referred to as metalanguages (Hayward 2000:227). Metalanguage is a discourse on other discourses, hence the narratives within narratives (Hayward 2000:227). Lucy (1993:12) contributes to the discussion of metalanguage by including the notion of object-language:

> In many traditional philosophical and linguistic accounts, ordinary language is conceived of as referring, in the first instance, to a world of non-linguistic objects. The use of language to refer to language itself is seen, then, as a higher order or iterative use worthy of special mention. Language referring to language in this way is called *metalanguage* and the ordinary language referred to is called *object language*.

Lucy (1993) is describing object-language as the basic core and ordinary language; this is the primary language. The metalanguage then, is that which refers to the object-language and attempts to attach a deeper meaning to it. It represents the language within the language, and this 'unseen' language attaches a larger 'context' to the object-language. Without the metalanguage, the object-language would not contain any meaning other than its most basic connotation.

Lucy (1993:1) elaborates on the function of metalanguage in contemporary society.

> Language provides a powerful tool for representing and characterizing the world, and much of human activity consists of using linguistic utterances to effect certain action. When, therefore, as scholars, we undertake to develop accounts of human life, one of our central tasks must be to characterize the use of language. This use depends in crucial ways on the reflexive capacity of language, that is, the capacity of language to represent its own structure and use, including the everyday metalinguistic activities of reporting, characterizing, and commenting on speech.

Lucy (1993) maintains that language provides society with a powerful tool with which to communicate and comment on certain objects within the world. This commentary becomes the metalanguage and reveals personal opinions on that which is being commented on, the object-language. When undertaking to develop accounts of human life, it is necessary to characterize the use of language and the manner in which it can comment on its own structure and use. Metalanguage and object-language is prevalent in social discourse, as well as in literary forms such as novels and films. In film it is utilised in the form of visual translation styles and it serves very specific purposes, which will be elaborated on in Chapter Three: Conventions and Visual Translation styles of the Conspiracy Narrative.

Silverstein (as cited in Lucy 1993:33) has his own explanation of meta- and object-language that serves to support the above:

> Here, we assume that there is some language in the usual sense, i.e., some grammatically conforming system of expression-types, tokens of which refer-to some universe of referents and predicate-about some universe of states-of-affairs, and that the objects of reference-and-predication happen to be themselves grammatically conforming expressions of some language, called, by virtue of this, the object language of metalinguistic usage.

Language refers to a universe of referents. That which is being referred to has its own grammatically conforming expressions and is called the object-

language. Silverstein (as cited in Lucy 1993:33) lastly states that "the expression-types that are used to refer-to/predicate-about the object language belong, of course, to the metalanguage". The metalanguage is the system that refers to and comments on the object-language. In looking at the definitions and sources above, one can determine that the object-language is the ordinary, original or basic form of language that may or may not refer to other entities. The metalanguage references the object-language and presents either a different interpretation of it or it presents a deeper or 'hidden' understanding of it.

With reference to visual meta- and object language, it is important to note how the language of the meta-and object-language should also differ when looking at novels or films. For example, in a novel, character descriptions are given and the dialogue being spoken by the character is also present. The character's dialogue and the character's description, although both in the English language, are still separate languages. They are different forms of communication and they have different purposes. The character description gives more insight into the character's personality and thoughts, which helps inform the dialogue and gives it added meaning. The character description is the metalanguage of the dialogue, which in turn is the object-language.

In films, visual translation styles can construct, reveal or point to the metalanguage of a text, in this case, a conspiracy film. To reiterate, the term visual translation styles refers to the various cinematic techniques which can be used to visually portray the narrative. These techniques can consist of camera shots and angles, editing styles, sound design and even music (Fairservice 2001). These visual translation styles aim to strip away the illusion of film language to reveal a complex process of manipulation underneath, and at the same time, this process of illusion and manipulation aims to hook the audience into the conspiracy narrative by creating uncertainty. A camera shot, for example, could depict something to the audience that the characters do not necessarily see. The audience are therefore witnessing alternative narratives with which they can 'play' and freely interpret. They are experiencing the interaction between visible and

latent contents and themes in the film, i.e. the interaction between the metalanguage and the object-language.

The core narrative, or object-language (Bordwell 1985:18), is created by the dialogue that is delivered to the reader or audience by the characters, as mentioned above. The 'truth' or 'reality' of what the characters are implying through the dialogue is shown through the metalanguage. It is the 'hidden' or alternative story. The metalanguage can inform the reader that the character is lying or that the character is unaware of the implications or consequences of the dialogue. Even Bordwell (1985:18) mentions that "the metalanguage tells 'the truth'".

The above can apply to both novels and films. In cinema, the camera serves as the metalanguage. The various camera shots and camera angles show the audience the 'truth' or alternative narrative behind the object-language, something the characters are unaware of. The camera reveals the 'truth' about the characters and events (Bordwell 1985:18). Bordwell (1985:18) also quotes MacCabe who states that "characters speak, but their discourses are always framed by an equivalent of the novelist's metalanguage: the camera". MacCabe goes on to mention that narration in mainstream film is dependant on the opposition "between spoken discourses which may be mistaken and a visual discourse which guarantees truth – which reveals all" (Bordwell 1985:18). This 'truth' that MacCabe refers to is the subversive or alternative version of events portrayed by the visual medium. This fusion between metalanguage and object-language is therefore a very functional and vital element in cinema and, as mentioned in Chapter One: Introduction, may serve as the entry point into the manner in which the 'truth' or alternative history is revealed in the conspiracy film. The metalanguage functions to inform and even manipulate interpretations of the text. When individuals communicate to each other by using speech, their actions and body language communicate the metalanguage of what is being said. It adds additional meaning or reveals that which is not said.

To summarise the above, the visual translation styles serve to present the

alternative or subversive narratives. In this way, the dominant or hegemonic version of accounts is portrayed through the object-language. The metalanguage then presents the subversive version of events by commenting on and adding alternative view points to the object-language. I determined that through the use of the camera, the metalanguage or 'truth' can be revealed about the characters and their discourses. When I discuss visual translation styles in Chapter Three: Conventions and Visual Translation Styles of the Conspiracy Narrative, I will use the notions of metalanguage and object-language as part of my conceptual framework.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I investigated the theories of Baudrillard and his notions of truth and reality, seeing as the conspiracy film deals with the uncovering of the truth. Drawing on Baudrillard, I established that the terms truth, reality and fact do not have any credibility. Baudrillard compares these terms to the notion of fabrication and simulation, and does not find any difference. The conspiracy film also sees 'truth' and 'fact' as a simulation, as these terms are always proven to be false in the conspiracy film's narratives. This study aims to analyse the conspiracy film's conventions and necessitates the investigation of the conspiracy film as a genre.

Secondly, I investigated genre theory and demonstrated how genre is constituted by containing certain conventions and characteristics that are common in all films of the same genre. When writing about the conspiracy film, I will be using the classic Hollywood narrative as a reference. In this chapter, I discussed the notion of the classic Hollywood narrative and related it to the outlined structure of Campbell's hero's journey.

Thirdly, I indicated how aporia, which involves the experience of uncertainty and doubt in dealing with textual tensions, allows the audience to play with and create interpretations of the film text, while the vagueness and irresolvable answers of the narrative remain firmly intact.

Finally, I studied the notion of metalanguage and object-language. Metalanguage refers to language referencing language. In terms of film, it refers to narratives within narratives or alternative narratives. The object-language consists of dialogue being spoken by the characters. The metalanguage provides the audience with the alternative narrative behind what is being portrayed.

CHAPTER THREE: CONVENTIONS AND VISUAL TRANSLATION STYLES OF THE CONSPIRACY NARRATIVE

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter (Chapter Two: Reading the Conspiracy Film) was concerned with the theoretical framework that I shall use and reference in the chapters to follow. I based my theoretical frame on Baudrillard's notions of truth and fabrication[4]. I also investigated genre theory, and meta- and object-language. In the following chapter, I specifically investigate the conspiracy narrative and its conventions as well as the various visual translation styles that can be employed to better depict the dominant and alternative historical 'facts' in the conspiracy narrative.

This chapter will analyse *National Treasure* (2004) by viewing it as a conspiracy narrative first, and in doing so, exploring and delineating conventions and visual translation styles of the conspiracy narrative, showing how they can serve to destabilise hegemonic versions of events. Other visual texts that will receive attention are *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), *National Treasure: Book of Secrets* (2007) and the television series *The X-Files* (1993-2002). I have selected these specific narratives because they all contain elements of alternative histories, as opposed to dominant versions of events and proclaimed 'truths', which have been altered. They also use imaginative visual translation styles that are used to depict these 'truths'. I am aware that I have also selected a television series to analyse, and I place this series as a valid point of reference for the feature films. *The X-Files* (1993-2002) also contains alternative versions of histories and attempts to challenge hegemonic viewpoints in the same manner as the other films chosen films. In the colourful language of McRae (2002:2), *The X-Files* (1993-2002) "mobilises

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[4] Although Deleuze would eventually argue that "the real is always actual-virtual" seeing as there is only "the actualization of actual images" (Lindblom [Sa]:5), that particular ontological position falls beyond the scope of this current study.

contradictory imaginings of the past to reclaim hidden histories". In addition, McRae (2002:2) confirms that the series articulates "vibrant and joyful imaginings of historical narratives". These opposing narratives exist through aporia, and can be "joyful" in the sense that the viewer is invited to participate in or play with the text's meanings. Similarly, *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) also deals with alternative versions of history, as shown earlier. A symbologist and cryptologist discover clues to long-oppressed narratives within Leonardo Da Vinci's paintings that challenge accepted religious foundations. *National Treasure* (2004) is also a conspiracy narrative that suggests alternative narratives concerning American history. Hollywood has indeed "supplied more numerous and sometimes more vivid instances of political terrorism than the country's enemies" (Nelson 2003:80). If it holds that films often "strive to address various contemporary concerns to which different cross-sections of the audience can relate" (Aguado 2002:171), either deliberately or implicitly, these case texts demonstrate how the conspiracy narrative can articulate the tension between alternative histories.

The selected titles correspond to Nelson's (2003:89) selection of conspiracy texts, *The Parallax View (*Pakula 1974) and *The Skulls* (Cohen 2000), which demonstrate respectively how American hegemony "squelches political dissent" and how "political elites extend themselves in democratic times". The idea of political oppression and the abundance of the minority elite demonstrate narrative commonalities between my case texts and numerous other conspiracy narratives.

3.2 Conspiracy narrative conventions

Each of the above mentioned narratives can be slotted into a mainstream genre. *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) can be seen as an action film or even a suspense drama, while *The X-Files* (1993-2002) is labelled as a science-fiction/drama. The Internet Movie Database (IMDB 2009) categorises *National Treasure* (2004) as an action/adventure, *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) as a thriller and *The X-Files* (1993-2002) as a sci-fi thriller. Yet, at the core of each of these narratives is a conspiracy, as I have outlined in the previous section.

The other genre elements seem mainly to determine the diegetic context of the conspiracy, i.e. whether the conspiracy will take place within an adventure, a science-fiction environment or even a comical situation. It is my opinion then that a conspiracy narrative is possibly best seen as a hybrid of genres, combining one or two mainstream genres to form a mixed genre; this view is supported by Neale (2000:51), who points out that hybrids are actually more evident than 'pure' genres. *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) demonstrates this genre hybridity by combining conventions from the thriller and the conspiracy genre. Because the conspiracy narrative can be positioned as a hybrid, linking it with specific genres enables one to outline its conventions. As mentioned earlier, I position the detective genre as a possible link. Neale (2000:75) quotes David Bordwell: "The [detective] genre aims to create curiosity about past story events (e.g., who killed whom), suspense about upcoming events, and surprise with respect to unexpected disclosures about either story or syuzhet." Whereas the term 'story' refers to the plot, syuzhet refers to the reshaping and representation of events through narration into plot (Bordwell 1985:50). An analogy can be drawn here to meta- and object-languages, where the metalanguage reshapes the object-language by commenting on it. In this regard, even when characters in a conspiracy narrative seem to impart knowledge about a narrative event or 'history', the film can audio-visually suggest that this current version is an incomplete or even deceptive version.

In Chapter One: Introduction, it was suggested that a conspiracy narrative proposes an alternative history and destabilises dominant understandings and versions of the narrative event concerned by presenting a narrative twist that may lead one to scrutinise the narrative events and claims to 'truth'. *National Treasure* (2004) reveals that a fortune has been hidden from public knowledge since the American Revolutionary War. These revelations threaten the status quo and call the dominant historical narrative into question. In the detective genre, the alternative narrative also threatens the status quo and what occurred in the past. The detective solves his case by uncovering the key to the narrative's central mystery, probably casting a new light on characters and events. The destabilisation of the dominant through the subversive by the revealing of a shocking narrative 'truth' that has been kept

temporally repressed can be seen as a significant convention of the conspiracy narrative. Not only is the narrative content (functioning as object-language) called into question, but the visual language of the film (functioning as metalanguage), which unfolds according to a classical Hollywood narrative, is challenged as well. Any notion of 'truth' is reframed as (a) fiction.

Trotter (as cited in Chernaik *et al* 2000:22) describes the detective as a character who "fulfils the demands of the function of knowledge", or who shares his knowledge with the reader and other characters. Like a contemporary but less nuanced Hercule Poirot, *The Da Vinci Code's* (2006) Robert Langdon (Tom Hanks) is a symbologist who regularly throughout the film shares his knowledge of signs and symbols. In the dialogue scenes between him and Teabing (Ian McKellen), both characters share their knowledge with each other to keep the audience informed of the subversive historical narrative that exists concurrent to the dominant. Without clarifying which version is the 'right' or 'actual' one, the notion of aporia comes into play as the characters and dialogue present the audience with an opportunity to form interpretations based on the information. Indeed, the characters in *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) are detective-like in trying to solve the mystery of the conspiracy. They search for clues to the solution of the conspiracy by studying hegemonic 'history' on which the conspiracy is based and impart their knowledge to the audience. Here then is the second convention: characters impart their knowledge on dominant historical events in order to inform the audience of the fragility of this dominant version of a particular historical narrative or event. Specifically, this negotiation between versions of events and their multiplicity of meanings links with the notion of aporia and encourages audience involvement in decoding the filmic text without necessarily arriving at any narrative certainties. When no conclusive version of events is provided, the audience generate their own interpretations and tentative conclusions.

In addition to the above, there are other mechanisms used in the detective narrative that seem to manifest in the conspiracy narrative. The detective narrative consists of mysteries and clues that need to be uncovered in order

to address a larger enigma (Chernaik *et al* 2000:xii). Like the detective narrative, the conspiracy narrative includes the investigation of clues to address the central mystery of the conspiracy. The plots of both the detective narrative and the conspiracy narrative present these clues at key moments in the narrative. According to Todorov (as cited in Malmgren 2001:21), there are two main storylines in a detective narrative. The first is the story of the crime, and the second that of the solution or investigation. The story of the crime tells "what really happened" while the story of the investigation explains "how the reader has come to know about it" (Malmgren 2001:21). In other words, the story of the crime deals with details pertaining to who was murdered, why they were murdered, how the crime took place and who the murderer was. The story of the investigation follows the detective and the quest he undertakes in order to solve the crime. In the prototypical *Murder on the Orient Express* (Lumet & Goodwin, 1974), the detective is placed on a famous train where someone was murdered. He searches the train for clues and speaks to various passengers, all of whom are possible suspects. His clues lead him to another location outside the train that is also linked to the crime scene. The detective figure needs to move through space in a temporal-linear way to solve the mystery. Through the detective's investigation, the reader becomes informed of the 'facts' so that the solution to the crime can be understood.

Similar in structure to detective fiction, the conspiracy narrative also follows two storylines: the first is the narrative of the conspiracy, which tells of the dominant historical events and the plot to cover up the alternative version. This narrative deals with aspects such as the hegemonic historical account, how this particular account is flawed, the alternative to the dominant account and the person(s) responsible for the invisibility of the alternative account and their reasons for doing so. The second narrative is the one of the investigation, which deals with the characters' journey to uncover the 'truth' and the obstacles they must face in order to find the answers they seek. In the conspiracy narrative, the protagonist also moves through chronological time and space to attempt to solve the conspiracy.

In both the conspiracy and detective genres, narrative progression is associated with successful movement through space. In *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), there are two narratives occurring parallel to each other. The one is the story of the secret contained within Leonardo Da Vinci's paintings and the Opus Dei's attempt to cover up this secret; the second is the story of the protagonists' attempts to expose these secrets while being pursued by the antagonists. This convention of the conspiracy narrative deals with the inclusion of two parallel running narratives: one revealing the dominant historical account and conspiracy, the other depicting the characters' journey to uncover the answers behind the conspiracy. This overlapping of narratives forms an essential part of the interaction between meta- and object-languages, wherein one narrative (and the way in which its images are constructed) informs viewers' reading of the other narrative.

In *The X-Files* (1993-2002), the narrative of an alien invasion conspiracy presents various narrative twists that serve to bring what is known about earth, its history and humanity's place in its own historical narrative into question. Episodes are divided into two types. 'Stand-alones' deal with strange cases that do not necessarily relate to the main conspiracy while 'mythology' episodes specifically investigate issues pertaining to the encompassing conspiracy. These 'mythology' episodes are of particular significance to this study. The terms 'mythology' and 'conspiracy' are connected as both terms can refer to narratives that are neither hegemonic nor conclusive. 'Mythology' here can also refer to narrative elements constructing a framework that explains certain events as to Barthes's (2009) understanding of myths as social truths. Bell and Bennion-Nixon (as cited in Parish & Parker 2001:134) refer to how series creator Chris Carter explicitly calls the conspiracy narrative of the series the "mythology". This term refers to the overarching narrative that unfolds as the series progresses (Parish & Parker 2001). The slowly unfolding alternative version of American history is positioned as increasingly authentic as the series progresses.

Similarly, *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) and *National Treasure* (2004) invite consideration of alternative narratives as conspiracy details are revealed.

These films disclose minimal amounts of information – or clues – at a time, only enough to maintain the narrative momentum of the dominant mythology while continuously pointing towards its possible invalidity. In disclosing important information at key points, *The X-Files* (1993-2002) manages to establish certain events that appear to be irrelevant at first, but that are later indicated (even vindicated) to be pivotal to the overarching conspiracy mythology. As it continues, the series reframes events from an alternative perspective that is different to what was presented to audiences earlier. Significantly, the content of the narrative in terms of its object language might remain more or less the same, while it is the meta-language that reveals or points to clues and possible 'truths' have remained invisible from the dominant until they are emphasised audio-visually.

Bell and Bennion-Nixon (as cited in Parish & Parker 2001:134) comments on the structure of the series:

> *The X-Files* has sustained a long-running and complex conspiracy theory within a conventional format, yet it also twists 'logical' storytelling structures by reworking old narrative threads [the mythology], going back over previous storylines and making unforeseen connections in the light of new discoveries.

The "conventional format" referred to above relates to the classical Hollywood narrative format, which describes the structure of a narrative as containing a hero who needs to attain certain goals and overcome certain obstacles (Campbell 2008). *The X-Files* (1993-2002) contains a fragmented yet overarching narrative that slowly unfolds as the series progresses. The above quote suggests that *The X-Files* (1993-2002) abandons the idea of a rigidly linear path by creating unforeseen events and reframing past events from different perspectives and positions, suggesting that the first (dominant) version presented is not the only one. The fragments of this storyline are gradually revealed through visual translation styles. Each fragment 'exposes' another aspect of the 'alternative truth'. At times, these alternative revelations are proven to be 'false' by the characters and are consequently viewed as irrelevant, but in later episodes they are connected to previous fragments –

often through a particular combination of editing and mise-en-scene – which suggests an elaborate subversive narrative.

In a conspiracy narrative, suspense is instigated first from the possibility that there is an alternative narrative to a more familiar, dominant narrative and second from the idea that the 'truth' or alternative narrative is postponed to only be revealed at a later, more climactic, stage. Throughout the conspiracy narrative, hints and clues are revealed as to what the repressed narrative might be, but these clues can be misleading. This systematic revealing of hidden elements is especially evident in *The X-Files* (1993-2002). The conspiracy narrative's aim is not to simply alter 'historical facts' but to play on and exploit the hidden nature of the alternative narrative and systematically expose it. When viewed in light of the classical Hollywood narrative style, it can also be seen as an attempt to suspend the engagement until the end of the narrative, which is a regular occurrence in the Hollywood narrative where the hero obtains his goal only at the end (Campbell 2008:205).

In addition to the conventions of structure and plot of the conspiracy narrative, there are conventions concerning the characters in these texts. According to Wildermuth (1999:12), *The X-Files* (1993-2002) might appear to present a complex conspiracy but the aim is also to focus on the characters and their quest. The characters' development allows them to obtain their personal goals and solutions to their problems, as is regularly seen in the classical Hollywood narrative wherein the protagonist needs to overcome obstacles to obtain the main goal. Commonly, the main protagonist has a personal goal to fulfil in films (Bordwell & Thompson 1990:1068) and this is also the way in which the protagonist is described in the hero's journey (Campbell 2008:41), which constitutes a basic pattern for numerous narrative possibilities (see Chapter Two: Reading the Conspiracy Film).

The Hollywood narrative makes use of the hero's journey (Bordwell 2006:34), as can be seen in *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) where Robert Langdon has a personal goal to not only solve the conspiracy but to also determine why Sophie Neveu's grandfather was murdered. In *The X-Files* (1993-2002),

Mulder is plagued by the childhood memory of his sister's disappearance, which he alleges was an alien abduction. Mulder's personal goal is to discover what happened to her. While investigating this case with Scully, he uncovers the conspiracy that is linked to his sister's disappearance. In his larger narrative quest is to uncover the conspiracy he might also reveal the details of his sister's disappearance. This is another convention of the conspiracy narrative: characters solving problems of a personal nature as a result of their investigation into a larger, collective conspiracy.

The antagonists in a conspiracy narrative also have personal motives for what they are doing. To reiterate, the conspiracy narrative shares many characteristics with detective fiction, and David Schmid (as cited in Chernaik *et al* 2000:80) quotes Julian Symons:

> …it was accepted that the motives for all crimes should be personal, and within that context rational. They should not be committed…by somebody merely insane. It was permissible that the people in a story should *think* that a crime was irrational…but the reader knew that there would always turn out to be a personal motive (author's italics).

The eventual divulgence of a personal motive links with the protagonist's aim to solve a personal goal. The idea of the antagonist's personal motives also applies to conspiracy narratives, as can be seen in *The X-Files* (1993-2002), there are personal reasons for the secret sect to keep the truth of the conspiracy hidden from the public. This idea of the personally motivated enemy figure might be viewed as a cliché in cinema, i.e. from numerous *Bond* movies, and having reached its zenith in the eponymous Hannibal Lecter (Demme & Bozman 1991); nonetheless, the easily identifiable human antagonist provides a human face to connotations of political or religious repression and hidden narratives.

Often the antagonists in conspiracy narratives have specific ideological affiliations. In *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), the antagonists' personal reasons are informed by a particular religious framework. In both *The X-Files* (1993-2002) and *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), secret groups are willing to commit

murder in order to maintain the surface validity and dominance of their (hegemonic) version of events (of the history of Western civilisation; of the historical Jesus). This indicates another convention of the conspiracy narrative: antagonists have personal reasons and motivations for being involved in the conspiracy plot, whether related to material gain or to political authority.

The protagonists in a conspiracy narrative need aids in order to reach their personal goals, as is the case in the hero's journey story structure. These aids can contribute to confirm the validity of characters' claims or 'truths'. One such aid is science. In *The X-Files* (1993-2002) science is important because it is measurable and possibly empirically verifiable, belonging to a framework of scientific realism. This realism, however, is not ultimate or absolute. Psillos (1999:xvii) problematises scientific realism by mentioning that there is an epistemic stance[5] that "regards mature and predicatively successful scientific theories as well-confirmed and approximately true of the world". The conspiracy narrative attempts to uncover 'truth', and so science is a vital piece of the fictional conspiracy's puzzle. It is problematic to assume that science, which is biased to favour that which is visible, can reveal (the) 'truth', especially in light of Baudrillard's comments on the nature of what is seen. Still, science plays a part in attempting to understand and find the alternative narratives in a conspiracy narrative. Part of the conspiracy to colonise the earth in *The X-Files* (1993-2002) is to combine human and alien DNA, creating alien-human hybrids to serve as a slave race when the final invasion takes place. The science involved in this process is obviously unheard of, and yet it is treated as possible as well as plausible. Science, then, which is generally seen as an objective practice especially in the quantitative sense, has the potential to contribute to the subversion of the dominant. Instead of disproving the apparently impossible or improbable, 'science' frames the impossible or improbable as potentially conforming to established laws of physics and chemistry.

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[5] Epistemology refers to knowledge about knowledge and the reliability and validity to claims of what is known (Pearson & Simpson 2001:219).

In conspiracy narratives characters are able to do incredible things with the help of science in order to uncover and validate alternative 'truths'. In the same way, the antagonists are able to do incredible things with science to keep the conspiracy hidden, as with the DNA hybridisation in *The X-Files* (1993-2002). The notion of science seems dominant in most conspiracy narratives in the sense of a tool for discovering and determining the 'truth', as is evident in *The X-Files* (1993-2002). Here, the characters are constantly challenged to compare the evidence, or science, to that which they believe in. Scully has trouble identifying with Mulder's conviction that there exists extraterrestrial life because it goes against her dominant scientific knowledge, which is framed as an objective paradigm that reveals the dynamics of all occurrences and events, including 'supernatural' ones. However, Mulder's theories are also supported by this science and so science becomes a tool that will either subvert or support dominant and existing narratives. In this way, science colludes with the metalanguage that sheds light on the possibility of an alternative approach to the object-language of Scully's scientific knowledge. There are also times when science cannot aid in explaining certain paranormal events in the series. In instances like this, science can (n)either support nor subvert, inviting aporic playfulness to promote uncertainty. This convention of science presenting subversive narratives, or supporting existing objective narratives, is common in the conspiracy narrative.

Science has become a dominant way of looking at the world; indeed, Irvine and Beattie (1998:32) mention that in a secular world science has replaced religious belief as the dominant knowledge paradigm. Western society finds its roots deep within the Judeo-Christian moral tradition (Johnson 1994:19). This moral tradition contains a set of shared values as well as assumptions about human nature, reason and action (Johnson 1994:19). These assumptions, mainly relating to issues of moral law (Johnson 1994:13), form part of the religious belief system and represents much of what is seen as available knowledge for the Judeo-Christian society. From the position of natural science, religious understandings of the world and how it works are often framed as invalid (Irvine & Beattie, 1998:32). The reasoning that science

is truth while religion equals illusion presents a reversion to binary oppositions; a problematic occurrence as the lines between illusion and truth become blurred and indistinct – 'truth' is already a simulation (Baudrillard, 1983b). It is then not viable to suggest that one element, in this instance science, is true and another element, in this instance religion, is an illusion, or vice versa. Truth and illusion are viewed as two sides of the same construct and so this opposition between truth and religion is problematic in a time that encourages shifts away from such limited, categorised thinking. Smith (2005:3) puts it thus: "[s]imulation is not an imitation or distortion of reality... [it] is the loss of the possibility of reality through the exorcism of illusion". The characters in *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) are faced with scientific evidence that threatens to destabilise their view of the world, which is based in and around notions of religious faith and belief. However problematic, the idea of often clearly defined belief versus evidence and of science versus faith is present in conspiracy narratives and can therefore be labelled as another convention. Conspiracy narratives suggest that these notions exist in opposition to one another.

This convention of science in opposition to belief suggests a reduction of complex power relationships and character relationships to binary opposites. Baudrillard (1983b:3) states that "the real is produced from miniaturised units, from matrices, [and] memory banks", and further states that with these, the 'real' "no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance". There is no objective reality against which to measure 'truth' or illusion, and so there is no absolute or ultimate instance that can justify science and belief as opposing concepts. They form part of the same hyperreality, the same fabrication that can be reproduced an indefinite number of times. Indeed, part of the criticism held against the conspiracy narrative is that they "seek to impose a modernist order through the demarcation of an identifiable 'other' acting against the interests of the self" in spite of the positioning of the conspiracy narrative as "blurring the ontological certainty of truth" (Jones 2008:42). Still, the conspiracy narrative does persist as a destabilising force in the sense that, as Jones (2008:42) acknowledges,

there remain the possibilities of further deception, betrayal and encompassing conspiracies.

The apparent paradox – that conspiracy narratives aiming to subvert dominant 'histories' promote unsophisticated notions of science and religion – makes sense when considering the narrative model of the typical conspiracy narrative as discussed here: the classical Hollywood model. Within the limitations of this narrative form, with its transparent and seamless manner of construction, there is little opportunity to investigate complex tensions between science and religion while explicitly adhering to the hero's journey[6]. Finally, for Baudrillard, history had become a "lost referential" where one's "understanding of history is increasingly divorced from the 'historical real'" (Coulter 2010:12) and the actual external reality of history has ostensibly disintegrated.

Both science and belief exist as simulations in a hyperreality, for there is no room in Baudrillard's hyperreality for such opposing notions that are fabrications (Baudrillard 1983b). This problematic opposition of belief versus truth suggests that the conspiracy narrative cannot be conclusive.

In light of the above, Pirie (1996) claims that a conspiracy narrative can never have a satisfying ending, where 'satisfying' implies the presentation of a clear, complete and comprehensive (re)solution to a film's central problem, or mystery. According to Pirie (1996:23), conspiracy thrillers, especially, are "virtually impossible to bring to any satisfactory conclusion". Pirie substantiates his point by referring to television series such as *The Prisoner* (1968) and films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978), which contain conspiracy elements and have endings that are either incomprehensible (in that many questions remain unanswered) or do not present an otherwise 'satisfying' conclusion (Pirie 1996:23). As Vogler (Bordwell 2006:34) sees it, a

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[6] Though it does not directly address conspiratorial thinking, Darren Aronofsky's *Pi* (Aronofsky & Watson 1998) manages a rare feat of investigating an intersection between science and religion. In telling its tale of paranoia, approaching madness and Jewish mysticism, the film, shot in stark black and white, is clearly experimental in its dense use of symbols and juxtaposing shots – a near direct opposite of classical Hollywood storytelling.

satisfactory ending is one that answers all questions posed by the narrative and that sees the protagonists achieving their initial goals, echoing the preferred ending of the hero's journey (Campbell 2008:205), where the hero finally obtains the elixir (goal) he set out to get. Yet, while many conspiracy narratives opt to have an open ending and promote uncertainty over resolution, there are some conspiracy narratives that even in its climax and aftermath conform to classical narrative storytelling.

National Treasure (2004), for example, saw the characters finding the treasure and solving the mysteries of the conspiracy. This ending may at first suggest that narrative questions have been answered, and while it may be true for the film in terms of content, even such a straightforward ending may suggest an undermining of, for example, governmental authority and demonstrate a distrust of those in state bureaucracy. *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) suggests an open ended conspiracy, yet in terms of the plot and story, all the loose narrative ends have been neatly tied together. By the end of *The X-Files* (1993-2002), the conspiracy is revealed and the alternative narratives are known; however, the earth is still going to be invaded by aliens and there are suggestions that there is still more to the conspiracy than meets the viewer's eye. The diegetic inevitability of the alien invasion is still viewed as a satisfactory ending, and conforms to the classical Hollywood narrative style.

Insofar as the characters reach a sense of closure by obtaining their personal goals as well as the greater narrative goals, the satisfactory ending is present in both the narrative arc and character arc. The protagonists have found the answers they were initially seeking: Mulder has closure on what happened to his sister; Ben Gates has found the treasure and restored his family name in honour; and Sophie Neveu has discovered the reasons behind her grandfather's death. In solving the main conspiracy, which relates to the mythology, the characters have solved their personal quests. Fenster (as cited in Parish & Parker 2001:138) mentions:

> The resolution returns that which had been either threatened or captured by the conspiracy…to a relatively secure, stable position free from the centralized power of the conspiracy, and it enables the protagonist to resolve whatever personal crisis

established his or her original motivations that led to or were caused by his or her finding the conspiracy.

Any facet that was put under threat by the conspiracy returns to a secure status once the conspiracy has been exposed and ended. It is important that this 'secure status' is often presented as a tentative one, and, like the dominant narrative, liable to be challenged.

In summary, Irvine and Beattie (1998:31) encapsulate the structure of a conspiracy narrative by invoking the three slogans of *The X-Files* (1993-2002), "I want to believe"; "The truth is out there"; and "Trust no one", all playing around the central notions of oppressive dominant grand narratives: certainty versus illusion or simulation versus truth, and often resulting in the subversion of state or governmental authority. A conspiracy narrative suggests the existence of alternative and often conflicting versions of 'truth'. The analysis of conventions in this section has provided more insight into the narrative dynamics of the conspiracy narrative. The next section will investigate the inclusion of history in conspiracy narratives. The 'historical facts' need to be incorporated and communicated through clever visual translation styles; these will be discussed in the sections to come.

3.3 History in conspiracy narratives

Historical representation in film is often criticised. Rosenstone (1995:26) quotes Jarvie:

> The moving image carries such a 'poor information load' and suffers from such 'discursive weakness' that there is no way to do meaningful history on film. History, he explains, does not consist primarily of 'a descriptive narrative of what actually happened.' It consists mostly of 'debates between historians…'

Jarvie seems to underestimate the potential of film to depict versions of historical events and betrays a rather limited view of what history entails; Jarvie (as cited in Rosenstone 1995:26) suggests that history cannot be completely portrayed on screen because of certain limitations and

'weaknesses' the medium contains, one of which is the linear narrative located in the classical Hollywood narrative. Jarvie (as cited in Rosenstone 1995:26) insists that history needs to be communicated by many individuals within the context of a discussion. If history is communicated through a single descriptive viewpoint, it risks being uninformed and even prejudiced.

In Spielberg's *Munich* (Spielberg & Kennedy 2005), an exploration of Israeli-Palestinian tensions masquerading as a historical drama, is presented as a single descriptive narrative to the audience. Ideologically and in terms of content, this narrative is told from only one point of view, sacrificing political nuance for the sake of a linear narrative. This helps to explain why historians might criticise the representation of history in film, as Jarvie (as cited in Rosenstone 1995) has done, for it does not present some 'accurate' account in full detail, which implies that history is distorted and flawed. 'Accuracy' is, of course, a problematic notion in a postmodern context, and the assumption that any narrative account of history could or should be 'accurate' is, at best, naïve. As a convention, the conspiracy narrative, possibly more so than historical dramas, attempts to show how 'history' is flawed by suggesting the existence of narratives that do not follow the same viewpoints that the familiar, dominant versions present.

Raack (as cited in Rosenstone 1995:25-26) argues that written history is "too linear and too narrow in focus to render the fullness of the complex, multi-dimensional world in which humans live". He mentions that only film, with its ability to juxtapose images and sounds can "possibly hope to approximate real life" and provide an adequate "empathetic reconstruction to convey how historical people witnessed, understood and lived their lives" (Rosenstone 1995:25-26). This is problematic in view of the fact that film cannot ever hope to approximate 'real life' – following Baudrillard, anything reproduced has no reference to anything outside of the reproduction itself and should be seen simply as the construction (simulation) it is. As Rosenstone (1995) here suggests, film can portray versions of histories from many different vantage points, thereby creating various reconstructions of 'historical events'. In other words, many films based on the same subject matter might be able to achieve

these reconstructions of history, but no one single film can achieve this on its own. As Baudrillard (1983b) would point out, there is no 'complete' or 'accurate' portrayal of history or facts; there is no manner in which to label a certain 'historical account' as 'unbiased', for these accounts are not based on anything other than a simulation brought on by their own reproduction. Historical accounts can therefore never be viewed as an 'unbiased truth'.

Jarvie's (as cited in Rosenstone 1995) suggestion is that history should be debated. This is where the conspiracy narrative's approach to film(ed) history differs from films such as *Munich* (2005). In *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), Langdon pays a visit to his old friend, Sir Teabing; a debate takes place between the two characters through the use of visual translation styles as each presents their knowledge and opinions on the hegemonic and subversive religious history concerning Jesus and Mary Magdalene while Sophie Neveu interjects with questions and comments of her own. In this scene, a single descriptive narrative is presented to the audience, but it is also debated and questioned. The narrative is still linear in the style of the classical Hollywood narrative, but by having characters express various viewpoints on history, the 'historical' account is not as linear. In addition to the oral debate, the film also shows us visual material that may support some point of the debate. The conspiracy narrative does not aim to portray history 'accurately' but as dense and multi-layered, a moment framed through various viewpoints. Where the linear classical Hollywood narrative might present in Baudrillard's view a single dominant 'lie' or illusion framed as 'truth', the conspiracy narrative presents multiple illusions that allow various interpretations, again evoking aporic interplay with the text and its meanings. The nature of aporia in the conspiracy narrative allows for multiple interpretations rather than just one linear narrative. The conspiracy narrative aims to suggest, as Baudrillard (1983b) does, that all 'truth' or 'history', regardless of time, genre or characters, are illusions and in essence do not aim to promote a linear dominant narrative. For this reason, it is senseless to criticise the conspiracy narrative for not 'accurately' portraying history.

The conspiracy narrative challenges dominant versions of history so as to construct at least one alternative version – one of many possible versions – of a given history. The use of historical facts in conspiracy narratives serve to support the subversion of dominant representations of history. In *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), Da Vinci's *Last Supper* is read as a subversive visual text. According to the film, Leonardo Da Vinci was part of a secret sect known as the Priory of Sion, an association that, according to the filmmakers' version of Western Catholic church history, was hiding a subversive narrative concerning Christ's bloodline. Da Vinci knew about this information and painted hidden clues into his portraits in order to convey this information, or at least, to hint at what this information might be. The film suggests that not only was the disciple sitting next to Jesus in the painting Mary Magdalene but also that there was a romantic connection between her and Jesus. The religious history concerning the life of Jesus is altered in the film in order to disrupt the dominant narrative of a chaste 'sinless' Christ and creates the possibility of a Jesus that is focused more on sexuality than salvation. These 'alternative versions' of history and historical figures contain anti-establishment and subversive qualities, and depict narratives that make statements contrary to the dominant version of events.

Conspiracy theorists believe that what they are being told by authority figures, such as the government, is all part of a 'hidden agenda' (Allen 1972:8). They believe many of the major world events that are shaping our destinies occur because somebody planned them that way. The conspiracy theory suggests that we are living in a world of 'false facts'. Irvine and Beattie (1998:32) point out the following concerning this matter:

> Put simply, the belief in conspiracy leads the theorist to (re)encode all signs as substantiating his/her own belief in that conspiracy. This interpretive, (re)conceptualisation process is an attempt by the theorists to divorce knowledge claims and knowledge production from those powers who would attempt to manipulate it and use it to deceive the greater public.

Just as conspiracy theorists refuse to accept dominant narratives that are presented in the public sphere by those in power, the conspiracy narrative

also challenges the notion that documented history is unbiased and inclusive of all versions of a given event. In *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), it is suggested that the Roman Catholic Church repressed the existence of a historically founded romantic narrative between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, hidden for centuries so that the dominant theological views on the nature of Christ are not challenged and the power and hegemony practised by the Catholic Church can remain intact. In the narrative, the Catholic Church is fearful of the knowledge becoming public. This links with Foucault's (1972:202) discussion of knowledge supported by fear: "we will not allow any taint to that history of thought that is our own history". When a collective's 'own' history, which is perceived to be hegemonic and not at all a false consciousness, is challenged by alternative anti-establishment views, they become defensive. When these alternative views appear to contain 'truth', they become afraid of this knowledge that is informed by certain 'facts'. The 'facts' in a conspiracy narrative are not only altered for the sake of creating an elaborate conspiracy; they are often altered or omitted for the sake of narrative and cinematic spectacle. In *National Treasure* (2004), Ben Gates needs to steal the Declaration of Independence in order to read the concealed treasure map on the back of the document. This undertaking serves as an exciting narrative spectacle, as attempts to obtain the artefact result in exciting and dangerous situations for the characters. In this way, the conspiracy narrative also serves as spectacle when it aims to put characters in one dangerous situation after the other. Visual translation styles are also used to construct this spectacle. The 'spectacle' element is therefore contained within the visual language of the medium.

As the character Deep Throat mentions in *The X-Files* (1993-2002): "A lie is most convincingly hidden between two truths". The conspiracy should be based on some version of 'truth' in order to infuse its events with even a modicum of plausibility. Although a conspiracy narrative reconstructs and reinterprets 'facts' to serve its narrative purpose, the essence of the dominant, hegemonic historical account still needs to be intact, or else the conspiracy may be rendered implausible. Ludovise (2004:1) criticises *National Treasure* (2004) because according to him "facts are not so much stitched together as

dropped". She mentions an example where Ben Gates visits a recognizable and historical American monument and the audience suddenly learns that a Freemason treasure was buried beneath the building and has not been discovered for 200 years (Ludovise 2004:1). This piece of fiction is not substantiated by or based on any dominant historical 'fact' and therefore the scene tends towards becoming implausible. Alternatively, and somewhat controversially, Ludovise (2004:1) has praise for Dan Brown (2003), author of *The Da Vinci Code*, because of his apparent historical authenticity:

> One of the reasons that Dan Brown's books ended up being so popular was because they were written as if the facts in them were true. Nobody really thinks that the next Pope is going to be an agent of the Illuminati, but there are enough real pieces of history woven in with the obvious fabrications to make everyone feel that they are being let in on some great secret of the past.

Even though the quote above speaks about the written texts of Dan Brown (2003), it can be applied to the film version of *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) as well. There are indeed differences between printed text and visual media, but the film remains an adaptation of the book and contains identical inclusions of 'facts' into fiction. This relates to the manner in which visual translation styles can include and incorporate historical facts into the fictional narratives by using visual techniques. Dan Brown (2003) weaves hegemonic 'historical facts' into alternative fictional narrative events in a manner which suggests that this version of the story is a viable challenge to the dominant, accepted version of the grand narrative. If the fictitious elements are supported by enough 'historical facts', the narrative will seem more like an elaborate conspiracy and less like an imagined fantasy[7], which Baudrillard (1983b) would find ironic as he views all elements of fact and fiction as an imagined fantasy, products of a simulated hyperreality wherein 'truth' is reproduced a multiple amount of times and thus becomes second hand. I do not find this

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[7] Wearring (2005:185) mentions that "Brown's claims are supported at the best of times by references to a parade of either pseudo-historical or else completely fictional works, and the majority of the time by nothing at all". However, a sentence later, Wearring (2005:185) goes on to say that "this is perhaps the most interesting thing to come out of *The Da Vinci Code* (not Brown's claims, which are in no way, shape, or form original) but instead the worldwide phenomenon it has spawned." The manipulation of 'historical facts' therefore serves as the conspiracy narrative's spectacle.

interweaving of alternative 'facts' problematic for it is part of what constitutes the conspiracy narrative's visual language and conventions. Ludovise's (2004) criticism of *National Treasure* (2004) suggests a hypothesis that even though the 'facts' in a conspiracy narrative are altered, they still need to be grounded in hegemonic political and ideological plausibility.

The way in which the 'historical facts' are distorted serves as a form of spectacle. As a result, a conspiracy narrative does not only rely on action sequences or suspenseful scenes to provide the spectacle but also on the ingenious way in which historical facts are narratively manipulated to form a plausible conspiracy. Melley (as cited in Taylor 2005:6) explains how conspiracy narratives "are part of the paradox in which a supposedly individualist culture conserves its individualism by continually imagining it to be in imminent peril", using spectacle within a larger framework of simulation in which such images of a given country or nation does not correspond to any actual external referent. As I will show, visual translation styles aid in portraying these manipulated historical facts in an engaging manner which enhances the spectacle. These manipulated facts serve as the narrative 'hooks', as discussed in Chapter One: Introduction. The manipulated 'facts' operate in a conspiracy narrative without the need to include car chase scenes or elaborate gun battles, although these scenes appear to be part of the conspiracy narrative iconography. A conspiracy narrative's way of incorporating and altering historical facts serves as narrative as well as cinematic spectacle, together suspending any notion of disbelief, making what happens not only possible but plausible with the help of visual translation styles.

In looking at the above, it becomes evident that when studying the incorporation of dominant historical 'facts' through visual translation styles into visual texts, the conspiracy narrative should be separated from other types of films that are also based on history. The conspiracy narrative attempts to draw audiences into a fictional world where alternative truths and histories exist. Even though hegemonic historical 'facts' are used, the way in which they are altered often frames them as fictional. Whereas certain film forms

such as the docudrama could be viewed as containing a combination of 'fact' and fiction (Rosenthal 1999), the conspiracy narrative should be seen as purely fiction. In the context of Baudrillard (1983b), all film, regardless of genre or type, is always fiction, a text without referent. There is no referent because 'truth' only refers to itself, to its own reproduction.

In looking at the above, it can be argued that the conspiracy narrative contains no balance between 'fact' and fiction and is in its entirety fiction. In Chapter One: Introduction, it was stated that a conspiracy narrative contains topicality. Most films are relevant to a particular culture or political context, but it would seem that the conspiracy narrative is dependant on it. Millikan (2004:1) points out the following: "[i]t is impossible to separate the genre from its cultural context; Vietnam, Watergate, a wave of political assassinations, and other national calamities created the aura of institutional distrust that the original conspiracy thrillers played on". Clearly, Millikan acknowledges the impact of socio-cultural contextual variables on film narratives. The same can be said for the conspiracy narrative, as its narratives are also rooted in the socio-political context of the time.

The X-Files (1993-2002) refers to numerous political events, such as Watergate, the Roswell crash and the Kennedy assassination. In one particular episode it is revealed that one of the show's antagonists, Cigarette Smoking Man, was the gunman who shot and killed John F. Kennedy. Lee Harvey Oswald, who is believed to be the original gunman (McAdams 2008:[sp]), is portrayed as a pawn in a greater scheme in which he had no authority. This particular episode not only alters the dominant 'historical facts' but it also places itself within a very specific political context. The assassinations that have taken place in America over time as well as political scandals including Watergate serve to create a milieu of paranoia and uncertainty that forms the breeding ground for potential conspiracies. The political context does not necessarily need to be included and referred to in the conspiracy film's narrative, as with *The X-Files* (1993-2002), but it does serve as the catalyst for conspiracy stories. Millikan (2004:1) mentions that if there is to be a sudden emergence of conspiracy thrillers, it could link to "the

growing feeling that the current imbroglio in Iraq is the result of official deception on the part of the Bush administration". It would not be unreasonable to assume that any conspiracy narratives that are made post 11 September 2001(9/11) are in some way grounded in the political distrust in the governing powers of the state, the upheaval that was caused by the events of that day and the political decisions made in its aftermath. As described by Holm (2009:40), the 9/11 attacks "created a social and political climate…in which…questionable commandeering of private sector information could be implemented by the United States government in order to gather information on its citizens", which can possibly further alienate civil society from figures and institutions of governance and authority. This speaks to Jameson's (1995:3) assertion that conspiracy narratives contribute to individuals' understandings of what "landscapes and forces confront us…whose abominations are heightened by their concealment and their bureaucratic impersonality".

Irvine and Beattie (1998:31) add to this by stating that conspiracy theories have emerged in popular culture as a means of "reconciling contradiction" and "making available knowledge/information by divorcing it from power structures that manipulate it". The political distrust in governing powers creates a platform for conspiracy theories and narratives that present alternatives to the dominant explanations presented by governing powers. In this way, the conspiracy narrative is grounded in real political frameworks, even though it is still fictitious. Referring to *JFK* (1991), Roger Ebert summarises the use of historical 'fact' in conspiracy narratives: "[t]his is not a film about the facts of the assassination, but about the feelings. *JFK* accurately reflects our state of mind since November 22nd, 1963. We feel the whole truth has not been told" (Millikan 2004:1). The "whole truth" refers to a repressed or alternative historical account that challenges the existing dominant one and in the end presents a more complete image of what had transpired. The "state of mind" refers to the political distrust and uncertainty that events such as JFK's assassination have generated in American society. Within the aporic playfulness of the conspiracy narrative, political history becomes especially

layered and it is left up to viewer to disentangle certain narrative threads and clues while connecting and reconnecting others at the same time.

In this section, the way in which 'historical fact' is incorporated into the conspiracy narrative was analysed and investigated, highlighting how alternative narratives can challenge the hegemonic account of 'history' or events in order to create an elaborate conspiracy. Oliver Stone's *Nixon* (Stone & Cinergi 1995) and *JFK* (1991) are additional examples of conspiracy narratives that reconstruct American political history. I also indicated how a conspiracy narrative is connected to and may be seen to comment on a specific political context.

Silverstein (2000:1) quotes Mel Gibson's character in *Conspiracy Theory* (Donner 1997): "A good conspiracy is an unprovable one." There is no substantial evidence for the claims made in *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) and even less evidence for the assertions in *The X-Files* (1993-2002), so these narratives can create fictional evidence that in turn refers to or constructs fictional 'truth'. Conspiracy narratives flirt with the fluidity of conflicting versions of events, often embellishing the alternative version to destabilise the dominant version(s). The sheer impossibility to prove the conspiracy is what allows the conspiracy narrative to incorporate 'historical facts' and modify them in order to serve the conspiracy. Because of these textual liberties, there is criticism aimed at the incorporation of 'historical facts' through visual translation styles in the conspiracy narrative, even though the terms 'fact' and 'fiction' are constructed in conspiracy narratives and there is no balance between the terms.

The notion of 'historical accuracy' in films is a moot point. The conspiracy narrative's aim is to include enough dominant hegemony to make it plausible, and beyond that the dominant accounts of history can be altered and omitted as is needed for the fictional conspiracy to exist. Rosenstone (1995:31) mentions the following concerning history: "On many historical topics, one can find short and long and longer works, for the amount of detail used in a historical argument is arbitrary, or is at least dependent upon the aims of

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one's project". The amount of detail expressed in the communication of any dominant historical account is variable, and so a decision can be made regarding which dominant 'facts' to include and which to omit. In this same way, the amount of 'historical facts' used in a conspiracy narrative is dependant on the aim of the narrative. With the use of the visual media, the conspiracy narrative can choose which dominant accounts it wishes to challenge.

3.4 Summary of conventions

In the previous sections, I analysed the conspiracy narrative with regard to its conventions and incorporation of dominant and alternative historical facts. I did this by investigating other genre conventions such as those of the detective film, and drew parallels with the conspiracy narratives I chose as references. My investigation into the use of hegemonic historical facts in the conspiracy narrative added to my understanding of the way in which these 'facts' can be portrayed and challenged through the use of visual translation styles, and this will be analysed in the next sections.

The key ideas I articulated in the previous sections are the conventions that are contained within the conspiracy narrative, the incorporation of dominant history and historical facts and the manner in which these historical facts are challenged and manipulated through visual translation styles in order to present alternative narratives or 'truths'. The key ideas were presented as follows:

- The conspiracy narrative is not given as much attention as other mainstream Hollywood narratives. This is as a result of the conspiracy narrative containing elements belonging to other genres, such as adventure films and thrillers, and conspiracy narratives are therefore labelled as these genres instead.
- The conspiracy narrative can be constructively compared to the detective film in terms of conventions and characteristics.

- The conspiracy narrative contains the disclosure of a shocking subversive 'truth' about the past that has been kept secret over a period of time.

- In the conspiracy narrative, characters impart their knowledge on dominant historical events in order to inform the audience or reader of the dominant version of a particular historical narrative so that the existence of a conflicted alternative of said narrative creates an effective shock. This imparting of knowledge framed within specific audio-visual techniques serves as the metalanguage that offers a deeper understanding of the object-language.

- The notion of aporia allows an open engagement with the conspiracy narrative and its meanings as conspiracy narratives allow audiences to interpret the texts according to their individual experiences.

- The conspiracy narrative deals with two parallel running narratives: one revealing the dominant historical account and conspiracy, and the other depicting the characters' journey to uncover the answers behind the conspiracy.

- The conspiracy narrative contains fragmentation of the exposure of the conspiracy in order to feed anticipation and deny expectation.

- The characters in the conspiracy narrative solve problems of a personal nature as a result of their investigation into a larger, collective conspiracy.

- The tension between belief and science is apparent in many conspiracy narratives. Since Baudrillard maintains that notions of science and belief or 'truth' and fabrication are often interchangeable simulations, no actual opposition can exist between these notions. Conspiracy narratives embellish this almost false tension to more clearly position what is viewed as dominant and alternative.

- The conspiracy narrative is inclusive of dominant historical accounts that are adapted and manipulated in order to create an alternative version of said historical accounts. This creates the fictional conspiracy, which regularly promotes the idea that the dominant version of events is equally fictional.

- The conspiracy narrative is grounded in social and political contexts.
- Regardless of the above, in a Baudrillardian sense the conspiracy narrative is in its entirety fiction, as clear operational differences between 'fact' and fiction are an illusion. This links with Baudrillard's notions of simulation and hyperreality, where the conspiracy narrative is no more an 'accurate' representation of 'reality' than Disneyland is; in the words of Baudrillard (2006:6): "the whole of life has been Disneyfied".

By discussing and investigating each of these key elements, I was able to form an outline of what the conventions of the conspiracy narrative entails. The conventions of the conspiracy narrative deal with the alteration of dominant hegemonic narratives and the suggestion of alternative narratives. This is done through introducing characters faced with evidence that forces them to question hegemonic narratives as well as their own belief systems. The exposure of the conspiracy presents resolution, but not necessarily definite conclusion.

Now that an outline of the conspiracy narrative and its conventions has been presented, I address the manner in which these conventions and alternative narratives can be communicated within the visual translation styles of the conspiracy narrative.

3.5 Introduction to visual translation styles

In the previous sections, I have outlined the various conventions in the conspiracy narrative by using *National Treasure* (2004), *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) and *The X-Files* (1993-2002) as case studies. I attempted to analyse the manner in which dominant versions of history are incorporated into the conspiracy narrative by examining the above mentioned conspiracy narratives as well as consulting various sources including Rosenstone (1995), Pirie (1996), Kelly (2007) and Campbell (2008).

The sections that follow aim to analyse the various visual translation styles that can be employed to best communicate or portray the incorporation of these hegemonic narratives as well as their subversive counterparts. Visual translation styles refer to the various cinematic techniques that can be employed to communicate an idea. These techniques can be linked to editing or the way in which a particular shot is framed. Cinematic communication is reliant on these techniques for they assist in relaying certain information to an audience, and the specific way in which visual translation styles are used determines the effectiveness of the communication in terms of the diegesis and mimesis of the narrative. Conceptually, visual translation techniques inform film language, which in turn informs film content, which points towards visual translation styles as operating within metalanguage.

Diegesis refers to the telling of a story by a narrator, whereas mimesis shows rather than tells (Fludernik 1993:27). Mimesis[8] can also refer to imitation, in that it can imitate the story that is being told through the diegesis (Fludernik 1993:27). The conspiracy narrative's visual translation styles often aims to combine elements from both diegesis and mimesis. In *National Treasure* (2004), Ben Gates's grandfather tells him the myth of the hidden treasure that the forefathers hid somewhere in the country. As his grandfather tells him the story, the audience piece together the narrative from the dialogue, but the narrative is also revealed through visuals depicting the secret location of the treasure being handed down to each passing generation. The dialogue serves to construct the diegesis in which the story is told, while the visuals serve as the mimesis that portrays and imitates the events being told. The visuals are produced through the use of visual translation styles, which either subvert or support the narrative offered by the dialogue. In this sense, visual translation styles create multiple narratives and offer various interpretations of the object-language as diegetic construction.

When the audience needs to be informed of certain dominant histories in order to better understand the background of the conspiracy narrative, the

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[8] The notion of mimesis here should not be confused with a strict interpretation of the Aristotelian use of the word.

characters relay information by telling the audience the dominant histories through dialogue. *National Treasure* (2004), *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) and *The X-Files* (1993-2002) all contain scenes with lengthy expository dialogue. In all three these narratives, the dialogue is used as a means to communicate hegemonic historical accounts. The characters have discussions with each other and through these discussions hegemonic histories are revealed, which in turn informs the audience. This is by no means an unconstructive approach. As Pirie (1996:23) argues in his discussion of dialogue in *The X-Files* (1993-2002): "[l]ong verbal exposition is usually a tired device to give the audience off-screen plot or back-story, but its vital function here is to detail authentic paranormal case histories which (like the captions) *give the show its much-needed grounding in reality* (my italics)". When dialogue is embedded with 'historical facts', it aids to place the scene within a realistic framework. The characters are referring to narratives that pertain to 'actual' historical events. Nonetheless, the conspiracy narrative still runs the risk of containing lengthy scenes consisting of nothing more than expositional dialogue. The solution for this problem is to portray these scenes through compelling visual translation styles, thereby avoiding an over reliance on expository dialogue.

Conspiracy narratives may also choose to portray the dominant historical account by visually depicting the account instead of having the characters discuss it. This method was used in an episode of *The X-Files* (1993-2002) where the character of the Cigarette Smoking Man was asked to assassinate JFK. The Lone Gunmen, a group of paranoid conspiracy theorists, are talking to Mulder and Scully about the Cigarette Smoking Man and are revealing the 'facts' about his involvement in the Kennedy assassination through dialogue. The episode then inter-cuts with scenes from the past depicting the exact event the Gunmen are speaking about. Here, dialogue is replaced with action as a means to communicate the alternative historical account. This technique of intercutting between past and present serves to emphasise how editing can be used to challenge dominant ideas about history and historical events by showing a key historical moment as a construction, not a 'truth'.

In order for Ben Gates to decipher the clues he discovers in *National Treasure* (2004), the characters need to refer back to important moments in American history: relevant parts of American history are communicated to the audience through the dialogue scenes. *The X-Files* (1993-2002) makes use of the same method to communicate the dominant history. As in the previous examples, these 'facts' are revealed through conversations between Mulder and Scully. When discussing case histories, Scully reveals the '*actual* historical facts' or dominant history, while Mulder counters her arguments by revealing the '*altered* historical facts' or alternative history.

In all three the above mentioned films, the hegemonic historical accounts are revealed to various degrees by means of conversations between characters and lengthy dialogue scenes. This is the method used to equip the audience with the knowledge they need in order to fully understand and appreciate the fictional conspiracy.

As mentioned before, this method, although effective when attempting to communicate the dominant historical accounts, can potentially become monotonous. Shot selection and shot size as well as editing techniques communicate the 'historical facts' in a visually dynamic manner. These are the building blocks of visual translation styles and will be discussed and theorised at length in the sections to follow. Shot sizes or spatial proximities can determine the importance of a specific line of dialogue. For example, a close-up of a character adds more weight to what s/he is saying as opposed to a medium shot. These techniques need to effectively communicate the dominant and subversive historical accounts in the conspiracy narrative. The documentary film is one particular film type that aims to communicate historical notions and 'facts'.

A conspiracy narrative may borrow from visual translation styles utilised in some documentary films in order to communicate the dominant historical accounts and aid in keeping the audience engaged in the lengthy dialogue scenes. Dancyger (2002:53) mentions the following concerning documentary editing techniques:

> Because the documentary film was less influenced by market forces than commercial film was and because the filmmakers attracted to the documentary had different goals from commercial filmmakers, often goals with social or political agendas, the techniques they used often displayed a power not seen in the commercial film. Subsidized by government, these filmmakers blended artistic experimentation with political commitment, and their innovations in the documentary broadened the repertoire of editing choices for all filmmakers.

It would seem that the editing styles of the conspiracy narrative can be influenced by documentary editing. According to Dancyger (2002:69), commercial films as well as television have been influenced by the visual translation styles of the documentary:

> Perhaps more than any other genre, the documentary has been successful in communicating ideas. The interplay of image and sound by filmmakers such as Riefenstahl, Capra, and Jennings has been remarkably effective and has greatly enhanced the filmmaker's repertoire of editing choices. These devices have found their way back into the fictional film, as evidenced in the work of neorealist filmmakers and the early American television directors whose feature film work has been marked by a pronounced documentary influence.

There are a few highly contentious ideas in this quote, for example, Riefenstahl and Capra both had unique and varied styles of filmmaking. Riefenstahl partly created propagandist films, while Capra promoted an idealised America. It is also problematic to assume that the documentary is the only type of film that developed revolutionary new editing choices and techniques. Nonetheless, Dancyger (2002) suggests that film and television have evidence of documentary influence in their visual translation styles. The conspiracy narrative can also contain many influences from documentaries, especially concerning scenes containing lengthy exchanges of dialogue, and it can make use of experimentation in its visual translation styles in the same way as *Diary for Timothy* (Jennings 1945 as cited in Dancyger 2002:68-69). This would make sense, as the documentary is edited in such a way so as to communicate hegemonic 'facts' and perspectives in the best possible manner, as can be seen in the film *Diary for Timothy* (1945). Humphrey Jennings's

Diary for Timothy (1945) is a film about a baby born in 1944. This film does not focus on one event, place or person. Instead it roams visually, alternating between various different images. The baby at different ages is constantly the visual reference point. This film also contains narration addressed to Timothy that does not aim to form the plot but rather to shape a series of ideas concerning the world in which Timothy is growing up in (Dancyger 2002:68-69). Jennings made use of alternating visuals and narration in order to communicate the 'facts' and ideas.

In the 1960s and 1970s, conspiracy narratives not only based their visual translation styles on documentaries but also on television (Dancyger 2002:148). According to Dancyger (2002:148), television had a sense of immediacy that film lacked. This sense of immediacy was supported by the broadcasting of live news events being reported as they unfolded as well as live talk shows (Dancyger 2002:148). Feature films were influenced by television and attempted to capture the realistic feel of the television actuality programmes by using similar visual translation styles in order to gain greater audience appeal. The documentary style had an influence on the conspiracy narrative as early as John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962). This documentary style involves jump-cut editing, an editing technique especially foregrounded in French new wave cinema: it breaks the continuity of time by jumping from one part of the action to another and gives the film a sense of realism (Dancyger 2002:149) while simultaneously calling attention to the film as constructed artefact. Dancyger (2002) is vague in his explanation of 'realism', but seems to allude to the notion that this specific visual translation style gives the conspiracy narrative a more 'documented' feel and therefore aids in making the fictional aspects seem more 'factual'.

In conspiracy narratives, this approach also aids in grounding the plot in a 'reality'. As mentioned before, the dialogue containing hegemonic histories or alternative historical narratives gives the conspiracy narrative a sense of 'realism', and in the same way, the visual translation style can aid in creating a 'real' milieu. This is important, especially seeing as the conspiracy narrative aims to sell its alternative historical narratives as the dominant 'truth'.

Therefore, a very useful visual translation style to use when communicating hegemonic 'facts' would be the documentary style. This style includes jump cutting and a mix of cinema verité, which combines "naturalistic techniques" with "stylized cinematic techniques" of editing, camera shots and staged set-ups (Dancyger 2002:149). This type of visual translation style is used at times in *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), where shots are often dissolved into one another in order to portray the "naturalistic" or traditional elements of a scene, which is the object-language containing the characters' discussions of the hegemonic historical account, and the "stylized" elements of the scene, which consist of visuals portraying the alternative subversive account of the 'facts'. These different shots and editing styles aid in communicating the alternative versions of the narrative. Fairservice (2001:263-264) mentions the following:

> …it is not only the performances, it is also text, not just the meaning that each actor invests into the scene, but the *content* of the line which suggests what we should see when it is being said. The content is *both* the text and the way it is delivered and the emphasis and meaning will alter depending on what we are shown as we hear it (Author's italics).

The visual translation styles used when depicting a scene containing dialogue can support or subvert what is being said. The meaning and content of any given line of dialogue is important to the narrative, but the shot choices and editing techniques used to portray the lines of dialogue will contribute to the extent to which the audience reads the meta- and the object-language of the scene, the former informing the reading of latter.

In the following section, I will analyse specific camera shots and editing techniques that can be employed to enhance the incorporation of dominant and alternative narratives within lengthy dialogue scenes. It should also be emphasised that audio is included in my discussion of visual translation styles. Sound and music plays an important part when choosing methods to communicate ideas in the conspiracy narrative. An audio cue can inform the reading of the object-language as much as a camera shot can. For example, a change in music can alert the audience that something important is being

said and so audio is also viewed as a translation style in the sections that follow.

3.6 Camera shots and editing techniques as visual translation styles

Transitions between scenes are made more visually appealing by using editing techniques and enable films to 'jump' from one time and place to another without disrupting the narrative (Reisz & Millar 1968:15). Filmmakers such as D.W. Griffith discovered ways to use constructive editing to strengthen the narrative of the film – Griffith pioneered what would later become known as the classical Hollywood narrative – experimenting with techniques such as cross-cutting, flashbacks and dissolves (Reisz & Millar 1968:26-27). Russian formalist Sergei Eisenstein used intellectual montage to signify time lapses between shots without any explanation (Reisz & Millar 1968:36). Most of these earlier techniques inform the visual language of both mainstream and independent films.

In terms of narrative, the classical Hollywood film is fictional but set to resemble, in some way, the external world outside of the diegesis. It introduces a problem early in the narrative and as the story progresses the characters logically work through the problem. The end of the narrative sees the solution to the problem (Hammitt 2006:[sp]). The editing and camera shots in the classical Hollywood narrative follow a pattern where the main focus is continuity. All cuts, camera shots and angles are used to introduce the audience to the scene and characters and to follow them through their development (Hammitt 2006:[sp]). This narrative formula is also apparent in the hero's journey (Campbell 2008); this is the formula I will be using in the following section as the films I selected as case studies contain this formula with regards to the characters' journeys within the conspiracy narrative.

I will first analyse the various ways in which dialogue can be edited, as described by Fairservice (2001) and other sources, in order to communicate the hegemonic 'historical facts' in the most effective manner possible. The techniques I will be looking at are the following:

- Cutting within delivery of dialogue to accomplish shifts in pace and amplification of hegemonic 'facts';
- Using various camera angles to suggest important dominant or subversive narratives;
- Camera movement within shots to amplify shifts in the narrative or character development; and
- Cutting with the rhythm of speech to create an effective visual portrayal of subversive narratives within the dialogue.

I will then analyse various cinematic techniques that can be employed to aid in the destabilisation of dominant narratives. The aim is also for these techniques to aid in communicating dominant historical accounts in a stimulating way. The techniques, explained by Fairservice (2001) and other sources, include the following:

- Slow motion
- Fast motion
- Displaced sound
- Flashbacks
- Fragmentations and full stops
- Jump cuts

These techniques will be investigated in the sections that follow. I am investigating the above mentioned techniques as opposed to other models such as colour correction or computer generated content, because these are the most prevalent techniques in the conspiracy narratives that constitute my case studies with regard to the communication of dominant and subversive narratives. The techniques selected are also, in my opinion, most common to the visual language of the classical Hollywood film. After all, the purpose of this chapter is not to invent or study new cinematic techniques but to investigate the ways in which familiar cinematic techniques can be employed to communicate hegemonic historical narratives in a conspiracy narrative.

For the sections which follow, I will be referencing Dancyger (2002) and Fairservice (2001), amongst others. Their explanations of the various cinematic techniques are comprehensive and the notions put forward by other authors such as Reisz and Millar (1968) are akin to Dancyger (2002) and Fairservice (2001).

3.6.1 *Changing the pace by cutting in dialogue*

In a scene where two characters are exchanging dialogue, the classical Hollywood narrative's logical approach would be to cut after each spoken line of dialogue. After a character has spoken his line of dialogue, the interest switches to the listener to show the listener's reaction (Fairservice 2001:266-267). Monaco (2000:217) refers to this Hollywood technique of editing as "invisible cutting" because the cuts should not be noticeable and therefore not subversive. This approach would need to be adapted in order to promote dramatic tension and shifts in pace. The tension or dramatic development needs to increase in order to amplify the communication of dominant or subversive narratives within the dialogue; otherwise the characters are only casually talking with no change in the pace of the cinematic rhythm.

Fairservice (2001) has a different approach for when a particular scene contains more urgency: if the characters in the scene become involved in a heated debate, as in the discussion of Da Vinci's Last Supper painting in *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), the rhythm and speed at which they speak can vary. The shot will cut to the listener while the other character is still speaking in order to capture a few seconds of the listener's reaction. The listener would then respond in the same shot (Fairservice 2001:267). This technique is not dependent on the content of the dialogue but rather on the force and urgency with which the dialogue is delivered by the character:

> Cutting ahead at the end of a line is more a measure of the force
> with which it is delivered and the nature of the reaction rather
> than the content of the line itself. In some instances this
> technique, of regularly making the picture cut a few frames

before the end of an actor's line, has tended to be adopted as a quick and easy way of artificially injecting pace into an otherwise slackly performed scene… (Fairservice 2001:267)

The object-language in the scene – the characters engaging in dialogue – is given more meaning through the metalanguage of the early cutting technique. This premature cut presents the reactions of the characters, which serve as the metalanguage, suggesting an alternative viewpoint on the object-language of the dialogue. This technique can aid in making the communication of hegemonic historical accounts in the conspiracy narrative less monotonous. When two characters are delivering dialogue containing 'historical facts', the scene could be cut away before the end of the line of dialogue; this will raise the pace, create tension and also serves to hook the viewer into the narrative. The 'historical facts' will be communicated more effectively if the pace in a scene changes. In *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), Robert Langdon is brought to the Louvre museum to aid in decoding signs left by the murdered curator. During this scene, the pace increases as Langdon explains what the signs might mean. The shots cut to Neveu before he has finished speaking, and the audience is able to see her shocked reactions to what Langdon is saying and this increases the urgency of the scene and makes it more tense and suspenseful. This is due to the increase in pace by cutting away from Langdon before he has finished his line of dialogue. In this demonstration of film's ability to manipulate, the 'facts' are communicated in an effective, mainstream-friendly way.

This method of cutting within the dialogue can also aid in manipulating a scene to be subversive of what was actually shot. For example, Anderson (1999:16) mentions that editing can be employed in order to either lengthen or shorten a scene to aid with pace. He talks about a scene he has edited wherein a short kiss was cut in such a manner as to make it appear longer (Anderson 1999:16). In this way, the editing techniques clearly functions to manipulate footage into a specific representation seen on screen. Baudrillard's notion of simulation and reproduction also comes into play as the 'truth' which was shot is altered or reproduced into yet another version or 'truth' by using editing techniques to either lengthen or shorten a scene in

order to give it new meaning. The visual translation styles are adapting the 'truth' so to speak, and this can also be utilized in the conspiracy narrative. By lengthening a reaction shot through editing, the audience is presented with information that exposes additional communication and therefore reveals either supportive or subversive details. Through editing and visual translation styles, the metalanguage is revealed by allowing the audience to see a character's reaction when hearing a 'fact'. This reaction shot reveals the character's thoughts or shock and it exposes the ramifications of the 'fact'. The reaction shot is a classical narrative convention that suggests mainly emotional (irrational) reactions that the viewer is meant to mirror. I provide greater detail regarding this idea later.

3.6.2 Covering the scene with various angles and shot movements

In addition to quick cutting to increase pace, the way in which a scene is shot can also aid in creating more tension or engagement. Fairservice (2001:269) mentions how "[m]ost dialogue scenes in films seldom consist of repetitive alternations of close shots; depending on the directorial style, a scene will be covered, wholly and in part, by a wide range of framings, actors' movements, [and] camera movements". By covering the scene with various shot angles and shot framings, there are more cutting options available. When the shots alternate between angles, the pace can also be increased. For example, if one character were to be filmed in a neutral angled medium close-up, the importance of his dialogue will not weigh as much as if he were shot in a low angled close-up. Alternating between shot sizes and angles can therefore increase dialogue importance as well as performance urgency. Nelmes (2003:71) describes how early cinema would place the camera to film a static wide shot in order to incorporate all the action, a technique heavily influenced by theatre. However, filmmakers realised that by changing the shot sizes, shot angles and even by adding movement, they could add various different perspectives to a particular scene (Nelmes 2003:71). It is this variety of perspectives that is important when it comes to shot sizes in a conspiracy narrative. By changing the size of a shot and presenting an alternative perspective, emphasis can be placed on the communication of dominant or

subversive historical narratives within any given scene. There is no one particular shot size or shot angle that can be viewed as more 'truthful' than the next, but these various shot sizes do present alternatives and allow an audience to receive different viewpoints of a particular scene.

Figure 1.1
Medium shot of Mulder from *The X-Files* (1993-2002)
(Downloaded from http://www.xfroadrunners. com/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=114&pag e=4)

Figure 1.2
Medium close-up of Mulder from the same scene as figure 1.1
(Downloaded from http://www.xfroadrunners. com/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=114&pag e=4)

The two images above (Figures 1.1 and 1.2) are taken from *The X-Files* (1993-2002) and demonstrate alternating shot sizes of the same scene. Both shots attempt to focus on Mulder, but the second shot is closer and therefore adds more importance to what he is saying (and his reaction to other figures in the frame) while maintaining continuity according to mainstream editing.

Nelmes (2003:71) adds to this technique by stating that a close-up can allow the audience to know a character intimately and to interpret their thoughts and feelings, thus the notion of aporia is present. The close-up serves as the metalanguage, which allows closer, more intimate as well as possible subversive details about the character, who functions as part of the object-language.

If a shot of an actor slowly tracks in to his face, the attention is drawn to the character and is focused on him and what he is saying. As mentioned in

Chapter Two: Reading the Conspiracy Film, object–language is the core language while metalanguage refers to the object-language, providing it with additional meanings beyond the content (Lucy 1993:12). The shot of the character is the object-language, but the moment the shot slowly starts to zoom into the character's face, the metalanguage is communicating a meaning or even a thought process that would have been missing if the shot remained static. By selecting a shot that allows the character's face to fill the frame, the attention is focused solely on the apparent importance of the dialogue. The shot size is the metalanguage signalling to the audience that the object-language contains vital information. The camera angles and movements are therefore very functional when attempting to communicate dominant and alternative historical 'facts' effectively.

The reason I am focusing on dialogue at this point is because most of the dominant historical accounts in my case studies are communicated to the audience through characters' dialogue scenes. The way in which these dialogue scenes are shot will help to determine the effectiveness of the communication of the historical accounts.

3.6.3 Cutting with the rhythm of speech

As mentioned before, when two people are having a conversation in a scene, the palpable way to edit it would be to cut after each line of dialogue. The cuts therefore follow the rhythm of the speech. This is a common and comfortable visual translation style from the classical Hollywood narrative which has shaped expectations (Fairservice 2001:274). By purposely choosing cutting points that sit uncomfortable with the dialogue rhythms, the scene becomes unsettled. This aids in injecting tension into a potentially mundane moment. Selecting cutting points that intersect dialogue unpredictably when one character is speaking and not the other "provides a way to affect the balance of the scene and reflect the tensions built into the performances" (Fairservice 2001:274).

I agree that the technique of cutting a scene to disrupt the dialogue is effective when aiming for a disconcerting feel. When doing this in a conspiracy narrative, an unexpected technique is being exposed, and can cause uncertainty while the historical 'facts' are being communicated. In this way, the editing style promotes aporia by creating an uncertainty amongst audiences regarding the unexpected and seemingly irrational cuts. Monaco (2000:218) recounts how Jean-Luc Godard would startle audiences by cutting mid-shot, a very disconcerting technique. Editing plays a very important role when communicating ideas or 'facts' in any film, but it is especially imperative when used in conspiracy narratives. As previously stated, a director may choose certain shot sizes or angles to highlight important lines of dialogue. If a character mentions something necessary for the advancement of the plot, a close-up of that character could be implemented in order to emphasize what is being said. The director could cover one particular scene with various shot sizes and angles, and it is then up to the editor to choose which shots will best communicate the ideas or 'facts' that the audience needs to know (Dancyger 2002:276). The change in editing can alert the audience to important information in the dialogue, in that "dialogue that is important for advancing the plot requires a close-up or some shift in the pattern of shots to alert us that what we are hearing is more important than what we've heard earlier in the sequence" (Dancyger 2002:276).

There is an example of this editing shift in *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), in a scene where Langdon and Teabing discuss the dominant historical notions surrounding the Holy Grail: the shots are medium close-ups and the pace of the editing is neutral but once Teabing starts to reveal the alternative fictional historical narrative concerning Leonardo Da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper, the shot sizes change in order to signal to the audience that important information is being communicated. The shots are now close-ups of Langdon and Teabing, as well as of Neveu who is intrigued by what they are discussing. The pace of the editing also changes and the cuts occur quicker to heighten the tension and importance of the 'hidden historical facts'. Even the editing pattern alters into one that not only cuts between the characters but now also includes shots of Da Vinci's painting to further amplify the

magnitude of the discussion taking place. These shifts in shots and shot sizes can be viewed as the metalanguage; the object-language in the scene is the discussion by the characters concerning the dominant historical account. The close-ups of Da Vinci's painting serves as the metalanguage and attempts to provide the audience with the layered meaning of the painting, that which is not being revealed by the dialogue and object-language.

This technique of shifting editing patterns can also be used to prepare the audience for an important 'fact' that is approaching in the scene. Instead of changing the editing pattern and shot sizes while the 'facts' are being communicated, the altering can occur in order to foreshadow the 'facts'. In an episode of *The X-Files* (1993-2002), Mulder is accused of murdering a man who was working for the Department of Defence. While appearing in front of an FBI panel, Mulder reveals the name of a mole working inside the FBI who has orchestrated everything that occurred in the episode. Before Mulder reveals the name, he first explains what this person has done. The sequence contains wide shots as well as medium close-ups. The shots alternate between Mulder and the Section Chief of the FBI. As Mulder recounts the events of the past few days, the shots become tighter and the editing pattern shifts to include shots of the Assistant Director, Skinner, who fears being named as the mole. This can be seen in the figures below.

Figure 2.1
Medium shot of Mulder
(Downloaded from http://www.xfroadrunners.com
/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=122&page=14)

Figure 2.2
Medium close-up of Mulder
(Downloaded from http://www.xfroadrunners.com
/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=122&page=14)

Figure 2.3

Close-up of Skinner

(Downloaded from http://www.xfroadrunners.com
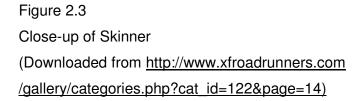/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=122&page=14)

Figure 2.4

Close-up of Mulder

(Downloaded from http://www.xfroadrunners.com
/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=122&page=14)

This alteration and development of shot sizes helps build the tension, and the change in editing pattern indicates that the 'truth' is about to be revealed: Mulder is leading up to the reveal of the mole's name. The object-language is communicating the crimes of this individual while the metalanguage, aided by the shift in shot sizes and editing, is signalling the imminence of an important revelation. Aporia is also present here, as this development in shot sizes and editing pace also aids in creating uncertainty as to who is going to be named as the mole. Mulder then names the Section Chief as the mole and the editor cuts to an extreme close-up of the Section Chief, revealing his reaction and conforming to the classical Hollywood emphasis on the reaction shot to guide viewers' reactions. Thereafter, the editing pace again becomes 'neutral'. In this way, the editing techniques foreshadowed the 'facts' to come, whereas in *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), the technique was being used *while* the 'facts' were communicated. Both methods are effective and successful in communicating the alternative 'facts'.

Besides the visual translation styles above, there are also stylistic cinematic techniques that can be employed as visual translation styles to aid in the communication of dominant historical narratives. These will be discussed next.

3.6.4 Slow motion

Slow motion is most commonly used to expand moments of death, violence or impending doom (Fairservice 2001:304). An example of this effect can be found in *Armageddon* (Bay & Bruckheimer 1998), where the heroes walk towards the spaceship launch pad in slow motion. This effect consists of shooting a shot with a higher frame-rate in order to gain a deliberately slowed down version of the action. In its essence, slow motion aids in adding emphasis to a shot containing this effect (Fairservice 2001:304). Monaco (2000:95) describes slow motion as being a useful tool to enhance a climax. Spottiswoode (1969:163) mentions that certain events in a narrative can take place too fast and are gone before they can be comprehended. In this sense, slow motion allows events to be literally slowed down and examined. This links with Baudrillard's (as cited in Malpas 2005:94) commentary on postmodernism wherein he states that events occur too quickly for sense to be made out of them. In order to examine events or situations to receive the full communication those events offer, a degree of slowness is required, and this is what slow motion literally attempts to achieve in a film. In addition, the artificial, 'unnatural' level of slowness seen onscreen calls attention to the constructed nature of the film, which further exposes it as a simulation, a hyperreal text, that further demonstrates the fallibility of dominant narratives. Where slow motion is used in a particular scene, that scene with its definite visual emphasis will carry more narrative weight and the contents thereof may in turn be suggested as 'more correct' or 'more true' than what has previously been suggested or presented.

A character who discovers an important 'fact' or who reveals vital subversive information in a conspiracy narrative can be shot in slow motion to amplify the information. In the above mentioned example of *The X-Files* (1993-2002), after Mulder has named the Section Chief as the mole, he turns to look at the Assistant Director. The shot of him doing this is in slow motion and amplifies what he has just revealed. It also places major importance on the revelation that the Section Chief was the mole. The object-language is communicating that the Section Chief was the mole, but the metalanguage, in the form of

slow motion, communicates aspects such as the notion that Mulder has possibly known this 'fact' for a long time as well as the disclosure that he has willingly protected Skinner by deciding to name the Section Chief. Without the metalanguage, which is the slow motion effect in this case, the audience is presented with a static shot of Mulder revealing the mole and no 'hidden' or additional subversive information is revealed.

3.6.5   Fast motion

Speeded-up shots were commonly used during the silent period to convey comedy or humorous instances (Fairservice 2001:305). Giannetti (1987:106) mentions that directors employ fast motion for comic effects; additionally, it was used to convey films as a construct that presented a distillation of reality (Fairservice 2001:305), a simulation within a hyperreality. This effect can also be viewed as a method to create distortions within a scene. Giannetti (1987:106) mentions that dignity is difficult in fast motion, for "acceleration robs us of our humanity". These notions concerning fast motion contribute to the technique's ability to disconcert and distort a scene or characters within a scene.

Fast motion was used to great effect in *Saw* (Wan & Burg 2004) in order to enhance the uneasiness and grimness of the narrative. It also "robbed the characters of their dignity" because the fast motion does not allow an audience to connect with the characters and there are therefore no sympathetic feelings towards the characters or their humanity. As with slow motion, when a shot is sped up, it places emphasis on what is happening in the shot. This method can also be used to amplify the communication of historical narratives in a particular scene. In *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), Robert Langdon discusses the alternative historical narrative concerning the Roman Catholic Church's attempts to edit the Scriptures. As he discusses this narrative, a sped-up visual presentation of the account is presented. The sudden speed in the shot communicates the discomfort and unease that is present in the scene and also emphasises that the account is an important and 'overlooked' or 'secret' one. The metalanguage informs the audience that

there is something dubious in the scene not being revealed in the object-language. Furthermore, as Giannetti (1987:106) states, the dignity of the characters in the historical visual portrayal is put into question by employing fast motion as a visual translation style. Aporia is once again present as uncertainty regarding the characters' motives is prevalent and the film's ideological allegiance uncertain.

3.6.6 Displaced sound

This method consists of using odd sounds or dialogue displaced from its synchronous source. An example of this is when films make use of a character's spoken voice-over as a means of commenting on or advancing the plot of the narrative (Fairservice 2001:305). This method can also be employed to amplify and emphasise the communication of dominant and alternative historical accounts in a conspiracy narrative. The displacement of sound is often used in *The X-Files* (1993-2002). There are moments during the series when a sound effect is used that does not necessarily fit into the scene: incoherent sounds emphasising what is taking place in the scene. There is a character in the show known as the Alien Bounty Hunter, who polices the colonization plans on earth. He carries a type of knife with him that he uses as a weapon against anyone who opposes him. Each time he uses this knife a specific sound effect plays and comes to be associated directly with the Alien Bounty Hunter. The term leitmotif is applicable at this point. Leitmotif is the term given to a musical element containing a significant external meaning (Cupers & Weisstein 2000:127). It is a recurring theme and this musical element is associated with the theme. Each time the musical element is heard, the theme is signified and this is the case with the Alien Bounty Hunter's sound effect in *The X-Files* (1993-2002). During dialogue scenes, where Mulder and Scully might discuss alternative historical 'facts' pertaining to the fictional conspiracy, this specific sound effect will play when they mention an important 'fact'. The sound makes the audience associate what is being said with the Bounty Hunter, and therefore they know that the 'facts' being communicated at that moment are connected with the overarching conspiracy.

3.6.7 Flashbacks

Typically, the flashback is an image or a segment of film used to portray an occurrence that took place at an earlier time in the narrative. It is a technique which asks the audience to step out of the developing plot in order to interpret it (Fairservice 2001:306). Metalanguage provides a narrative within a narrative (Hayward 2000:227), and this is exactly what the flashback does, providing an additional 'past' narrative within the present one, which can either support or subvert the dominant 'present' version of events. The flashback method can create a visual portrayal of the dominant historical narrative as well as of the alternative narrative, which is being communicated in a conspiracy narrative. It can be used as a substitute for lengthy dialogue scenes. In my case studies, the flashback is used in conjunction with the dialogue scenes. If a character is informing another character of dominant historical narratives in a conspiracy narrative, the scene could cut to a flashback depicting the historical account they are discussing.

The Da Vinci Code (2006) often employs this technique as a way of communicating the hegemonic historical accounts. Teabing informs Langdon and Neveu of the Roman Catholic Church's meetings to discuss which historical accounts should be included in the Bible, indicating that the written word cannot be viewed as a dominant version of history for it is subjective writing by individuals with specific goals and cultural motivations. As Langdon discusses this particular 'historical account', the scene dissolves into a flashback depicting the meetings. The audience sees the various Church Leaders as they engage in heated arguments and discussions. This flashback portrays what occurred in the past and it also equips the audience with the knowledge they need to interpret and understand the fictional conspiracy. In a way, the flashback serves as a simulation of the hegemonic historical account and places the account within Baudrillard's hyperreality wherein all narratives are fabrications and simulations. Additionally, the flashback can be seen as a mental or cognitive simulation (*not* a memory, since none of the characters were present at this discussion) made visible in the film.

In addition to this visual portrayal, the flashback can also be employed to subvert the object-language taking place in the narrative. Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis and Stam (1992:113) references Casetti who describes the flashbacks in Hitchcock's *Stage Fright* (1950). Casetti describes the flashbacks as "lying flashbacks", which portray a version of events that contradicts the character's dialogue (Burgoyne *et al* 1992:113). The character speaks about certain events and as he speaks, the flashback reveals the 'true' events and therefore subverts the narrative the character is presenting. This tension elicits aporia, as this subversive use of the flashback raises uncertainty about which narrative is 'true' or more 'true'. This is another example of a visual translation style being used to either support a narrative, as mentioned in the above example in *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), or to subvert a narrative, as is the case in *Stage Fright* (1950).

3.6.8 Fragmentations and full stops

Fragmentations and full stops involve the manipulation of frames in order to create a jerky or static effect (Fairservice 2001:310). These devices are used to distort the realism of film and to distance the viewer, thus subverting the classical Hollywood narrative. The most commonly used isolating device is the freeze-frame, where action suddenly halts. This draws attention to the significance of the image (Fairservice 2001:310). Monaco (2000:482) describes how the freeze-frame, or "stop motion" as he confusingly calls it[9], was especially effective in the early sixties during the filming of sporting events. By using a freeze-frame at any particular point, the impact of the event was enhanced (Monaco 2000:482); consider the controversial freeze frames signifying the demise of the characters in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (Hill & Foreman 1969) and *Thelma & Louise* (Scott & Polk 1991). In the same way, the freeze-frame can be used as a device to draw attention to the significance of a line of dialogue that has just been spoken. I feel that in a conspiracy narrative, this technique can also be functional when

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[9] Stop motion is a term conventionally applied to a specific type of hand-manipulated animation (Hayward 2000:17) such as the type used in the film *Coraline* (Selick & Jennings 2009).

combining it with displaced sound. A character might discover a 'fact' and the shot can freeze while the audience hear a voice-over from the character, describing the 'fact' that has just been discovered. In *The X-Files* (1993-2002), Scully discovers a pendant that she picks up to examine. The shot freezes and her face transforms to sand through a dissolve as her voice describes the implications of the pendant. The metalanguage reveals that the pendant has a great effect on her, almost life-shattering. This technique of frame manipulation aids in amplifying the communication of alternative and dominant historical narratives. In this example, the visual translation style is not subverting the 'facts' but supporting it. The freeze-frame enhances this particular event and therefore aids in the communication of the 'fact'. By slowing down the shot or by freezing it, the audience is given time to examine the 'fact' and form their own interpretations of the overarching conspiracy.

3.6.9   Jump cuts

The jump cut originated when early films were shot using cameras that needed to be cranked. The cameraman would only crank the camera when something interesting was happening. He would then stop turning until something else happened. This would cause a break in the action and became known as a jump cut (Fairservice 2001:311). Monaco (2000:218) mentions that even though the jump cut was used by filmmakers such as Godard to disconcert audiences, it has become more streamlined in modern films. In the classical Hollywood film, the jump cut is used to compress dead time (Monaco 2000:217). It is a technique that allows the action to flow. The jump cut was also effectively put to use during the French new wave (Neupert 2007:224). This effect was used as a constant punctuation device and its use is effective in the conspiracy narrative as well. The jump cut is commonly used to disorientate the viewer, but, as with the freeze-frame and displaced sound, it draws attention. The jump cut is an effective technique to use when communicating vital dominant and alternative 'facts' in a conspiracy narrative. In an episode of *The X-Files* (1993-2002), Mulder is led to believe that there is something important hidden in his parents' summer house. As he searches the house, jump cuts are used to indicate that he is about to find something.

He then discovers the Alien Bounty Hunter's knife in one of the lamps. The 'fact' that his parents were in possession of this knife is an important plot point and vital to understanding the rest of the overarching conspiracy. The jump cuts therefore amplify the tension inherent to Mulder's search and draw the audience's attention to this important 'fact'. In this example, the object-language is merely communicating that Mulder is searching for an object. There is not yet any indication that this object is relevant to the overarching conspiracy. The metalanguage, in the shape of jump cuts, then reveals that the discovery of the object is fast approaching. The jarring jump cuts also signify that the object might hold an unexpected or subversive revelation of what Mulder believes about the conspiracy and his parents' involvement in it.

The above mentioned visual translation styles aid in communicating important dominant and alternative historical accounts in the dialogue. In a lengthy conspiracy narrative, it is possible for these visual translation styles to become over-used. It then becomes necessary to analyse a few alternative techniques to employ to communicate the 'historical facts' effectively. One of these alternative techniques is the inter-cutting with action during conversation. Dancyger (2002:277) explains how James Cameron used this technique in *The Terminator* (Cameron & Hurd 1984) during a scene where the character of Reese needs to explain to Sara Connor that the Terminator was sent back in time to kill her before she could give birth to a son. In this same scene, the two characters are being chased by the Terminator. Cameron inter-cuts between the excitement of the car chase and the conversation between the two characters (Dancyger 2002:277). The action in this scene keeps the audience engaged, and by inter-cutting with the dialogue, they also become informed of the 'facts' they need to know.

Similarly, at the start of *National Treasure* (2004), Ben Gates approaches a ship buried in ice that is rumoured to contain a clue as to where the treasure is buried. In between all the action, the characters discuss the clues and reveal important hegemonic American historical accounts that will aid them in finding the treasure. The revelation of these accounts is inter-cut with the

action of the scene, and therefore the audience remains engaged throughout the communication of the 'facts'.

Figure 3: Scully framed with the "I want to believe" poster in the background (Downloaded from http://www.xfroadrun ners.com/gallery/categories.php?cat_id =117&page=2)

Another technique that can be used to amplify what is being said during dialogue scenes is to add something, a prop or an object, to the background of the shot. This prop or object can either add irony to what is being said or it can amplify it. During the Last Supper conversation in *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), Leonardo Da Vinci's painting is constantly visible in the background while the characters discuss the dominant historical accounts surrounding it. This is an effective technique to use when communicating hegemonic and alternative historical accounts because it provides the dialogue with a visual aid. This technique also speaks to the notion of mise-en-scene, which is a term used to describe all objects or people in any given scene (Hammitt 2006:[sp]). By carefully constructing the mise-en-scene, objects can subvert or amplify the object-language. As mentioned in previous chapters, in *The X-Files* (1993-2002), Mulder has a poster with the words: "I want to believe". There are a number of scenes in Mulder's basement office where the shot is framed in such a way to include this poster in the background. It is a reminder of the main theme and helps to enhance the dialogue during these scenes; dialogue which inevitably includes matters concerning belief and truth. This poster is representative of the meaning making capacity of metalanguage.

Lastly, one more additional element that can be incorporated in order to bring the audience's attention to the 'facts' or to exact a measure of manipulation is music. Music determines the mood and atmosphere and can also greatly

affect the performances (Parrent 2002:209). Music has the power to manipulate audience emotions, often informing an audience when to feel sad and when to be afraid. Music can be viewed as the metalanguage of any given shot, and it informs and adds detail to the object-language. There is an example of this in *The X-Files* (1993-2002), where Mulder at last finds out that his sister has been dead the entire time he has been searching for her. Before this 'fact' is revealed, the music slowly starts to build up, signalling to the audience that the final 'reveal' concerning Mulder's sister is at hand. The tone of the music, which is poignant, also implies that the news is not good. The object-language has not revealed anything concerning Mulder's sister yet, but the metalanguage, in the form of music, has already suggested the worst.

In the same way, music can focus an audience's attention on the 'facts' in a conspiracy narrative. When a character reveals a 'fact', the music can let the audience know that something important was just revealed in a prescriptive manner. This can be achieved by music suddenly starting or stopping directly after the 'fact' is revealed. In the example from *The X-Files* (1993-2002) where Mulder reveals the mole working in the FBI, the music slowly builds up as he is about to reveal the Section Chief as the mole. Once he has named the Section Chief, the music suddenly stops and the audience only hears slow rhythmic sounds enhancing the importance of what has just been revealed. Music can therefore be seen as another translation style that can aid in the communication of dominant and alternative historical accounts in a conspiracy narrative.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the various visual translation styles that can be incorporated in the conspiracy narrative to better portray the communication of dominant and alternative historical accounts. These visual translation styles are employed in order to focus the audience's attention on certain important elements or 'facts' in the dialogue that are vital to understanding the developing plot of the narrative.

Referring consistently to the case texts selected for this study and to key figures in relevant scholarship, I analysed the following visual translation styles:

- The technique of changing the pace by cutting in dialogue aids in speeding up the pace of a scene in order to signal that important revelations are being made in the dialogue. This technique also allows for reaction shots of the listener in the scene, and their reaction also communicates the importance of the dialogue at that specific moment.
- By covering the scene with a variety of shot angles and shot sizes, the option of cutting to a close-up in order to enhance importance and relevance is made available. As with shot sizes, the shot movement aids in communicating importance and relevance in a scene. A static shot that starts to moves indicates that there is a shift in the scene.
- When shots are not cut to match the rhythm of the speech in the scene, a jarring effect is created and this causes an unsettling atmosphere indicating the presence of development in the conspiracy narrative. This technique also aids in shifting the editing pattern that can signal a revelation in the narrative.
- Slow motion is often used to place a great deal of emphasis on a particular shot. Similar to slow motion, fast motion also aims to place emphasis on a particular shot, although in a more disconcerting manner.
- Displaced sound, such as sound effects, can draw attention to a scene and signal a revelation in the conspiracy narrative.
- Flashbacks are a very effective technique that allows an audience to view the visuals of the back story of the conspiracy or the visual presentation of the dominant and alternative historical accounts.
- Attention can be drawn to a vital moment in a scene, and the communication of alternative or dominant historical accounts that takes place in that moment, by using techniques such as freezing the frame.
- Jump cuts can be used to signify a change in the scene as well as a revelation about to occur.

I also placed these techniques and visual translation styles in a theoretical context. The visual translation styles can be viewed as the metalanguage of any give scene, as these techniques reveal a deeper meaning to the object-language, which is the dialogue or action in the scene. Visual translation styles can also aid in creating uncertainty by employing disconcerting techniques such as jump cuts. Techniques such as freezing the frame or using slow motion can present an audience with the opportunity to analyse a scene and to form individual interpretations concerning the communication of the 'facts'. In this way, the visual translation styles are encouraging the notion of aporia. By using the visual translation styles discussed in this chapter, the communication of alternative and hegemonic historical accounts and 'facts' becomes more effective. There are many other visual translation styles which can be utilized, but the techniques mentioned in this chapter are the most commonplace effective techniques in terms of the selected case texts.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

4.1 Summary

The aim of this study was to analyse the conspiracy film as well as the way in which dominant and alternative versions of history are portrayed in these films. Furthermore, this study's aim was to analyse the various visual translation styles that can be employed in order to best communicate the 'historical facts' that are present in the conspiracy film. *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), *National Treasure* (2004) and *The X-Files* (1993-2002) are the conspiracy films that were used as case studies throughout this process.

I began this study by analysing the way in which the notion of history is perceived in films. In Chapter One: Introduction, I studied the criticisms for and against the notion of history in film. In Chapter Two: Reading the Conspiracy Film, I outlined my conceptual and theoretical framework by investigating the theories of Baudrillard on 'truth' and 'reality'. I also discussed genre theory, the notion of aporia as well as the terms meta- and object-language.

In Chapter Three: Conventions and Visual Translation Styles of the Conspiracy Narrative, I analysed the conspiracy film as a sub-genre in an attempt to discover the various conventions of the conspiracy narrative. This was achieved by referencing authors such as Kelly (2007) and Millikan (2004), who have written about the conspiracy film. A parallel was also drawn between the conspiracy film and the detective genre, which aided in formulating a few conventions of the conspiracy genre. These conventions were then cross-referenced with and compared to the three conspiracy narratives that were used as my case studies. By doing this, I was able to create a list of conventions which are unique to the conspiracy film genre, and provided insights into what this type of narrative entails.

By investigating and evaluating Rosenstone's (1995) and Wearring's (2005) research, amongst others, the study aimed to perform an analysis of the manner in which dominant and alternative versions of history are used in the conspiracy film. By referring back to the three films used as case studies, I was able to determine that dominant historical narratives are often altered or purposely omitted in order to serve the overarching fictional conspiracy of the narrative. This method creates the impression that a hidden or subversive past exists and that we cannot trust what we know as 'truth'.

I also determined that many of these altered historical narratives are communicated during lengthy dialogue scenes in the conspiracy film. Chapter Three: Conventions and Visual Translation Styles of the Conspiracy Narrative analysed the various visual translation styles that can be incorporated to best portray the communication of these alternative historical narratives. This was achieved by analysing various cinematic techniques and methods as described by authors such as Dancyger (2002) and Fairservice (2001). Each of these cinematic techniques was analysed and applied to the conspiracy film in order to find ways to better communicate the altered historical narratives. These visual translation styles were also compared to the styles used in the three films I used as my case studies. In doing this, I was able to formulate a list of possible visual translation styles that can be applied to a conspiracy film and aid in portraying or communicating the subversive and hegemonic historical narratives.

This qualitative study achieved the objectives stated in Chapter One: Introduction. I discussed what the conspiracy genre in film entails by analysing the conspiracy film with regards to character and plot conventions. I investigated how dominant and alternative versions of history are used in conspiracy films to enhance the narrative by studying the ways in which history is and was portrayed in film as well as the use of historical narratives in the conspiracy film. Finally I managed to analyse the types of visual translation styles used in order to incorporate the historical narratives by looking at conspiracy films like *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) with regard to dialogue communicating dominant and alternative historical narratives.

Through the above, I was able to determine how visual translation styles can be adapted in the conspiracy film in order to achieve maximum cinematic effect and engagement when communicating historical narratives.

The following is a summary of key ideas presented throughout this study:

- Drawing on Baudrillard, I established that within the context of the conspiracy narrative, the terms truth, reality and fact do not have any credibility. Baudrillard compares these terms to the notion of fabrication and simulation and does not find any difference. The conspiracy film also sees 'truth' and 'fact' as a simulation as these terms are always proven to be false in the conspiracy film's narratives.

- Genre is constituted by containing certain conventions and characteristics common in all films of the same genre.

- Aporia, which involves the experience of uncertainty and doubt in dealing with textual tensions, allows the audience to play with and create interpretations of the film text, while the vagueness and irresolvable answers of the narrative remain firmly intact.

- Metalanguage refers to language referencing language. In terms of film, it refers to narratives within narratives or alternative narratives. The object-language consists of dialogue being spoken by the characters. The metalanguage provides the audience with the alternative narrative behind what is being portrayed.

- The conspiracy film can partly be likened to the detective film in terms of conventions and characteristics.

- The conspiracy film contains the disclosure of a shocking subversive 'truth' about the past that has been kept secret over a period of time.

- In the conspiracy film, characters impart their knowledge on dominant historical events in order to inform the audience or reader of the dominant version of a particular historical narrative so that the existence of a conflicted alternative of said narrative creates an effective shock. This imparting of knowledge serves as the

metalanguage, which offers a deeper understanding of the object-language.

- The notion of aporia is present in the conspiracy film, as the conspiracy narratives allow audiences to interpret the texts according to their individual experiences.

- The conspiracy film contains fragmentation of the exposure of the conspiracy in order to feed anticipation and deny expectation.

- The characters in the conspiracy film solve problems of a personal nature as a result of their investigation into a larger, collective conspiracy.

- The conspiracy film is inclusive of dominant historical accounts that are adapted and manipulated in order to create an alternative version of said historical account. This creates the fictional conspiracy.

- The conspiracy film is grounded in social and political contexts.

- The technique of changing the pace by cutting in dialogue aids in speeding up the pace of a scene in order to signal that important revelations are being made in the dialogue.

- By covering the scene with a variety of shot angles and shot sizes, the option of cutting to a close-up in order to enhance importance and relevance is made available.

- As with shot sizes, the shot movement aids in communicating importance and relevance in a scene.

- A jarring effect is created when shots aren't cut to match the rhythm of the speech in the scene, and this creates an unsettling atmosphere that indicates the presence of development in the conspiracy narrative.

- The technique of slow motion is often used to place a great deal of emphasis on a particular shot.

- Displaced sounds such as voice-overs or sound effects can draw attention to a scene and signal a revelation in the conspiracy narrative.

- Flashbacks are a very effective technique that allows an audience to view the visuals of the back story of the conspiracy or the visual presentation of the dominant and alternative historical accounts.

- Jump cuts can be used to signify a change in the scene as well as a revelation about to occur.

4.2 Reflection

During my study, I came upon various notions that greatly enriched my understanding and appreciation for the conspiracy film as well as the use of history in film and the visual translation styles that can be implemented to communicate these histories. Baudrillard helped me to understand that the terms truth, reality and fact do not have any credibility and that these terms can be compared to the notions of fabrication and simulation. As embodied and expressed in images, truth and reality are themselves fabricated, simulations. It is problematic to use these terms in a postmodern context, as they do not represent absolutes.

I also investigated genre theory and managed to demonstrate how genre is constituted by containing certain conventions and characteristics that are common in all films of the same genre. By studying genre theory, I was able to broaden my knowledge and better analyse the conventions of the conspiracy film.

I also addressed how aporia allows the audience to create their own interpretations of the film text, while the irresolvable answers of the narrative remain firmly intact. This notion gave me a new angle with which to analyse and understand the conspiracy film, as the conspiracy film allows for this potentially infinite subjective interpretation of the text. It never proposes one absolute answer.

The notion of metalanguage and object-language allowed me to fully understand the concept of narratives within narratives. This was advantageous when discussing the various visual translation styles that can be utilised in the conspiracy film, as it gave me a basis for the manner in which the visual translation styles can reveal or communicate more than the dialogue or actions in a scene are communicating.

In this study I was also able to form an outline of what the conventions of the conspiracy film entail. I determined that the main attraction of the conspiracy film is the carefully executed alteration of dominant hegemonic narratives and the suggestion of alternative narratives. The alternative narratives presented in the conspiracy film are based on their hegemonic counterparts and this serves to create plausible conspiracies which question dominant historical accounts.

Finally, I was able to analyse the various visual translation styles that can be incorporated in the conspiracy film to better portray the communication of dominant and alternative historical accounts. I discovered various methods and cinematic techniques that can create very effective communication as well as engagement.

In reflecting on my work, there are areas where further study can aid in creating more depth to certain subject matters. My study provided an overview of the conspiracy film as well as the incorporation of hegemonic and alternative historical accounts; however, these subjects possibly contain in-depth detail that has not been discussed in this particular study. The overview of the conspiracy film and its incorporation of historical narratives in this study aimed to create a basis from which the visual translation styles that can be implemented in these films can be analysed.

4.3 Suggestions for further research

As mentioned above, the subject matters of the conspiracy film as well as its incorporation of historical narratives can be researched further in order to obtain greater in-depth detail. A possibility: conspiracy narratives can be framed as "mind game films" in a discussion of the film theory of Thomas Elsaessar, who investigates notions of the "puzzle film", and Deleuze's taxonomy of the moving image as it appropriates time and space can further complexify the study of the conspiracy film and its alleged relationship with reality.

Another area of investigation is the permeability of genre, such as horror and science fiction, to demonstrate how many narratives have underlying conspiracy notions. Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984), for example, is, in the end, a dystopian vision of a future where humanity has failed and technology is the new oppressive force to resist and distrust.

There is also the opportunity to apply conspiracy theory on television series other than *The X-Files* (1993-2002)*,* where such a study could develop a 'conspiracy narrative visual language' specifically for this medium. Series to be investigated may include the popular *Lost* (Abrams & Glasgow 2004) and *Warehouse 13* (Espenson & Winemaker 2009).

Each of the above mentioned study areas are related to the conspiracy film and the use of historical accounts in film and will serve to deepen the understanding of these subject matters. This study has hopefully served to provide an overview of these subject matters and deepen understanding of the way in which history in conspiracy films can be effectively communicated through the use of carefully selected visual translation styles.

A last word: although not integrally linked to this current study but related to it, I have submitted a feature length conspiracy narrative film screenplay as well as a short filmed piece to demonstrate the dynamics and mechanism of the conspiracy narrative. Each of these three texts is aimed at improving and illuminating the other.

"Truth is as subjective as reality." – Jose Chung, character in *The X-Files* (Carter & Spotnitz, 1993-2002).

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