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“Drugs and Dissent: A Cognitive Approach to Strategies of
Unreliability and Reader Disorientation in *Naked Lunch* and *Fear
and Loathing in Las Vegas*”

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for my parents

1. INTRODUCTION

When psychoanalysis and the theory of relativity overturned the concept of objective reality at the turn of the 20th century, authors like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce were among the first to adapt literary conventions to suit the new world view Freud's and Einstein's discoveries engendered. While the Victorians had wanted to convey a realistic picture of society, the modernists sought to paint a convincing picture of the ways the human mind, its feelings, its memories, and its many shortcomings essentially lay the foundation for one's world view. With this new-found interest in subjective experience came an interest in perceptive faults, which prompted writers to search for new ways of expressing errors of judgement or cognition. Literature should, in simulating the human consciousness, be just as untrustworthy as one's own sensations.

While the idea to employ unreliable narrators was not entirely new (the German Romantics had used unreliable narrators already at the turn of the 19th century; examples of early unreliability in English literature include Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* or Wilkie Collins' *Moonstone*), the concept ultimately rose to fame when the postmodernists took over the modernists' distrust in objectivity and combined it with their irreverence of tradition and a celebration of the perceived cultural decline their predecessors had merely lamented at the turn of the century. Unreliable narration, especially as employed by authors from the 1950s onwards, is a fascinating concept, since it completely overturns the expectations most readers hold towards literature. One is used to trusting narrative instances even if the perspective is clearly limited, but unreliable narrators cannot be trusted – for precisely this reason, one's engagement with an unreliable narrator is inherently far greater than with a reliable narrative instance. In order to keep track of the *histoire*, one has to be very careful in evaluating narratives marked unreliable by various clues.

Unreliability may stem from either moral or cognitive impairments on the side of the narrator; it thus offers deviant perspectives on the respective readers' norms. When authors employ unreliability to challenge or even attack established values and practices, matters become complicated – uniting unreliable narration and valid criticism may, in fact, seem an irreconcilable paradox. Still, writers do succeed in combining these apparently disparate elements, creating unique and influential works in the process, two of which will be examined in this thesis. Both novels are major underground narratives¹, cult classics in their own right, which combine both moral and

¹ As regards the classification of the two novels as underground literature, Scott MacFarlane rightfully states that

the term underground narrative, whether applied to the Beats [to whom Burroughs belongs] or hippies [to whom Thompson can be counted, albeit with some reservations], does not presuppose a lack of success in the marketplace and it is not about literature having been clandestine or hidden. Rather, a work of underground narrative connotes a message and story that is positioned to challenge the mainstream culture and its values. (13)

cognitive unreliability with outspoken cultural critique – William S. Burroughs’ famously obscene *Naked Lunch* and Hunter S. Thompson’s shamelessly insulting *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. The aim of this thesis is to show that both works can be classified as intrinsically unreliable narratives of a very specific and elaborate kind that successfully allow for comments on culture and ideology. Therefore, it is essential to determine how unreliable narration functions from a cognitive point of view, i.e. how the reader detects unreliability in literature, and how this is specifically effected in the works chosen and on the various levels that unreliable narratives function on. Focusing on the relationship between unreliability and cultural critique, it will then be clarified how unreliable narration complements ideological criticism and determine whether unreliability invalidates cultural critique or whether it may, in fact, even strengthen its effect.

In doing so, this thesis is meant to fill a gap: regretfully, neither *Naked Lunch* nor *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* have received the critical attention they deserve despite their widespread success. That both novels have been adapted into major motion pictures only makes their continuing popularity more apparent. Therefore, I want to provide a contemporary and extensive scholarly perspective on these two classics that has long been overdue. The effect of the novels, after all, is intriguing: how do Burroughs and Thompson, authors of what is in one way or the other semi-autobiographical, transmedial and often outright offensive cultural critique turned drug fiction, achieve their unique effect of transgressing, even transforming a reality everyone is familiar with into a place where nobody is safe and anything is possible?

In order to arrive at a satisfactory answer to this question, a recently sprung up discipline of literary criticism seems most suitable. Cognitive poetics, in its holistic view of literature that is no longer connected only with one side of the author-text-reader relationship and writing detached from context, offers a suitable means to uncover the basis for the novels mentioned. As Peter Stockwell lucidly sums up, '[t]he ‘meaning’ can be found in the minds of readers, configured there partly from readerly processes and individual experiences, and only partly from the cues offered by the elements of the text object' (91). Drawing also on studies of unreliable narration and linking them to cognitive poetics (a connection that is actually inherent in the very nature of the matter²), this thesis will have to extend and adapt the notion of unreliability as regards the two novels’ narrative situations to effectively account for the unique ways and modes of telling in both of the works discussed.

For this reason, it seems suitable to call both *Naked Lunch* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* underground classics.

² See chapter 1.1.

Since part of the novels' effect is also directly due to their unique transgression of their media, this will have to be discussed in some detail as well. The cut up³, strongly visual and enigmatic text layout of *Naked Lunch* and Ralph Steadman's illustrations and paint spills in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* immediately spring to mind in this context. A large part of the books' effects can be directly attributed to the way conventions of typesetting, of strictly textual and paratextual features are bent, extended or broken. In their transcending the written word, both novels also aim, albeit on different levels, at cultural criticism that is always at least partially directed against simple-minded, indoctrinated conservatism and stifling middle-class degeneration. Especially in connection with a theory of unreliable narration, a thorough discussion of these critical voices seems to suggest itself.

Before any meaningful analysis of the works themselves can commence, however, a theoretical basis has to be established. Therefore, in the following brief chapters I will present a brief overview of the most important critical concepts and assumptions used in the subsequent analysis that will serve as a theoretical common ground from which to start. Given their cursory nature, these brief outlines can only encompass the most basic and important approaches cognitive poetics and unreliability studies respectively have to offer.

1.1. UNRELIABLE NARRATION AND ITS PROBLEMS⁴

Since its coinage by Wayne Booth in 1961, the term unreliable narration has quickly become a part of common and basic literary terminology. As Ansgar Nünning (3-4) points out, however, a thoroughly valid and precisely formulated definition of what unreliable narration actually is has yet to be put forward. The term itself seems straightforward enough, but on a second glance it becomes clear that the notion we have of its meaning is, in fact, rather obscure. This problem is exacerbated by the large amount of heterogeneous phenomena the term is set to describe in literary criticism – there are hardly any unifying factors in what makes narration unreliable, i.e. what definite signals all unreliable narrators have in common. Even Nünning's broadest take on the issue – '[d]er allgemeine Wirkungseffekt von *unreliable narration* besteht [...] oftmals in einer fortschreitenden unfreiwilligen Selbstentlarvung des Erzählers' (6) – admittedly cannot account for all the effects the term has to describe.

Many critics⁵ have argued that narrators are to be deemed unreliable under the condition that they exhibit (world-) views, opinions or beliefs that are in more or less direct contradiction

³ While *Naked Lunch* is a cut up and fragmented novel, Burroughs only developed his trademark cut-up approach to writing after its publication, together with painter Brion Gysin (Weinreich 84)

⁴ Most of the information this chapter provides draws heavily from Ansgar Nünning's influential and extensive anthology *Unreliable Narration*.

with those of the implied author of a given work (Nünning 8). Instead of clearing up what unreliable narration means, however, the introduction of the implied author to the problem only serves to obfuscate the phenomenon even more, as it merely offers a second, almost equally loosely defined term as part of an explanation for the first (Nünning 10). At this stage, the only actual differentiation possible is to point out the inherently twofold nature of unreliable narration, which is of crucial importance to any discussion thereof: unreliability may, in the sense of a discrepancy, either stem from the narrators' moral and ethical values or their cognitive or mental impairment⁶, both of which may be in conflict with those of the actual – not implied – reader (Nünning 11).

In the first case, the focus is on judgements the narrator, and the reader respectively, make, while in the second case it lies on certain facts and events that may arouse suspicion or questions as regards the narrators' capability for presenting a valid picture of their environment – their reliability or lack thereof. One also has to consider that reliable and unreliable narration are no binary opposites, but rather the extremes of a sliding scale on which any grade of (un-)reliability is possible (Nünning 13). From a cognitive point of view, the actual assessment of a narrator's (un-)reliability solely rests with the reader at all times – constructs including both an implied author and an implied reader are neither useful nor necessary in a description of this literary phenomenon. It is first and foremost the audience's knowledge of the world and its inhabitants that allows the identification of an unreliable narrator as such – unreliable narration is therefore a relational or interactive phenomenon (Nünning 23). This in turn implies that there is a naturalisation process in making sense of unreliable narration (Nünning 25-26), which proves to be one of the links with cognitive poetics⁷.

It is, however, possible to deduct a catalogue of criteria with which unreliability can be determined and measured. Since a concise overview has already been given by Ansgar Nünning (27-31), the information presented here will only serve as a starting point to the various factors that have to be kept in mind in a discussion of unreliable narration. In general, one has to distinguish between internal, i.e. textimmanent, and external, i.e. contextual criteria for unreliability. The former factors mainly encompass discrepancies and contradictions in a narration, be they between the utterances of a narrator and circumstantial (partly or entirely contradictory) hints the reader receives, a narrator's words and deeds or inconsistencies in various perspectives presented, as well as explicit commentaries relating to reliability or a lack thereof or attempts at manipulating the reader. The contextual criteria, on the other hand, encompass two frames of reference rele-

⁵ See Nünning 8.

⁶ In this thesis, both moral and cognitive deficits are highly relevant; the borders between them cannot be drawn clearly in the novels I will discuss.

⁷ More on naturalisation processes and similar concerns can be found in the following subchapter.

vant to the processing of (un-)reliability – the readers' literary and real-life knowledge, respectively. As soon as a text is in violation with the (unwritten) laws of either, readers will notice the element of unreliability.

As regards the textimmanent factors, Gaby Allrath (60) has proposed a very helpful model to tackle the various levels of internal unreliability – a model I will, as far as it is applicable, adhere to in the following analyses. According to her, internal unreliability works on three distinct layers: the content of the narrative, its macrostructure, i.e. its continuity, and its style. Treating the content itself as the topmost layer in the hierarchy, one may easily work one's way from the content over the overall layout and organisation of the text right down to its core stylistic features. At each individual level, one may proceed outwards to the contextual criteria as mentioned above – the audience's literary and real-life competence. Naturally, not all components of the model work equally well on all texts discussed, which is why an eclectic approach seems ideally suited for the matter, as it can be tailored to the texts in question easily.

1.2. COGNITIVE POETICS AND UNRELIABILITY⁸

Now that a framework on unreliable narration has been established, the question arises as to where cognitive poetics come into play. Two reasons immediately come to mind: firstly, cognitive poetics is a means of systematically describing notions of unreliable narration, and secondly, it serves as a set of tools to comment on various literary phenomena especially prevalent in the texts I will discuss. The link between theories of unreliability and cognitive poetics is fairly straightforward: since cognitive poetics per se are above all a way of contextualising texts, notions of unreliable narration not only (in their vital connection to contextual factors, which I have illustrated in the preceding subchapter) comport superficially with cognitive poetics, but in fact can only be discussed using cognitive methods – whether they be labelled as such or not. However, the focus of this thesis does not only rest on unreliable narration, but also on how the chosen novels disorient the reader and undermine conventional narrative modes. Here, cognitive poetics provides several models and approaches for interpretation that can be easily appropriated to the unique experiences of the three novels up for analysis. For this reason, I will give a short overview over the most important concepts I will refer to and apply in this thesis and, where applicable, link them to concepts of unreliable narration outlined above.

One of the most crucial notions of cognitive poetics (and of cognitive sciences in general, for that matter) is that of figure and ground. While these two terms in themselves are rather self-

⁸ Most of the concepts in this chapter have been taken from Peter Stockwell's excellent introduction to cognitive poetics.

explanatory – figure refers to the foregrounded elements of literature, while ground refers to the textual fundaments on which they are set – they are among the most fruitful approaches to literary texts. Foregrounding in literature may be achieved using a multitude of literary devices, including, but not limited to ‘repetition, unusual naming, innovative descriptions, creative syntactic ordering, puns, rhyme, alliteration, metrical emphasis [or] the use of creative metaphor’ (Stockwell 14). Stockwell explains that ‘[i]n this view, one of the main functions of literature is to **defamiliarise** the subject matter, to estrange the reader from aspects of the world in order to present the world in a creative and newly figured way’ (14). Deviations and deviancy from expected outcomes (relative to both literary and to real world knowledge) are therefore means by which to gauge what is foregrounded, what is ‘[t]he dominant’ (Stockwell 14) in a particular text. Defamiliarisation is, while a general feature of literary texts, especially crucial to unreliable narration and reader disorientation. Unreliable narration foregrounds the unusual and the unexpected; unreliable narrators repeat themselves, employ deviant descriptions and regularly mix up the ordering of events in their accounts, thereby stumping and maybe even confusing the reader. For this reason, deviancy is not only a gauge for literariness in general, but also an important indicator for unreliable narration and an explanation for reader disorientation.

Highly relevant to the selection of novels in this thesis, but not in itself connected to the theory of unreliability, is also the theory of cognitive deixis, which is concerned with the various levels on which a narrative works and how they are interrelated⁹. It derives from the notion that a narrative consists of a multitude of narrative levels, which, depending on the particular text, are for instance the various perspectives that form the story. In Stanzel’s terms, these would be multiple strands of focalised narration, each of them representing a distinct level of the narrative. Also included are, however, stories characters tell one another, dreams or wishes they have, flashbacks, flashforwards and even authorial comments, each of which is another distinct level of the narrative. All of these levels make use of deictic expressions¹⁰, and only by ‘**deictic projection**’ (Stockwell 43) can one make sense of these often quite intricately interwoven expressions in a text. This means that only if one projects a ‘deictic centre’ (Stockwell 44), i.e. the origin or most basic level of narration in a text, can one understand its deixis and the relationship between the multiple levels a narrative encompasses.

As regards literary analysis, ‘**deictic shift theory**’ (Stockwell 46) is a means of applying the notions of cognitive deixis to texts. ‘The world of a literary text consists of one or more deictic fields [what I have called multiple levels above]’ (Stockwell 47), distinct textual layers of the narrative, which can be transcended to reach an upper layer (this occurrence is termed a ‘**pop**’

⁹ For an illustrated model of the levels of literary production as well as reception, see Stockwell 41-43.

¹⁰ Deictic expressions are, for example, words ‘such as ‘left’ and ‘right’, ‘above’ and ‘below’, ‘in front’ and ‘behind’ ’ (Stockwell 43).

[Stockwell 47]) or a lower layer (termed a **'push'** [Stockwell 47]) of the text. In general, one might say that upper layers shift the basic level of the narrative towards a more authorial, commenting, or metareferential level, which is above the narrative metaphorically. The opposite concept of lower layers in turn denotes embedded narratives, such as flashbacks, stories told by characters or, in drama, plays within plays, metaphorically below the basic level of the narrative. An example for a pop process would therefore be the interruption of a narrative (the basic layer of the text) for the insertion of an authorial comment (an upper – “authorial” – layer of the text). A character (again the basic level of the text) reflecting on his former life (a further removed – “flashback” – layer of the text), on the other hand, would be an example of a push process. Many literary texts, and especially the novels I propose to discuss, make use of a highly complex system of pushes and pops, which is why deictic shift theory is an important tool to understand what these texts achieve.

For the particular texts concerned, what is generally called **'schema theory'** (Stockwell 75) proves to be most instrumental. Schema theory actively links text and context, thereby connecting the world of a piece of literature and the real world, the world of the real (as opposed to implied) reader. This connection is achieved by a reader's knowledge of so-called scripts (Stockwell 77), learned schematics that can be applied to specific – both real-life and literary – situations:

Scripts develop out of **plans**, which are generalised conceptual procedures such as 'socialising' or 'getting a drink'. When a plan becomes routine in experience, it becomes a script. (Stockwell 78)

Scripts are by nature dynamic, since fixed and unchanging scripts would only relate to relatively unique situations and therefore would not be very helpful. There are different types of scripts¹¹ evoked by certain textual clues, called **'headers'** (Stockwell 78). Scripts also entail various conditional roles that have to be filled – relating to participants, objects or places – called **'slots'** (Stockwell 78). While all of this is fairly straightforward in real life, reading literature requires a distinctly different treatment of schemas.

In literature, schemas may form textual grounds (as established above), but texts usually – as is the case with our three novels – prove most interesting when established schemas are overturned, modified, or entirely dismantled (which clearly happens in unreliable narration, but not exclusively). There are 'three different fields in which schemas operate: **world schemas, text schemas** and **language schemas'** (Stockwell 80). This means that when events take an unexpected turn (affecting world schemas), are ordered in an unusual way (affecting text schemas) or

¹¹ For information on the various types of scripts and headers, see Stockwell 77-78.

oddly formulated (affecting language schemas), this is mostly because of what Stockwell calls ‘**schema disruption**’ (79). Since this thesis deals with highly subversive works, deviance from established schemas is, for its purposes, one of the main points of attention.

The degree of deviation from our sense of reality in world schematic structure can be measured on a scale of **informativity**, on the basis of three orders of informativity:

- **first-order informativity** – normal, unremarkable things [as encountered in real life] are schema preserving or reinforcing
- **second-order informativity** – unusual or less likely things encountered in literary worlds develop schematic knowledge by accretion.
- **third-order informativity** – impossible or highly unlikely things [to happen in real life] represent a challenge to schema knowledge as schema disruption. (Stockwell 80)

Second-order informativity and third-order informativity will feature prominently in the texts discussed in the following chapters.

As regards the various schemas, a visualised link with both Ansgar Nünning’s remarks on the relevant contextual factors of unreliable narration and Gaby Allrath’s model of textimmanent unreliability¹² may prove helpful:

TABLE 1

Corresponding Concepts in Unreliability and Schema Theory

TEXTUAL LEVEL (ALLRATH)	content	macrostructure	language
	↓ evokes ↓	↓ evokes ↓	↓ evokes ↓
SCHEMA THEORY (AS BY STOCKWELL)	world schema	text schema	language schema
	↑ corresponds with ↑	↑ corresponds with ↑	
CONTEXTUAL LEVEL (NÜNNING)	real-life knowledge	literary knowledge	n.a.

TABLE 1 illustrates how Gaby Allrath’s textimmanent factors of unreliable narration evoke their respective schemas in the form proposed by Peter Stockwell, which in turn correspond to the concepts put forward by Ansgar Nünning. It also clearly shows that ‘[a]ny approach to a literary text that insists on pure formalism, restricting itself to syntax and semantics and the words them-

¹² See chapter 1.1.

selves on the page, is doomed to failure' (Stockwell 91). In order to make sense of textimmanent factors, they have to be linked with their corresponding concepts in schema theory. The contextual facets of a text as proposed by Nünning can even be completely subsumed under the respective schemas and therefore do not necessitate additional discussion, which prevents the theoretical approach to our three novels from becoming overly complex. This way, the model accounts for every aspect of my discussion without necessitating any additions to include phenomena that cannot be easily explained by it¹³. Note, however, that unreliable narration is not the main concern of our analysis, but rather an important aspect thereof. Not every level of every work discussed entails a strong connection to unreliable narration, which is why unreliability will only feature where the particular level contributes to it.

There are of course a large number of additional approaches to literature that cognitive poetics has to offer. I have, however, chosen those theoretical concepts that offer the most fruitful insights into the matters at hand. Not every concept is (reasonably) applicable to every text; the purpose of the particular selection made here is to best suit the texts – and the topics their discussion entails. With the proper theoretical ground thus provided, the next chapter marks the beginning of my textual analysis.

¹³ There is, however, one somewhat exceptional aspect to one of the levels, namely on the content level. The two texts' implicit (and explicit) cultural criticism acts as a bridge between internal and external textual factors in itself already by pointing outside the world of the text. It will therefore be discussed where applicable, since its effect not only rests on content, but also on structure and especially on language.

2. WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS – *NAKED LUNCH*

‘Perhaps [why] I am so uniquely terrible is simply that
I represent total Dissent. Total Dissent. T.D.’

—William S. Burroughs (*Last Words* 63)

Naked Lunch, arguably William Burroughs’ most important work as well as his literary legacy, has always posed a somewhat of a problem for its readership, academic or otherwise. Not only is the text cryptically coded, its meaning largely obscure and its interpretation – if at all possible – a Herculean task for any scholar, but the novel itself has also seen a considerable number of different editions, nearly all of which incorporate changes, additions and rearrangements by Burroughs himself. While the demand for a definite edition is large, the actual composition of such a volume is highly problematic. Who can, with any rightful authority, claim the arrangement of chapters, sentences, even words and letters should be one way and not another?

After all, part of the novel’s effect stems from Burroughs’ deliberate misspelling of words and ungrammatical constructions forming a sheer unmanageable amount of at the same time hardly and heavily interconnected bits and pieces, which, along with an entire corpus of subtexts, makes up the narrative as such. But that is not all – the novel’s most complete edition also features two separate introductions¹⁴, an ‘ATROPHIED PREFACE’ (172) and an appendix. On a mere two hundred pages, Burroughs manages to create a vast text world rich in texture that is constantly referencing Western master narratives and lies embedded in paratextual reflections that contextualise and analyse not only the book, but also its writing process and its narrator, who in turn is constantly shifting from character to (implied?) author and back.

Needless to say, conventional modes of reading fail miserably due to the Joycean scope of the novel¹⁵, which has evidently deterred scholars and critics alike from giving the novel the attention it deserves. As Robin Lydenberg explains,

[m]uch critical work on Burroughs treats both his personal life and the idiosyncratic mythology which pervades his fiction as cultural, sociological, or psychoanalytical artifacts. His depiction of the underworld of drugs, sex, and petty crime and his exposure of the insidious power of bureaucracy, technology, and the politics of war elicit what is essentially a moral response from most critics. Burroughs is either condemned for the “unspeak-

¹⁴ Introductions to the book by other authors (such as the introduction by J.G. Ballard in the edition used) do not actually form a part of it, contrary to those written, arranged and inserted by Burroughs himself. While they still are paratexts in Genette’s definition, they are not relevant to the novel’s discussion and therefore not taken into account here.

¹⁵ According to Stephen Sheehan, ‘[i]n 1959 the first edition of *Naked Lunch* was published by Olympia Press in Paris in circumstances very similar to that of another avant-garde text thirty seven years earlier, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*’. Apart from its publication history, however, there are several more aspects that link the two novels – their unique use of language and potpourri of styles, for instance.

able” content of his fiction or championed for his courageous and clear-sighted quest for individual freedom. While these issues are surely important, they have overshadowed the significance of Burroughs’ stylistic accomplishments. (*Word Cultures* ix)

For none of Burroughs’ literary accomplishments does this statement ring more true than it does for *Naked Lunch*, which makes the need for a re-evaluation on the grounds of unreliability and cognitive poetics all the more pressing. Since plot and characters alike in *Naked Lunch* are elusive at best, the only means of attaining any real understanding of the work is to subject it to a thorough investigation of what it actually does, which is the main concern of cognitive poetics. For the purpose of arriving at workable conclusions, a bottom-up approach seems best suited. I will begin by tracing the text’s arrangement and paratext¹⁶, from there moving on to the text itself and its various implications according to the model of analysis proposed in the introduction¹⁷, before bringing in contextual features of the novel while considering its evident cultural criticism at the same time.

2.1. PRELIMINARIES: THE DISCOURSE WORLD AND PARATEXT OF *NAKED LUNCH*

As mentioned above, *Naked Lunch* comprises not only of the main narration as such, but includes several carefully interlinked co-texts that draw from and build on each other. Since I am not yet dealing with the novel’s main narrative, the concepts and models set forth above¹⁸ can only partly account for these texts. However, since these satellite texts are instrumental for understanding the novel’s complex and uniquely unreliable narrative situation, they have to be disentangled and explained in detail as well. Unfortunately, this is not an entirely straightforward process. Carol Loranger notes that

Naked Lunch has undergone at least five significant changes in the three and a half decades since its first publication. The changes in each case have consisted of the addition or deletion of large, often self-contained portions of text. None of these changes can be considered accidental variants, since changes of this magnitude and these particular kinds were enacted by author or publisher in response to specific pressures. But neither can these changes be satisfactorily marked in each case as deliberate authorial revisions [...]. Some of Burroughs’ additions pre-date *Naked Lunch*, others are mutually contradictory, and yet others were written or transcribed by third parties and were included in some editions but omitted from others, presumably with Burroughs’ blessing. (par. 2)

¹⁶ Since the paratexts of the novel are not actual parts of its main narrative but important sections of the work nonetheless, they may serve as the starting point of its discussion, but do not belong to the analysis of the narrative itself. One may argue that they still represent a portion of *Naked Lunch*’s macrostructure, but their detachment from the actual narration and their inherently non-narrative nature defeats any purpose their inclusion into the macrostructural analysis may have had. While they are undoubtedly relevant to the text, they are not, strictly speaking, part of the main narrative’s internal organisation and should therefore not be treated as such.

¹⁷ See especially chapters 1.1. and 1.2.

¹⁸ See chapters 1.1. and 1.2., respectively.

In fact, the text – or rather, as will become clear soon – the polyphonous discourse of the novel offers some hint at the uncertainties that pervade it constantly; how fitting then that it begins by undermining itself:

I awoke from 'The Sickness' [Burroughs' opiate addiction] at the age of forty-five, calm and sane, and in reasonably good health [...]. I apparently took detailed notes on sickness and delirium. I have no precise memory of writing the notes which have now been published under the title *Naked Lunch*. (7)

Thus writes the signatory and author of *Naked Lunch*'s 'Introduction' bearing the subtitle '*deposition: testimony concerning a sickness*' (7), thereby stressing the random and necessarily incoherent nature of the book, and its inherent and constant unreliability. This confession renders the entire novel suspicious, especially since the process of its compilation is only 'apparently' (7) Burroughs' work. In the spirit of the novel is also Burroughs' partial revision/contradiction of the above statement – 'When I say I have no memory of writing *Naked Lunch*, this is of course an exaggeration' (15) – that found its way into the book about three decades after the original assertion.

Along with this section, called 'Afterthoughts on a Deposition' (15), and the 'Appendix' (185), the 'Introduction' forms the novel's paratext. Not all of these elements were included in the novel's first edition, and a section Loranger dubs 'Naked Lunch on Trial' (Table 1) is no longer included in recent editions¹⁹, but otherwise the arrangement and selection of paratexts included in the edition used for this thesis may be the most definite (i.e. comprehensive or complete) composition accessible. The nature of the additional material makes its discussion so crucial to grasping the novel: I have said before that the narrative and the paratexts draw and build on each other, which warrants calling them intertexts in addition to mere paratexts. Not only do they contain understanding aids for the *Naked Lunch* narrative, they even seem to be no less than outsourced extensions of the novel. Orbiting the main narrative, as it were, these intertexts, along with the narrative portion of the novel, form what is probably no less than a *Naked Lunch*-discourse – pre- and posttext, commentary and interpretation all rolled into one. What is even more important is that while there are distinct paratextual borders to the four sections of *Naked Lunch*, the texts itself are – despite being written several years or even decades apart – subtly intertwined and form a complex whole that has to be considered in its entirety, which is what I propose to do in this chapter.

What immediately springs to attention when reading Burroughs' introduction is the strong autobiographical tone he consciously puts on display at the very beginning of the text. The introduction is signed by 'William S. Burroughs' (14), as are the 'Afterthoughts' (15). The main text

¹⁹ For a detailed overview of the changes made in the novel's paratext, see Loranger Table 1.

uses the persona of Bill Lee, which is again no one else but Burroughs himself: Bill Lee makes his debut in the likewise explicitly autobiographical novel *Junky*, so there is hardly any doubt that Bill Lee is in fact an incarnation of Bill Burroughs²⁰. Even before the narrative ends, however, Bill Lee turns into ‘William Seward’ (178). The ultimate section, the ‘Appendix’ (185), marks the return of ‘WILLIAM BURROUGHS’ (187). Remarkable are not only the various names Burroughs uses for himself, but also the different typesets he uses – italics and small capitals, for instance – indicating the various stages of authorship related to the respective texts. “The ‘I’ who begins *Naked Lunch*, William S. Burroughs, ex-junkie not responsible for the text, mutates into Bill Lee, junkie-detective-huckster on the lam; mutates again to ‘I, William Seward,’ pulling off the Bill Lee mask in the ‘Atrophied Preface’; and resolves itself as William Burroughs’ (Loranger, par. 14). Part of the novel’s uniqueness therefore is its constantly reinforced connection with its real (as instead of implied) author, beginning with the introductory ‘*deposition*’ (7).

Where other writers make use of introductions as means to express their gratitude to contributors or tell stories of a novel’s first publication, Burroughs presents the reader with a concise introduction into the world of ‘junk (generic term for opium and/or derivatives including all synthetics from demerol to palfium)’ (7) and addiction – in some ways a prerequisite (especially for the audiences of the late fifties and sixties who, despite the rise of the hippies, were still largely ignorant or misinformed in terms of drug-culture²¹) for understanding the novel’s main concern. In this sense, the introduction evokes the audience’s schema for drugs and drug culture (more specifically for opiates and opiate addicts, which is why I will refer to it as opiate addiction schema from now on), a schema that one can assume to be rather underdeveloped in most readers. Depending on the schematic knowledge of the particular reader, this schema accretion (Stockwell 78) or even schema restructuring (Stockwell 78), meaning the creation of an entirely new schema, is instrumental to the understanding of the novel – the thus modified or created schema will be evoked again and again in the main narrative later on.

Similarly, clues towards decoding *Naked Lunch*’s elaborate system of deixis are provided already. Among the most remarkable features of the novel are its constant pushes and pops, indicators of its constant transgression of deictic fields. One of the most common examples in this respect – as evidenced by the quote in the paragraph above – are Burroughs’ authoritative bracketed explanations, which make their appearance in the first few lines and feature prominently throughout the rest of the book. Whenever we find a bracket in the narrative (or in the paratext, for that matter), it marks a pop from the current deictic field (which is mostly that of the narra-

²⁰ As are most of the characters featuring in *Naked Lunch*. More on this in the subsequent chapter.

²¹ It comes as no surprise, therefore, that one of Burroughs’ (and, incidentally, of Hunter S. Thompson’s) pet peeves is the misrepresentation of drug users and drug abuse so prevalent in the United States of the 1950s and 60s. See also chapter 4.1.

tive) to that of the authorial comment. In most cases, these pops are necessary – they explain terms and concepts hardly any reader, neither in the time of the book's first publication, nor today, would be able to understand without additional information. Thereby, these pops prove to be schema accreting building blocks for the opiate addiction schema. This deictic field of explanatory commentary – the science, sociology and linguistics of opiate addiction – forms the ground against which the novel is set.

Thus, the introduction sets the scene for what is to come in several ways. Hints at all the major schemas, worldly or otherwise, of *Naked Lunch* can be traced here; even the writing, which starts out in a fairly factual way, ultimately foreshadows the broken up, fragmented and transgressive narration that follows. '[It] is signed by its author but its slangy, elliptical style approaches that of Bill Lee, the voice of the narrative portion of the text' (Loranger, par. 14) and displays an ever-shifting assemblage of various jargons and dialects, medical and economic expressions and traits of factual journalism, thereby evoking, and subsequently melding, the numerous text schemas that make up large portions of public discourse. By this, Burroughs manages to expose the cacophonous, disturbing and ugly nature of the mass media in all its facets, which is definitely one of the most fascinating aspects of the novel. When the introduction dissolves into what is entitled '*Post Script...Wouldn't You?*' (12), a brief glance at the following pages leaves no doubt that *Naked Lunch* has spilled over into Burroughs' '*deposition*' (7) at last: features of the text, such as an overly frequent use of '...', along with use of capitalisation, italics and rudimentary syntax, forming 'sprawling sentences filled with slang, allusions, and other voices' (Leddy 36), signal that the reader has almost arrived at the main text.

Before the narrative commences, however, there are still Burroughs' 'Afterthoughts on a Deposition' (15) that were, as already mentioned, only inserted some thirty years after the original introduction – in 1991, to be exact. Afterwards, the chaos that is *Naked Lunch* truly begins. Since this chapter exclusively deals with the novel's paratexts, our analysis of the main narrative, its content, macrostructure and language, only begins in the subsequent chapter. What follows the narrative, however, is once again part of its schema accreting textual satellites, and therefore immediately relevant: The final part of *Naked Lunch*, its 'Appendix' (185). It consists of a 'letter from a master addict to dangerous drugs' (187), a mock-scientific treatise in letter form that was actually published in the 'British Journal of Addiction' (187). It is remarkably different from the rest of the novel's satellite texts in that it not only echoes scientific medical discourse (which the introduction also does to considerable extent), but actually claims to be a part of medical discourse, which it fakes quite successfully. Despite appearing out of context, i.e. not in the actual 'British Journal of Addiction' (187), the 'Appendix' (185) displays a header indicating the journal title and the respective issue numbers. The text itself is also written in a highly academic jargon in which

Burroughs manages to pass himself off as a man of experiment, ‘a scientist, coolly experimenting on himself and others and disinterestedly recording the results of his experiments for the public at large’ (Loranger, par. 13).

The article encompasses explanations on a copious amount of different drugs, notes on their usage as well as their side effects. Over the whole of the article, Burroughs includes personal experiences related in a detached language indicating his entirely scientific approach and interest in the matters discussed. The second half of the article is almost entirely devoted to the various ‘cures’ (191) for morphine addiction known at the time of the journal’s publication, along with Burroughs’ experiences of their advantages and disadvantages and their overall effectiveness as gauged by him. ‘The language of the article, together with Burroughs’s heavy use of passive constructions and medical jargon, careful attention to definition of terms, and (for botanicals) use of Latin species names, combines with its encyclopedic [sic] organization and tabulations of data to effectively imitate science writing of the day’ (Loranger, par. 13).

The purpose of the article, its place in the discourse of *Naked Lunch*, is similar to that of the book’s introduction, the ‘*deposition*’ (7) – both of them are ‘distinctly different, though not entirely contrary, defenses for the novel’ (Loranger, par. 12) necessitated by the looming threat of censorship and the subsequent banning of the novel upon its original publication. The ‘*deposition*’ (7) builds on the idea that the novel is mainly journalism, as evidenced by the following statement:

Junk is big business [...]. *The junk virus is public health problem number one of the world today.* Since *Naked Lunch* treats this health problem, it is necessarily brutal, obscene and disgusting. (11-12)

Sensation journalism, especially the kind concerned with topics such as organised crime, drugs and prostitution, has always been shocking for its naïve middle class audience. Incidentally, *Naked Lunch* incorporates most of what sensation journalism covers, and it does so more explicitly and openly than even the most daring piece on drug culture ever could. As Loranger (par. 14) notes, however, there is an additional dimension to it – that of satire:

Certain passages in the book that have been called pornographic were written as a tract against Capital Punishment in the manner of Jonathan Swift’s *Modest Proposal*. These sections are intended to reveal capital punishment as the obscene, barbaric and disgusting anachronism that it is. (*Naked Lunch* 12)

Considering the novel’s purported Janus face of both journalism and satire (it might be argued that it is neither; I claim it is, in parts, both), one cannot but think of *Naked Lunch* as a spiritual

predecessor to what Hunter S. Thompson would later dub gonzo journalism – the style of writing he is most famous for and in which he wrote *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, which in turn may be deemed the spiritual successor of *Naked Lunch* in more than one way²².

Apart from paving the way for the likes of Thompson, however, the novel as a whole is a complex potpourri of voices and of genres – one finds medical and academic jargon, yellow press journalism, satire, detective fiction, the occasional piece of utopian science fiction (also in terms of the various creatures that populate Interzone) and what might be, for lack of a better term, called drug or slacker fiction²³ (centring on the exploits and problems of drug consumers). Together they blend to form a novel that is transgressive in a multitude of ways, a fascinating bricolage of cultural artefacts transformed, rearranged, and caught in the act of constantly shifting meaning. It is precisely this fleeting meaning, its construction and implications, that form the main concern of the next chapter.

2.2. UNRELIABILITY IN *NAKED LUNCH*

2.2.1. CONTENT: THE NOVEL WITHOUT A PLOT

The main issue any discussion of *Naked Lunch* sooner or later boils down to is how to make sense of the novel on the level of its content. Questions of plot, progression, character grouping and character development can be answered superficially, but grasping the essence of the book is a different matter entirely. There is nothing definite to be found anywhere: *Naked Lunch* is a novel in which meaning, character relationships, chronology and most of all the polyphonous narrator constantly escape the reader, only to surface again and again in a multitude of varied configurations, some different, some similar, all of them oddly familiar. In Genette's terms, *Naked Lunch* is more about *recit* than about *histoire*, since a definite story cannot be identified while the discourse is omnipresent and overwhelming. The novel constantly echoes itself, its iteration of fixed phrases and their variations forming, according to Lydenberg ("Orifice" 62) 'a surprisingly lyrical refrain', and causing mostly disorientation upon the first reading. In order to encompass the books' narrative, one has to anticipate one of the major points as regards its unique macrostructural layout, since a large part of the confusion arises from the novel's hardly comprehensible order of chapters²⁴.

²² See especially chapter 4.1.

²³ Stephen Sheehan remarks that '[t]here is little recognition of the drug narrative as a genre in mainstream academia and problems such as whether a drug narrative implies all texts written under the influence of drugs or only texts that purport to portray the effects of drug induced perception remain largely unresolved'. Among the works that would belong to such a genre he counts, among others, Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and Welsh's *Trainspotting*.

²⁴ A comprehensive account of the novel's structure can be found in the following subchapter.

For the time being, it is sufficient to state that the chapters of *Naked Lunch* follow no logical or planned structure, but have been arranged randomly by Burroughs, i.e. without any sense of plot progression in mind. This effectively prevents the formation of any conventional plot structure, but it cannot be denied that there is a content level to the ‘kaleidoscope of vistas [and] medley of tunes’ (180) that is *Naked Lunch*, but like all the aspects of the novel discussed so far, it defies, and in turn redefines, any pre-formed notions of how literary works usually function. The novel’s random nature defeats the notion of plot in the sense of ‘[t]he plan, design, scheme or pattern of events in a [...] work of fiction; and, further, the organization of incident and character in such a way as to induce curiosity and suspense [...] in the [...] reader’ (“Plot”), yet there is a profound sense that something similar – the *Naked Lunch*-counterpart of plot, mostly in the form of recurring themes²⁵ – shapes the reading experience nonetheless. The absence of any authorial direction, its replacement by readerly choice and the resulting consequences²⁶ cannot, as macrostructural features, account for the way the book reveals its world to us. For this reason, a discussion of its content layer has to start on a far more basic level, as it defies any regular means of categorisation. The basis of its analysis therefore deals with the novel’s themes, the world schemas evoked by its content, its characters and its implicit and explicit cultural critique. All of these various elements contribute differently to the novel’s unreliability, which is why one has to distinguish between the ‘world-building elements and function-advancing propositions’²⁷ (Stockwell 137) among them. Depending on their belonging to one, both or neither category, their effects are of course different and will be treated accordingly. To sum up, this chapter will probe the content layer or *histoire* of the novel, its “non-plot”, in order to find out how its various themes and movements evoke, accrete, disrupt and refresh world-schemas by making heavy use of defamiliarisation and thus contribute to the profound sense of unreliable narration it evokes.

In his introduction to *Naked Lunch*, J. G. Ballard writes:

From its opening words we are aware that a unique world – comic, paranoid, visionary, delirious – is being revealed to us. Bizarre and nightmarish scenes flash by, like glimpses of some exotic and decadent city. Only later do we realise that this strange city is the one we all inhabit in our waking lives. (3)

²⁵ Considering how these themes surface in most of Burroughs’ works, one might even call them leitmotifs.

²⁶ More on this in chapter 2.2.2.

²⁷ For more on this terminology and a general overview of its field of study, text-world theory, see Stockwell 135-149. For our purposes, the terms used are largely self-explanatory and will therefore be used and, if necessary, explained in their respective contexts.

Ballard mentions several of the cornerstones on which the novel rests: its strange yet eerily familiar text world, its development of action in the form of flashes or glimpses, and the concept of the looming city that overshadows the entire novel and may be regarded as the one true ordering mechanism the text actually makes use of. From this, a simple question arises: how can the ‘unique world’ (3) of the novel be so odd and so well-known at the same time? The answer lies in Burroughs’ powerfully evocative writing and in its constant display of hints and clues towards world schemas everyone can easily make sense of. In *Naked Lunch*, what starts out as a first-order informative scene²⁸ rarely stays that way for very long. Burroughs is a master of schema disruption, and the many unsuspecting schema preserving beginnings of the novel take just as many unexpected twists and turns, displaying not only Burroughs’ ability to turn expectations and anticipations upside down, but also his remarkable ability to imitate an entire catalogue of different jargons, registers and writing styles over the course of the book²⁹.

Exemplary of Burroughs’ narrative, and exemplary of what one can expect from the novel’s many-voiced narrator, is the novel’s beginning, its very first sentence. Here, the scene is set, the ground prepared for things to come. ‘[T]he narrative portion of *Naked Lunch* begins in medias res, with a monologue routine [...] by (Inspector) Bill Lee, huckster, con-man, junkie sizing up the marks—including by implication the reader and implying that what follows—part hard-boiled detective novel, part science fiction hallucination, part social and political satire, part scholarly treatise of underworld jargon—is simply more of Lee [at a usual con routine]’ (Loranger, par. 10). ‘I can feel the heat closing in,’ the as yet unnamed protagonist tells the reader, ‘feel them out there making their moves, setting up their devil doll stool pigeons, crooning over my spoon and dropper I throw away at Washington Square Station, vault a turnstile and two flights down the iron stairs, catch an uptown A train...’ (17) Crammed into this sentence are several clear indicators of the narrator’s intrinsic unreliability. Firstly, his assessment of his surroundings, how he feels ‘the heat closing in on him’ (17), meaning his persecutors gaining ground, makes him sound like a heavy paranoid. Secondly, the waste he disposes of, the ‘spoon and dropper’ (17), are clearly utensils for the intravenous injection of drugs, thus rendering the narrator a – severely paranoid – drug addict (and by the by introducing one of the novel’s major themes, namely that of drugs and addiction).

Furthermore, as Michael Leddy and Ron Loewinsohn have pointed out, the beginning itself is deceitful as regards the relationship between the novel’s narrator and the reader, who is ‘[conned into] a position of greater knowledgeableness [...] than [he] can legitimately claim’ (Loewinsohn 579) by ‘a genuine con [...] to strengthen the sense of community between author

²⁸ Meaning a common scene that can – and often does – occur in everyday reality. See chapter 1.2 for a more detailed explanation.

²⁹ A closer inspection of language schemas and style can be found in chapter 2.2.3.

and audience' (Leddy 34) by a direct address in the novel's first paragraph: 'You know the type [an Ivy League character] comes on with bartenders and cab drivers, talking about right hooks and the Dodgers, call the counterman in Nedick's by his first name.' (17) This and similar reader addresses are typical of Burroughs' seemingly confessional style of writing. As a consequence, the in itself already unreliable narrative the purportedly confessing con-man Lee confronts the audience with is rendered even more unreliable by the evident conning of the reader into a purported familiarity with narrator and narrative that does not actually exist. This strategy in turn exacerbates the unreliability not only of this passage, but of the entire novel, since 'Burroughs is conning the reader, [but] he is also conning himself, becoming entangled in self-contradiction.' (Leddy 35)

Besides, the above-mentioned fact that the narrative is told by a habitual – and per definition unreliable – drug addict is made explicit even before the narrative formally commences³⁰, and it is stressed again and again throughout the novel. Long stretches of narration detail, for instance, how certain drugs are consumed. One learns, among other things, that

[s]hooting PG [presumably paregoric] is a terrible hassle, you have to burn out the alcohol first, then freeze out the camphor and draw this brown liquid off with a dropper – have to shoot it in the vein or you get an abscess, and usually end up with an abscess no matter where you shoot it. Best deal is to drink it with goof balls. . . . (26)

Later, the narrator, i.e. Bill Lee, gives an almost scientific account of the various drug-related issues he experiences. He writes '*Disintoxication Notes*' (55), relates his '*Withdrawal Nightmares*' (55) and even provides '*Habit Notes*' (62) elaborating on his practices of drug abuse and even the chemical nature of the substances concerned:

Shooting Eukodol every two hours [...]
 Eukodol is a chemical variation of codeine – dihydroxy-codeine.
 This stuff comes on more like C [probably cocaine] than M [probably morphine]. . . . [...]
 Eukodol is like a combination of junk [heroin] and C. (62)

Thus the reader is constantly reminded of Lee's physical, but in consequence also mental condition. In other instances, he³¹ even goes so far as admitting that '[certain sections of the book were] written in a stage of Yage [a powerful hallucinogenic substance] intoxication' (93). By these and similar confessions, along with digressions, the acknowledgement of memory deficits, the frequent use of formulaic expressions, fragmented writing and interjections, all of which criteria

³⁰ See also the beginning of chapter 2.1.

³¹ At this point the distinction between Bill Lee and William Burroughs, while blurry from the beginning, becomes increasingly difficult to make. More on this matter can be found towards the end of this chapter.

Gaby Allrath (66) categorises as distinct hints at unreliable narration and all of which feature prominently in *Naked Lunch*, one of the first things the narrative establishes is that caution is advisable as far as the narrator's depiction of events is concerned.

Burroughs' subtle satirical take on governmental forces likewise is established at the very beginning of the novel. It is characteristic of the entire novel and might also be called one of its themes. It even constitutes one of its main world-building elements: by means of schema accretion, Burroughs' cultural critique establishes the bloated, outright absurd bureaucratic power structures that underlie the various public institutions in the book. These are also revealed by another look at the beginning of the novel proper: Between the lines, it is evident that the police are after the narrator, and their 'crooning over [his] spoon' (17) – a display of vile satisfaction over the drug utensil – along with their 'setting up [...] devil doll stool pigeons' (17) – police informants and eavesdroppers – gives them a sadistic, almost perverse quality that all men of the law share in *Naked Lunch*³². Without even naming the forces at play, Burroughs manages to attack law enforcement and the government, and the way this is achieved is, paradoxically, closely linked to the specific form unreliability takes here. The novel's narrator may be epistemologically and morally deficient, but he has neither reason to lie nor to keep information from the reader, which makes his account a faithful, but not necessarily – or not entirely – truthful one. This type of unreliable narration, which Thompson also employs, is often tied to a homodiegetic first person narrator whose unreliability stems not so much from actual mental disorders or complete and utter moral depravity, but from a highly subjective, usually subversive perspective that is at odds with social norms and values and more often than not is fuelled by substance abuse.³³

Narrators of this kind, often outsiders and rebels of some sort, occupy a middle ground between the morally corrupt and the completely delusional in that they are neither madmen nor outright evil. Their warped reality in fact comes from their rejection of social taboos, especially concerning drugs and sexuality, which makes them perfect figures for challenging established values not only in their world, but also in ours. Dagmar Busch lucidly sums up this issue:

Im konventionellen Erzählen werden kollektive Modelle [meaning both accepted social norms, values and practices and common modes of evaluation of events and characters] häufig von der Erzählinstanz vertreten. Dagegen ist beim unzuverlässigen Erzähler, der von der Norm abweicht, zu erwarten, daß kollektive Modelle eher von den anderen Figuren verkörpert werden. Diese kollektiven Figurenperspektiven müssen jedoch keinen verbindlichen Maßstab abgeben. Vielmehr kann durch eine Kontrastierung von Figuren- und Erzählerperspektive auf soziale Mißstände hingewiesen werden, in dem sich die Perspektiven in ihrer Inakzeptabilität gegenseitig erhellen. (53)

³² Hunter S. Thompson expresses similar contempt towards law enforcement in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

³³ See also chapter 4.1.

The outsider perspective of these narrators is usually well above the shackles of political correctness or social contracts. This allows for daring evaluations in many taboo areas, an implication used to staggering effect not only by Burroughs, but also by Hunter S. Thompson. Clearly, *Naked Lunch* is full of criticism directed mainly towards the United States government, but also towards one-dimensional thinking in matters as diverse as religion, sexuality, medicine and economy. Yet this is never made explicit in any way; all these institutions and their foul practices ultimately expose themselves in the course of the narrative³⁴. It seems that by not making cultural critique too obvious, and by letting shady figures from the margins of society voice it, authors can get away with much more drastic food for thought than otherwise³⁵. Lydenberg supports this notion by stating that '[Burroughs]' declared aim [...] is to reverse and explode our assumptions about truth, empiricism, and moral norms.' ("How-To" 78)

From what was discussed so far, it has become clear that in *Naked Lunch* unreliable narration, defamiliarisation, cultural critique and schema disruption go hand in hand to create the fascinating experience the book offers. The atmosphere the novel creates in the first few lines, the world schema evoked, is that of a looming, inhuman mega-city. While the novel starts out in the United States, moving from New York to Chicago on to New Orleans in what seems like a partial rewriting of Jack Kerouac's masterpiece *On the Road*, only with considerably more substance abuse³⁶, 'the reader's hand is being held, unfamiliar habits and expressions being explained as they come up' (Blagrave 52). The schema of drugs and drug addiction that is evoked at the beginning of the novel is not only constantly preserved, but accreted in the course of the novel. This is either done in Burroughs' trademark bracketed explanations, in world-building digressions, or via function-advancing narration, but the effect remains the same: the schema of drugs and drug addiction is probably the one single schema left intact and developed by *Naked Lunch*. In consequence, the single constant in the world of the novel is the interminable substance addiction of its characters. Everything else is necessarily unreliable, since it is filtered through the blurred lens of drug abuse, as is made explicit again and again by strongly formulaic expressions that surface ever so often.

After the novel's first routine, which is still firmly grounded in reality by the constant mention of real locations, it becomes irrelevant whether the action takes place in 'Yemen, Paris, New Orleans, Mexico City [or] Istanbul' (*Naked Lunch* 20). All of them are, at least according to the novel's narrator, more or less the same when it comes to what he calls junk – opiates. It is

³⁴ Since Burroughs, or Lee, is merely a 'recording instrument' (174) (see also below), this is hardly surprising.

³⁵ In the case of *Naked Lunch*, of all such novels, this hardly mattered. The novel was put on trial for obscenity and banned for years despite its unreliable narrator and the relativisation of the novel's content this entails. For an account of the book's trial and censorship, see Whiting.

³⁶ Loewinsohn, on the other hand, sees the two works 'as precisely opposite to one another' (561), which, however, refers more to the production myths of the novels than to the content itself.

notoriously unclear whether this city construct, uniting features of various cosmopolitan cities around the world, is the novel's ground (i.e. as a world-building element of the narrative) or its figure (as a function-advancing proposition). A closer look reveals that it is probably both – it provides the setting as well as, for lack of a better term, parts of the action, and it is as off-putting as it is mesmerising. This place of overlapping cultures, places and people (see below) – apart from the omnipresent addiction, the only true organising factor of the novel – is called Interzone in anticipated Bhabhaesque fashion. If anything, Interzone is a third space turned sick reality, where meaning – and reality – is infinitely negotiated, constantly shifting and endlessly deferred, as is evident by its various nightmarish descriptions.³⁷

The first comprehensive account is remarkable not only for its dynamic description of a place where all things cultural and human not only overlap but mingle, but also for its screenplay style of writing that seems to introduce Interzone in an extensive camera sweep:

Panorama of the City of Interzone. Opening bars of East St. Louis Toodleoo . . . at times loud and clear then faint and intermittent like music down a windy street. . . . The room seems to shake and vibrate with motion. The blood and substance of many races, Negro, Polynesian, Mountain Mongol, Desert Nomad, Polyglot Near East, Indian – races as yet unconceived and unborn, combinations not yet realized pass through your body. [...] The *Composite City* [my emphasis] where all human potentials are spread out in a vast silent market. (91)

This 'Composite City' (91) Burroughs presents here encompasses elements of megacities from all around the world, rendering its culture and population both universal and unique, different but equal; existing everywhere, anywhere and nowhere at the same time:

All houses in the city are joined. Houses of sod – high mountain Mongols blink in smokey doorways – houses of bamboo and teak, houses of adobe, stone and red brick, South Pacific and Maori houses, houses in trees and river boats, wood houses one hundred feet long sheltering entire tribes, houses of boxes and corrugated iron where old men sit in rotten rags cooking down canned heat, great rusty iron racks rising two hundred feet in the air from swamps and rubbish with perilous partitions built on multi-levelled platforms, and hammocks swinging over the void. (92)

The convoluted mass of intersecting cultures and peoples – and ultimately people as such – is dazzling, an effect mainly achieved by Burroughs' references to cultural artefacts that immediately allow for connections with real world knowledge. One might argue the trigger words and key information used are rather clichéd, but this in fact only increases their collective impact. Apart from naming the various cultures and peoples involved (which in itself strongly relates to world

³⁷ For an interesting allegorical reading of Interzone, see Loewinsohn 571.

knowledge already), Burroughs mentions their housing, living conditions, even their food, drugs and their music.

Cooking smells of all countries hang over the City, a haze of opium, hashish, the resinous red smoke of Yage, smell of the jungle and salt water and the rotting river and dried excrement and sweat and genitals.

High mountain flutes, jazz and bebop, one-stringed Mongol instruments, gypsy xylophones, African drums, Arab bagpipes. . . . (92-93)

Later in the novel, the description of Interzone takes on a more allegoric quality. The notion that '[a]ll houses in the city are joined' is subjected to an even more drastic reinterpretation:

The Zone is a single, vast building. The rooms are made of a plastic cement that bulges to accommodate people, but when too many crowd into one room there is a soft plop and someone squeezes through the wall right into the next house, the next bed that is, since the rooms are mostly bed where the business of the zone is transacted. A hum of sex and commerce shakes the Zone like a vast hive[.] (143)

These accounts of the Zone not only prove that nothing is fixed or certain in Interzone; its seemingly animated, biological, living quality also hints at how blurry the borders of body and character are in the novel (more on this later). Descriptions such as the above also have an implicit metafictional quality that hints at the unreliable nature of the book itself, which, similar to its capital city, is a conjoined mass of intersecting literary traditions, jargons and voices just as much as it is a mixture of overlapping and inseparable reality and hallucination. 'In place of the order and hierarchy imposed by conventional language, Burroughs produces a text that functions by horizontal juxtaposition and discontinuity, creating a network of infinite and shifting intersections.' (Lydenberg, "Orifice" 70)

The accounts of Interzone furthermore show how Burroughs manages to narrate places and things both familiar and disturbingly different. This effect is in large parts due to Burroughs' ability to assign names and properties to characters, places and entities that echo those of our own world but also possess profoundly defamiliarised characteristics. Interzone itself sounds like a term coined by the public relations department of some petty bureaucracy. In addition, Burroughs includes constant acidic asides against big government through the introduction of Interzone's various malicious and perverse institutions and parties.³⁸ By these means he manages to achieve a truly horrifying familiarity effect, which is exacerbated by the Zone's background and its otherworldly inhabitants.

³⁸ For an elaborate discussion of Interzone's parties and their party politics, see especially Loewinsohn.

Despite the fact that one only late in the novel actually finds out about the parties and organisation of Interzone, it is one of the cornerstones of *Naked Lunch* as far as satire and cultural critique are concerned. One of the main players in Interzone is, for instance, a corporation called Islam Inc., which also employs the novel's narrator (119), is 'financed by A.J., the notorious merchant of sex' (119). 'Salvador Hassan O'Leary, the After Birth Tycoon, is also involved' (119) in it:

That is, one of his subsidiary companies has made unspecified contributions, and one of his subsidiary personalities is attached to the organization in an advisory capacity without in any way committing himself to, or associating himself with, the policies, actions or objectives of Islam Inc. [...]

A rout of Mullahs and Muftis and Husseins and Caidis and Glaouis and Sheiks and Sultans and Holy Men and representatives of every conceivable Arab party make up the rank and file and attend the actual meetings from which the higher ups prudently abstain. Though the delegates are carefully searched at the door, these gatherings invariably culminate in riots. Speakers are often doused with gasoline and burned to death, or some uncouth desert Sheik opens up on his opponents with a machine gun he had concealed in the belly of a pet sheep. Nationalist martyrs with grenades up the ass mingle with the assembled conferents and suddenly explode, occasioning heavy casualties. . . . And there was the occasion when President Ra threw the British Prime Minister to the ground and forcibly sodomized him, the spectacle being televised to the entire Arab world. (119-120)

From today's standpoint, this passage is highly problematic for its socio-religious implications. Clearly, it cannot be taken as a serious evaluation of the Arab world in any way. Instead, it combines Eastern and Western clichés (of Islam on the one hand and of multinational corporations on the other) and thus ridicules both East and West in a highly unorthodox (and nowadays no less than unthinkable) combination. At this point, however, the reader has become so used to Burroughs' constant breaks of taboo and outright offensive passages that the above does not even stand out particularly. Rather, it is merely one of the many bizarre incidents in the novel that, as I mentioned above, start out (relatively) harmlessly but turn out disastrous in a matter of minutes.

Here, the polished "corporate speak" at the beginning of the paragraph reads like just another business newspaper, except for Salvador Hassan O'Leary's 'subsidiary personalities' (119). O'Leary himself is typical of Burroughs' knack for colourful and provocative naming, as is also evident from the corporation the 'After Birth Tycoon' (119) is associated with: Islam Inc. paints the practices and policies of Islam as a religion as nothing more than yet another means of oppression and, in ultimate consequence, just another model of corporate business employed by those powerful few at the top of any given political entity and thus links it to the purely economical thinking that is usually attributed to the Western world. Many such passages are inserted throughout the novel, comic asides that provide detail and background to the places and institu-

tions featuring in the book. As such, they constitute world-building elements and thereby contribute to the text world knowledge of the reader. The details of legislative and governmental apparatuses comment on bureaucracy and statesmanship in general – evidently one of Burroughs’ pet peeves – and take on many forms in the course of time.

There is, for instance, the country of ‘Annexia’ (31), the name being a word-play on U.S. foreign policies in South America and Africa, in which the notorious Dr. Benway instigates ‘Total Demoralization’ (31). This he achieves by establishing a bureaucracy that completely overshadows everyday life and is reminiscent of the dystopian governments of Orwell, Bradbury or Huxley, but also of the famous Circumlocution Office in Dickens’ *Little Dorrit*, taking these ideas to absurd extremes: ‘Every citizen in Annexia was required to apply for and carry on his person at all times a whole portfolio of documents,’ (31) a measure constantly supervised by ‘Examiner[s], who might be in plain clothes, in various uniforms, often in a bathing suit or in pyjamas, sometimes stark naked except for a badge pinned to [their] left nipple[s]’ (31). Furthermore,

[d]ocuments issued in vanishing ink faded into old pawn tickets. New documents were constantly required. The citizens rushed from one bureau to another in a frenzied attempt to meet impossible deadlines. (32)

This document merry-go-round driving people insane is of course a satire of every bloated bureaucracy in the world; once again a well-established schema is disrupted by second order information. Later, we learn that

[d]emocracy is cancerous, and bureaus are its cancer. A bureau takes root anywhere in the state, turns malignant [...], and grows and grows, always reproducing more of its own kind, until it chokes the host if not controlled or excised. [...] Bureaucracy is wrong as a cancer [...] (111)

The effect of Burroughs’ provocative take on government officials rests on its close resemblance to the world of the reader: it is a freakishly distorted equivalent of the world as we all know it, which is what makes *Naked Lunch* the powerful satire it is.

Legislation is not the only target of Burroughs’ biting cynicism, however. When ‘the electronic brain [goes] berserk playing six-dimensional chess with the Technician and releases every subjct [sic] in the R.C. [Freeland’s Reconditioning Center, a mental institution headed by Benway]’ (42), chaos ensues: Apart from the usual deranged suspects,

[a] contingent of howling simopaths swing from chandeliers, balconies and trees, shitting and pissing on passersby. (A simopath [...] is a citizen convinced he is an ape or other simian. It is a disorder peculiar to the army, and discharge cures it.) (42-43)

Even worse,

[a] battalion of rampant bores prowls the streets and hotel lobbies in search of victims. An intellectual avantgardist – “Of course the only writing worth considering now is to be found in scientific reports and periodicals” – has given someone a bulbocapnine injection and is preparing to read him a bulletin on “the use of neohemoglobin in the control of multiple degenerative granuloma.” (Of course, the reports are all gibberish he has concocted and printed up.)

His opening words: “You look to me like a man of intelligence.” (Always ominous words, my boy . . . When you hear them stay not on the order of your going but go at once.) (43)

After the weird, the diseased and the disgusting, the avantgardists and bores take over as the scourge of intellectual society. Clearly, Burroughs is as critical of the so-called avantgarde as he is of almost anything else. Once again, his critique of contemporary society is packed in an apocalyptic scene that is rather world- and atmosphere-building than function-advancing, a winding digression instead of plot advancement. The prominent position of these musings allows them in fact to cross over from being ground elements to being figure as well. The frequent bracketed comments, addressed to the reader as a confidante, only add to this almost journalistic report, which may indeed be considered Swiftian in scope and execution.

It is hardly surprising that the academic world also features in another world-building digression, one that is not even remotely connected to the whereabouts and projects of Bill Lee. The students at Interzone University ‘smoke gage (marijuana) in cigarettes made of wrapping paper and lottery tickets . . . shoot junk with a safety pin and dropper, study racing forms, comic books, Mayan codices’ (75). Naturally, the validity of this institution, where the students openly take drugs and their professor subsequently ‘arrives on a bicycle carrying a string of bull heads’ (76) is rather questionable. The professor, discussing ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner by Coleridge the poet’ (77), does little but ramble about the similarities between the social conduct of baboons and how it relates to the poem. Ultimately, ‘[p]igs rush up and the Prof. pours buckets of pearls into a trough’ (78) – a scene that we may interpret as indicative of what Burroughs considers higher education to come down to.

In a similar vein, the novel debunks the American fixation on history and heritage and several American master narratives in one powerful sweep. Through an open door in a hospital corridor a detoxing Bill Lee comes to witness a ridiculous performance of American culture, exposed by Burroughs with unmatched disgust as shallow, superficial and immensely stupid:

An elderly man in the striped pants and cutaway of the diplomat stands on a platform draped with the American flag. A decayed, corseted tenor – bursting out of a Daniel

Boone costume – is singing the *Star Spangled Banner*, accompanied by a full orchestra. He sings with a slight lisp. . . .

THE DIPLOMAT (reading from a great scroll of ticker tape that keeps growing and tangling around his feet): “And we categorically deny that any male citizen of the United States of America . . .”

TENOR: “Oh thay can you thee . . .” His voice breaks and shoots up to a high falsetto.

In the control room the Technician [...] mutters sourly. [...] “[...] Put in that sex-changed Liz athlete [instead of the tenor]. . . . She’s a fulltime tenor at least. . . . Costume? [...] Let’s see . . . How about an Indian routine? Pocahontas or Hiawatha? . . . No, that’s not right. Some citizen cracks wise about giving it back to the Indians. . . . A Civil War uniform, the coat North and the pants South like it show [sic] they got together again? She can come on like Buffalo Bill or Paul Revere or that citizen wouldn’t give up the shit, I mean the ship, or a G.I. or a Doughboy or the unknown soldier That’s the best deal. . . . Cover her with a monument, that way nobody has to look at her. . . .”

The lesbian, concealed in a *papier maché* Arc de Triomphe fills her great lungs and looses a tremendous bellow.

“Oh say do that Star Spangled Banner yet wave . . .”

A great rent rips the Arc de Triomphe from top to bottom. [...]

THE DIPLOMAT: “That any male citizen of the United States has given birth in Interzone or at any other place. . . .”

“O’er the land of the FREEEEEEEEEEEE . . .”

[...]

The Arc de Triomphe falls with a ripping, splintering crash, reveals the Lesbian standing on a pedestal clad only in a leopard-skin jockstrap [...]

The Diplomat (wiping sweat from his brow): “To any creature of any type or description . . .”

“And the home of the brave.”

The Diplomat’s face is grey. He staggers, trips in the scroll, sags against the rail, blood pouring from his eyes, nose and mouth, dying of cerebral hemorrhage.

THE DIPLOMAT (barely audible): “The Department denies . . . un-American . . . it’s been destroyed . . . I mean it never was . . . Categor . . .” *Dies.* (60-61)

By simply mentioning names, the text shows how strongly evocative of connected world schema cultural artefacts have become. But not only does the above scene show how American culture is in fact nothing but a ridiculous performance, a mere show, it also clearly indicates how all the stories of which American history is made up are completely interchangeable. As is stated later in the novel, ‘there’s always a space *between*, in popular songs and Grade B movies, giving away the basic American rottenness’ (111). To this exact space Burroughs shifts the focus of the book, especially so in the passage quoted above. While everyone knows romanticised schemas of American cultural history and its present performativity, here we learn what goes on behind the scenes, behind the façade of American culture. Since there is no costume prepared for the lesbian, the technician simply goes through the whole lot of hollow disguises without any actual meaning; the only requirement seems to be some reference to heritage and culture – a simple name-dropping of iconic cultural elements. That the lesbian ultimately dresses up as an Arc de Triomphe shows the eclectic and borrowed quality of American culture.

The grisly scene, as witnessed by a then-hospitalised Bill Lee, shows also Lee's role as a casual observer, a passive receptor who hardly ever becomes active. Most of the time, he is an invisible reflector character revealing the events of the novel to the reader. When he actually features, the narrative shifts from third to first person and back again, which makes it increasingly difficult to decide who it is that speaks, and who narrates. This shifting of perspective is ultimately indicative of the shifting and constant bodily change he and all the characters in *Naked Lunch* go through. Bodies are no fixed entities, and their transformation is often instantaneous. Lee himself, for instance, is called 'El Hombre Invisible – the Invisible Man' (63) because of his unique bodily properties.

In the beginning his flesh was simply soft, so soft that he was cut to the bone by dust particles, air currents and brushing overcoats [...].
 During his first severe infection the boiling thermometer flashed a quicksilver bullet into the nurse's brain and she fell dead with a mangled scream. [...]
 But the infection burned the mold out. . . . Lee lived now in varying degrees of transparency. . . . While not exactly invisible he was at least difficult to see. *His presence attracted no special notice* [my emphasis]. . . . (66)

Lee's blending³⁹ with the background – or ground, to use the appropriate term from cognitive poetics – explains his almost constant absence from the actual narrative. While it is made clear several times that he is, in fact, the autodiegetic narrator of *Naked Lunch*, he only occasionally turns up in the novel in which he is actually supposed to be the protagonist.

In his stead, we are introduced to the many grotesque life forms that inhabit the Zone. Most of them were humans once, but have been transformed into something entirely different, frequently as a result of substance abuse – as is the case with Bill Lee as well. In the case of the Vigilante,

[t]he physical changes were slow at first, then jumped forward in black klunks, falling through his slack tissue, washing away the human lines. . . . In his place of total darkness mouth and eyes are one organ that leaps forward to snap with transparent teeth . . . but no organ is constant as regards either function or position . . . sex organs sprout anywhere . . . rectums open, defecate and close . . . the entire organism changes color and consistency in split second adjustments. . . . (22)

The Vigilante illustrates how tissue in *Naked Lunch* is mere raw material that is always open for adjustment or complete redefinition. The spontaneous transmogrification of humans makes the

³⁹ Lee shares his semi-transparent qualities with Dr. Benway, whose face is 'subject at any moment to unspeakable cleavage or metamorphoses' (36) and which 'flickers like a picture moving in and out of focus' (36), as well as with the Sailor, whose 'face dissolve[s]' (53) and '[comes] back into focus unbearably sharp and clear' (53). As is made clear at the end of the novel, this is anything but a coincidence (see below).

world of *Naked Lunch* one of potentials⁴⁰ as opposed to a world of definites. Here, transformation is not a matter of evolution, but rather of degradation; it is addiction that changes one's body. For this reason, these processes are also 'necessarily brutal, obscene and disgusting' (11-12). The junk addicts Burroughs creates follow what he dubs the '*Algebra of Need*' (8) in the novel's introduction – an equation in which '[A]be addict[s] in the street who must have junk to live [are] the one irreplaceable factor' (9). Not only their life, but their entire existence is geared towards a single purpose, they are ultimately specialised beings in what they do.⁴¹ While this evocation of world knowledge is highly disruptive, it is also a highly relevant commentary on the effects of human need, addiction and greed. 'In *Naked Lunch* addiction to drugs serves as the master metaphor for addiction in general-to sex, to power, and to security' (Loewinsohn 564). At the Boston obscenity trial, Allen Ginsberg furthermore emphasised 'addiction to material goods [and] addiction to controlling others' (Morgan 346). In one way or another, these or similar forces do indeed turn humans into driven beings who only live to fill their need, regardless of the form it may have taken. As Ron Loewinsohn puts it, '[t]he cost of these addictions is always the loss of individual will and subjecthood' (565).

This is instrumental to understand the world of *Naked Lunch* and the characters that inhabit it. Physical degradation not only befalls outright junkies, but the entire cast of characters, regardless of their motives:

Take Bradley the Buyer. Best narcotics agent in the industry. [...] Well [he] comes to look more and more like a junky. He can't drink. He can't get it up. His teeth fall out. [...] The buyer takes on an ominous grey-green color. Fact is his body is making its own junk or equivalent. (27)

Interzone is full of characters that undergo a transformation or a series of transformations somehow or other connected with the junk epidemic that has befallen the world of the novel and, as Burroughs makes painstakingly clear in the beginning, the real world as well. For him, addiction is 'a general condition not limited to drugs' (Morgan 351), and it relates to '[p]olitics, religion, the family [and] love' (Morgan 351) just as much as it relates to drugs. As a consequence, primeval forces take control over body and mind and result in the novel's characters turning to basic urges and instincts – a development that Hunter S. Thompson will later paraphrase at the beginning of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* with the words of Samuel Johnson: "He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man." (ix) In *Naked Lunch*, this regression to almost pre-

⁴⁰ See also the description of Interzone discussed earlier in this chapter.

⁴¹ For a detailed discussion of the dehumanisation, amputation and truncation the characters in *Naked Lunch* are subjected to, see Robin Lydenberg's article "Notes from the Orifice: Language and the Body in William Burroughs."

historic existence in the face of addiction illuminates the motivations that govern all human actions: total desire and total need, both of which are written into the faces and bodies of the creatures inhabiting the novel.

Precisely these forces prevent actual development or progress of any kind in the novel. In an ultimate twist of unreliability, a strongly metareferential instance breaks open the text world and reaches over into the world we all know, and all of a sudden William Burroughs himself speaks out, as if waking from coma:

There is only one thing a writer can write about: *what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing*. . . . I am a recording instrument. . . . I do not presume to impose “story” “plot” “continuity.” [...]

Sometimes an entity jumps in the body [...]. As if I was usually there but subject to goof now and again. . . . [...]

[...]

Sooner or later The Vigilante, The Rube, Lee The Agent, A.J., Clem and Jody The Ergot Twins, Hassan O’Leary the After Birth Tycoon, The Sailor, The Exterminator, Andrew Keif, “Fats” Terminal, Doc Benway, “Fingers” Schafer are subject to say the same thing in the same words to occupy, at that intersection point, the same position in space-time. Using a common vocal apparatus that is to be the same person – a most inaccurate way of expressing *Recognition*: the junky naked in sunlight . . . (174-175)

Burroughs’ role as a ‘recording instrument’ (174) is in complete accord with that of Lee’s throughout the novel⁴², who in turn, together with almost all of the characters that play some role, is exposed as no more than a facet, an aspect, a part of Burroughs’ drug-riddled self at a certain ‘intersection point’ (175) in ‘space-time’ (175). By this ‘conflation of narrative identities’ (Loranger, par. 14), the narrative has gone full circle. There is a sense that one has arrived at the very beginning of the novel once again, even before the inception of its narrative, since its final routine, bearing the telling name ‘ATROPHIED PREFACE’ (172), is underwritten ‘*Tangier, 1959*’ (184) in the same fashion as the novel’s satellite texts discussed in the previous chapter. The reader has, in this way, moved backwards in time, before the novel’s introduction, in a truly Shandean twist by which the text is seemingly cancelled out. Robin Lydenberg describes this effect as ‘reading [...] by a peculiar kind of looping process which continually revises and begins again.’ (“How-To” 82) As a result, the borders between narrative and paratext are ultimately and indistinguishably blurred, and the deictic pop to the authorial level of the text reveals that this level has, in fact, been part of the narrative all along.

In this sense, Stephen Sheehan notes that

⁴² See the above mentions of Lee as the invisible man – the invisible narrator of *Naked Lunch*.

[o]f all texts, it might be said that in *Naked Lunch* the difference between drug induced narrative and the rest of the text is indistinguishable, that the whole of *Naked Lunch* is the product of a drug altered authorial consciousness. However, *Naked Lunch* is not simply a diary, a direct recording of drug induced experience. It is as a result of the perception that *Naked Lunch* is made up wholly of a drug narrative that it has been regarded as a simplistic text and beneath serious intellectual scrutiny. *Naked Lunch* is a text made up of numerous different narrative voices that play off each other, including detective, medicinal, pharmacological, carnival and legal narratives, and in such play formulate the satirical, polyphonic structure of this text.

[...] [T]he most serious misreading of *Naked Lunch* is the one that reduces the text to a single, monologic, monoglot drug narrative: this is precisely what *Naked Lunch*, of all texts, is not. Drug narrative is an integral aspect of *Naked Lunch* but its importance is in large part derived from the fact that it is but one narrative kind amongst many in this text.

The content level of the novel, therefore, is inherently unreliable. Its unreliability stems from constant schema evocation and disruption, but also from the incoherent, random and episodic presentation of its plot, which, like the novel's characters or its capital city of Interzone, is a blur of intersecting, overlapping and ultimately inseparable but constantly moving parts. What remains true for all of the novel's routines, however, is a fascination with addiction in all its forms, which becomes the one true focal point of the narrative and with it, a constant reminder of the hallucinatory and intrinsically doubtful quality of the text, to which Burroughs' heavy use of irony and satirical asides contribute as well. Constant schema evocation and disruption are the main tools by which not only the text's cultural critique, but also its inherent unreliability works. Naturally, any discussion of *Naked Lunch's* content level can only be an approximation of the novel's actual content, but with its tendencies and themes outlined, an investigation into its macrostructure – or lack thereof – will hopefully shed more light onto the way the book eludes any conventional sense of plot and narration while still retaining a high degree of (schematic knowledge-influenced) accessibility.

2.2.2. MACROSTRUCTURE: EXCEPTIONS TO THE ROUTINE

Burroughs' biographer Ted Morgan writes that '[i]n form, *Naked Lunch* [is] startling, bearing as much resemblance to the conventional novel as a videotape to the Bayeux tapestry, or a strobe light to a candle' (350). Indeed, its structural layout is – similar to its content – anything but a straightforward matter; its conception is highly unique, especially for a novel, and unprecedented in the literary world. 'The narrative portion of *Naked Lunch* consists of twenty-three routines, drawn, according to the mythology, from letters, sketches and a detective pot-boiler written by

Burroughs during the Tangier period' (Loranger, par. 6). These routines⁴³, and especially their arrangement, were in a constant state of flux over the first few editions or, as Stephen Sheehan puts it, saw 'a number of births and rebirths'. Neither their patterning nor their content remained the same⁴⁴, which is why the structural layout of *Naked Lunch* demands special consideration. This is highly paradoxical: the novel itself makes it impossible for the reader to focus on a structure or order of its routines, yet their very randomness warrants closer inquiry. In other words: by abandoning the significance of any traceable structure, Burroughs manages to draw all the more attention to the absence thereof. Here, schema abandonment – the most radical form of schema disruption – leads to schema refreshment. Since the macrostructure and content of any text are inextricably connected, it is necessary for an understanding of the novel's content to dwell on the consequences of Burroughs' radical disruption of established textual schemas.

However, as a preliminary to a closer examination of these issues, it might be useful to consider what literary tradition Burroughs himself had in mind when putting together the novel in the first place:

Burroughs' intention was to adopt the oldest fiction format in the world, the picaresque novel: a series of events, horrific and humorous, that occur on a trip, as in Petronius's *Satyricon*. (Morgan 350)

Of course the novel transcends the literary schema for picaresque novels, but two of its central elements – that it consists of a series of loosely, or even unconnected episodes through which the protagonist stumbles without any real sense of direction or plot progression, and that its protagonists are rogues, petty criminals bent on mischief – are also instrumental for *Naked Lunch*. As far as the latter is concerned, William Lee is, after all, a con man, an outlaw agent and drug addict, which more than qualifies him for the role of a down and out postmodern picaro. As for the former, one might argue that the structural, or textual schema picaresque novels entail is not necessarily disrupted, but rather accreted. Burroughs takes the notion of loosely strung together episodes to a new extreme by abandoning all semblances of connection among the routines for good and, as if that alone were not enough, by arranging them at random to further defeat any regular textual advancement.

⁴³ This term for the novel's chapters was, according to Loranger, used by Burroughs himself to evoke notions of con-artistry prevalent in the book. Weinreich, however, claims routines to be 'analogous to the tales told by drinkers at a bar' (74).

⁴⁴ For a comprehensive account of the changes made, both in terms of content and arrangement, see Loranger pars. 8-10. For a comprehensive account of the novel's compilation and the controversy surrounding it, see Morgan 327-359. Since neither the actual reordering nor the technicalities of the book's compilation are relevant to this paper, I will not go into more detail here.

But there is a method to, a concept behind this madness.⁴⁵ Clearly, Burroughs' shuffling of routines, which is what makes the reading of *Naked Lunch* a necessarily non-sequential affair, holds an important message for its audience:

You can cut into *Naked Lunch* at any intersection point.... I have written many prefaces. They atrophy and amputate spontaneous [...]
Naked Lunch is a blueprint, a How-To Book.... (176)

This hint, which comes as a part of the 'ATROPHIED PREFACE' (172), the novel's 'provocatively displaced' (Lydenberg, "How-To" 76) last routine, instructs us that *Naked Lunch* is not to be read as a regular novel. The implications are manifold: taking this into account, one cannot but feel that the novel's constant non-sequitur, its incoherent and basically nonexistent plot in the regular sense and its spatio-temporal arrangement extending over into its paratexts suddenly make sense. If the novel is, in fact, 'a blueprint' (176), it is entirely up to its readers, in reading it, to create its meaning, to put the pieces – and there are many – back together as they see fit. Loranger tersely sums up this point by noting that 'even before its first publication, Burroughs may be seen relinquishing authority over the novel, allowing it to begin to *form itself* [my emphasis]' (par. 7).⁴⁶

Abandoning any fixed form, the creator offers up his work to the audience to do with it as they please and thereby deliberately and consciously achieves what Roland Barthes would only later call the death of the author (Sheehan, also Loranger, par. 5):

The Word is divided into units which be all in one piece and should be so taken, but *the pieces can be had in any order* [my emphasis] being tied up back and forth, in and out fore and aft like an innaresting [sic] sex arrangement. This book spill [sic] off the page in all directions, kaleidoscope of vistas, medley of tunes and street noises, farts and riot yipes and the slamming steel shutters of commerce, screams of pain and pathos and screams plain pathic, copulating cats and outraged squawk of the displaced bull head, prophetic mutterings of brujo in nutmeg trances, snapping necks and screaming mandrakes, sigh of orgasm, heroin silent as dawn in the thirsty cells, Radio Cairo screaming like a berserk tobacco auction, and flutes of Ramadan fanning the sick junky like a gentle lush worker in the grey subway dawn feeling with delicate fingers for the green folding crackle.... (180)

⁴⁵ Apart from the attempt at an explanation given here, there is also Ron Loewinsohn's extremely helpful take on the structure of the novel, which also takes the pre- and posttexts of the work into account. For him, '[t]he descent into addiction destabilizes [the text world], and this is the shift that the structure of *Naked Lunch* plays out' (566). For a detailed interpretation, see Loewinsohn 566.

⁴⁶ Burroughs, in letters to Allen Ginsberg, even claims that the various routines that make up *Naked Lunch* 'come to him unbidden [...] as if he were a dummy, mouthing the words of some ventriloquist' (Loewinsohn 577). This is further supported by the previously quoted revelation that the novel's narrator is a mere 'recording instrument' (174). On the absence of the author and/or narrator in *Naked Lunch*, see also Leddy.

In the spirit of *Naked Lunch* as a ‘How-To Book’ (176), Burroughs presents its poetics, the key to its mythology, and probably the only synopsis of it that may actually stand. The powerful imagery of the above paragraph not only sums up the novel, but it also provides directions – in fact the only direction it offers its readers – on how to approach it. This creates unreliability on an entirely new level, namely on that of the reader⁴⁷. The reader no longer only detects unreliable narration (which is still plentiful in the novel’s hazily recounted episodes), but also creates it through a certain reading of the book. Since it is up to the novel’s audience to make meaning of the novel’s routines, it is also up to them to think of links that tie them together; links that are neither available nor actually exist except in the individual – and unique – reading in which they occur. They are entirely shaped by the novel’s readers, and the “plot” they form is different with every reading, thus allowing for an unlimited number of different takes on the book⁴⁸. From a cognitive point of view, *Naked Lunch* extends the role of its readers from being mere receptors to being active participants, in some ways even filling the gaps that Burroughs’ conscious withdrawal from authorship left open.

Burroughs himself, also in the ‘ATROPHIED PREFACE’ (172), tells us that ‘[he] do[es] not presume to impose “story” “plot” “continuity” ’ (174), which is why the reader is left with a hardly comprehensible amount of routines that, even though they are all interconnected, cannot make up any plot progression in the regular sense.⁴⁹ Their ambivalence and their removedness from a clearly defined temporal order make it outright impossible to construct a definite timeline for the events they describe. Even more so, the narrative is constantly broken by deictic shifts in the form of bracketed expressions and winding digressions, in themselves hardly classifiable as pushes or pops, so that any attempt at establishing a valid macrostructure becomes impossible. This textual layout is an intrinsic part of the narrative’s unreliable nature – while it is possible to make sense of the text, almost all cognitive processes that normally define the reading of a novel are simply not applicable in the case of *Naked Lunch*. Instead, one is left with microstructural artefacts; the novel resembles more a corpus than a coherent text. Yet a sequential reading of the book does give a sense of development, of progression, because the text schemas readers of literature are used to, together with their knowledge that they are dealing with a novel in the broadest sense, seem to have an incredible hold on the recipients. In reading the novel, one therefore out of habit constructs a development of action that is never made explicit or even hinted at in the text as such.

⁴⁷ Clearly, this notion stands outside the model I proposed in chapter 1.2. The absence of any implicit or explicit direction for the reader warrants this mention, however, especially since it is unique to *Naked Lunch*.

⁴⁸ While one might argue that this is the case with every work of fiction, there is hardly any book for which such a statement holds more truth than *Naked Lunch*.

⁴⁹ Plot, as quoted in the previous chapter, can be defined as a meaningful ordering of events (“Plot”).

This imagined order of things offers some fascinating insights about how textual schemas actually work. When reading, one puts the building blocks of a text in perspective by applying what Ansgar Nünning calls literary knowledge to them. In the case of *Naked Lunch*, literary knowledge is all that is actually applicable to the text, since the novel does not have any macro-structural order to begin with. The order of the routines in the novel seems to fill various slots the textual schema for hard boiled detective fiction entails: the story begins in medias res with agent Bill Lee on the run from the cops – a simple chase scenario that is even more clichéd nowadays than it was at the time of writing. For Ron Loewinsohn, Lee's escape is 'a literal descent into the underworld' (566), as from now on 'the prose becomes progressively more and more surreal; the imagery, the personnel, the locations-all become more and more bizarre' (566). What follows is Lee's departure from the United States to Interzone. At this point textual schemas, which only shakily fitted the text in the first place, completely cease to function. This not only stresses the blurred reality of Interzone but also means complete that readers have to rely completely on their literary knowledge from now on.

This reliance on literary knowledge is necessary insofar as the routines that follow usually fail to clarify where, when and how they belong into the novel's "non-plot". Experienced readers of literature, however, look for connections that establish links between the routines. After all, it is not uncommon for novelists to disrupt textual schemas in order to create suspense, confusion or plot twists, which is what a cursory glance at *Naked Lunch* might imply. Almost every routine does indeed require readers to begin anew in making sense of the events, dialogue and even characters it contains. Ultimately,

[t]he reader is expected to supply missing links, construct wholes from parts, make metonymic connections, compare "shot" to "shot" and "sequence" to "sequence," as it were, in order to construct the novel. Burroughs, like a film-maker, supplies the clues and cues only. (Blaggrave 55)

What mainly accounts for this phenomenon are, as Blaggrave mentions, the countless textual clues scattered throughout the text: Burroughs' use of fixed phrases, expressions and often entire sentences⁵⁰ that mimic or directly quote other passages of the book leaves the reader with a constant sense of déjà vu (which imitates the flashbacks of opiate addiction and withdrawal) and serves to link even those routines that seem to have no place in the novel whatsoever. Still, it is strictly speaking only their embeddedness in the novel's corpus of routines and their interconnected web of references that makes them interpretable in such a way.

⁵⁰ An example of this being for instance Burroughs' regular mention that '[t]he addict can spend eight hours looking at a wall' (41) or a shoe (10, 15). This and similarly repeated pieces of information contribute strongly to the readers' schema of opiate addiction and addicts and have to be considered world-building elements of the novel, providing ground for the narrative.

This intertextual compatibility among the individual routines means that the audience itself is ultimately responsible for a major part of the novel's unreliability. Allen Ginsberg hit the nail on the head in stating that *Naked Lunch* in fact followed "a psychic structure" (Sawyer-Laucanno qtd. in Weinreich 82) – one that is not so much that of its author but that of its reader. As it is up to the reader to string the novel's various parts together and form some sense of progression, it is precisely the individual reading that may or may not lack consistency and actual development. There is no single correct way of ordering the routines, which, as was already noted above, makes discussing the novel by regular means almost impossible. This '[lack of] both a unified consciousness and the standard continuities of time and space that characterize conventional novels' (Whiting 158) makes every reading unique, since different aspects spring to attention with every new attempt at the book. Burroughs' insistence on the absence of ' "story" "plot" "continuity" ' (174) demands that the readers fill in the gaps themselves. Clearly, 'the novel's success, as it itself insists, depends on the reader's active, shaping involvement in the process of reconstruction and interpretation' (Murphy qtd. in Blagrove 90). It is therefore all the more surprising how easily one manages to navigate the episodes of *Naked Lunch*, which once again is mainly due to a certain common knowledge of how literary texts, and especially novels, normally work. Though *Naked Lunch* does not, in fact, function in any way that novels usually do, it is still possible – and ultimately necessary – to construe the set pieces it offers in a somewhat coherent way.

What poses a problem in this respect is the novel's very unclear distinction between figure and ground – a differentiation that is relatively straightforward in most other fiction and allows for the easy determination of macrostructure and its various components. Whereas the interplay between atmosphere and plot progression usually enables us to find and establish certain stages in the structure of a novel, *Naked Lunch* defies this approach entirely and intently⁵¹. Over wide stretches of narrative, there is no real action to speak of, but rather descriptions and elaborate histories of places, institutions and characters. While these elements cannot be considered as function-advancing, i.e. plot-advancing, in any way (if they were, they would serve as figure instead of as ground for the narrative), they still somehow form the figure, and not the ground of the novel. Since the focus is shifted to what are de facto mere world-building elements, they become surprisingly prominent and so fill the slot normally occupied by function advancing propositions. This is highly unusual for novels, and it is another factor that makes reading *Naked Lunch* different – and difficult. Readers are not used to paying careful attention to what would count as ground in many other novels, which is why '*Naked Lunch* demands Silence from The Reader' (177). It is full of '[d]oors that only open in *Silence*' (177), doors the reader must find and open in order to grasp the many interconnections among the shuffled routines of the book.

⁵¹ See the beginning of this chapter.

Naked Lunch is mostly concerned with presenting a world to its readers, a world that is built and fleshed out in the course of the book. This is done from a multitude of perspectives and in various voices, but the fact remains that there is hardly any action that would drive the plot of the novel forward. When there is actual development, the textual schemas that govern our reading immediately kick in and construe these routines in a certain way. It is precisely for this reason that the penultimate routine⁵² of the book – ‘HAUSER AND O’BRIEN’ (166) – comes across as the climax of the novel, its final shoot-out or face-off between what can hardly be called the narrative’s protagonist (who hardly acts at all) and his adversaries, who seem to be the “feds” that have pursued him since the beginning. This entire notion stems only from the reader’s knowledge of how narratives (be they crime fiction, Westerns or thrillers) are usually constructed and is never made explicit in the text, but it fits the schema one has become used to in deciphering detective fiction (a text schema which resembles the first and last routines most⁵³), and it also marks, in Loewensohn’s reading of the novel, the text’s ‘way back to the familiar conventions of hard-boiled detective fiction’ (566).

‘HAUSER AND O’BRIEN’ (166), therefore, together with the novel’s last routine, which quite in accord with the book’s introduction seems to present Burroughs in the process of ‘[awaking] from The Sickness [...] calm and sane, and in reasonably good health’ (7), provides the reader with a semblance of closure that is very hard to argue against, despite its seeming inconsistency with the book’s utter randomness. Burroughs’ renunciation of authorial intention and deliberate arrangement as regards the order of the routines prevents any conventional closure for *Naked Lunch*, but the text schema for novels readers of literature are so familiar with still allows for an accommodating, yet completely text-external construction of a macrostructure. It seems only natural to read the last routine, the novel’s ‘ATROPHIED PREFACE’ (172) as a look back on the times and events of the narrative proper, especially since there seems to be a considerable distance (both of time and of attitude) between what can only be termed then and now. That ‘Lee The Agent [...] is taking the junk cure’ (172) can only mean that he has abandoned his narcotics-fuelled ways for a better tomorrow – much like the ‘*William S. Burroughs*’ (14) of the introduction⁵⁴. It is also the introduction that in terms of language and style resembles the ‘ATROPHIED PREFACE’ (172) most, which only seems to further confirm its purpose and position as an epilogue or conclusion of sorts.

⁵² If indeed one does count the ‘ATROPHIED PREFACE’ (172) as a routine, which is warranted both by its position and its content.

⁵³ In addition, the deictic plane of detective fiction seems to be the novel’s basic level or origin. See the next chapter for more information.

⁵⁴ This is insofar hardly surprising as Burroughs and the manifold characters of *Naked Lunch* admittedly ‘[are] the same person’ (175), as was discussed towards the end of chapter 2.2.1.

This shows the incredible influence schemas exert upon the reading of texts – an interpretation along these lines is, after all, difficult to pinpoint in the text itself but rather represents a reading in which all the novel’s empty slots are filled in with basic schema knowledge. That the novel can in fact be processed and presumed to be understood is an impressive cognitive feat for any reader just as much as it is a daring but brilliantly innovative reinvention of the novel genre on the side of its author.

2.2.3. STYLE: SPEAKING IN TONGUES

Part of *Naked Lunch*’s appeal is undoubtedly due to Burroughs’ extraordinary and transgressive style of writing. I have already hinted at the many-voiced mixture of registers several times, and the quotes I have presented in previous chapters serve to illustrate the scope of Burroughs’ writing to some extent. In this chapter, the main focus will lie on the language schemas the novel evokes and subsequently debunks, its transcendence of textual genres and the effects achieved by this. The question of how the book’s broken and fragmented writing, its daring mixture of jargons, registers and styles as well as its typographic, syntactic and grammatical oddities contribute to the narrative’s inherent unreliability will also be addressed. In terms of cultural critique and satire, there is much to be said about Burroughs’ mock writing. Since at this level of analysis deictic shift theory plays an important role⁵⁵, I will try to shed some light on the highly complex mechanics that govern the novel in this respect as well. In order to arrive at satisfactory conclusions, each of these aspects has to be investigated from the bottom up, i.e. from their actual basis upwards to their implications, which is why the following observations are of a rather general nature. After a common ground as regards the stylistic characteristics of the novel has been established, a discussion of more detailed aspects will follow.

Before that, however, I want to focus on a highly programmatic passage from the novel that illustrates Burroughs’ use of language schemas on a very general level and is also rather insightful in connection with the novel’s title. This passage, and the ideology it implies, can therefore be considered paradigmatical for the intention not only behind the title of the book but the work as a whole. In essence, it provides the reader with the formula, the basic strategy, Burroughs uses in his application of language schemas. Considering the title, one hardly wonders that this central passage is, in fact, a sample menu from the famous ‘*Chez Robert*’ (122), a restaurant where ““Transcendental Cuisine”” (122) is served, much to the disadvantage of its patrons:

⁵⁵ See chapter 1.2 for an explanation of the term.

Sample Menu:

The Clear Camel Piss Soup with Boiled Earth Worms

*The Filet of Sun-Ripened Sting Ray
basted with Eau de Cologne [sic] and garnished with nettles*

*The After-Birth Suprême de Boeuf,
cooked in drained crank case oil,
served with a piquant sauce of rotten egg yolks
and crushed bed bugs*

*The Limburger Cheese sugar cured in diabetic urine
doused in Canned Heat Flamboyant. . . .*

So the clients are quietly dying of botulism. . . . (122-123)

Burroughs use of language schemas is highly exemplary in this instance: the above passage immediately evokes language and text schemas of menus in gourmet restaurants (even if the textual hint indicating that this is, in fact, a ‘Sample Menu’ [122], were missing), an impression which is further complemented by the neat italic script in which it is set and its centred justification. The content, however, is highly provocative in its sheer disruptive quality. What Burroughs does here is exactly what the novel’s title suggests – as he explains in the introduction: ‘NAKED Lunch – a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork’ (7). The novel as such then consists of a series of naked lunches, as it were, though its lunches are not limited to food intake and relate to a variety of occupations and conditions in the course of the novel (of which the application and consumption of various drugs is naturally one of the most common).

In all cases, Burroughs’ strategy for revealing the stark and repulsive truth in the nude is to use well established language schemas in order to put into words what normally could not, or rather would not be phrased and formulated within the language schemas that he selects. By means of the constant schema disruption that follows, Burroughs manages to strip the various discourses and styles he imitates of what, for him, seems to be their main purpose – hiding the truth by veiling it in euphemisms and palliating phrases. Language in *Naked Lunch* can no longer hide the truth, and the reader is mercilessly subjected to whatever ‘is on the end of every fork’ (7) or, in a metaphor even more telling in its scathing criticism of media discourse, ‘on the end of that long *newspaper* [my emphasis] spoon’ (12). The disruptive effect Burroughs achieves stems from his deviating use of well established language conventions – instead of using language schemas to blandish and/or to deceive, he uses them to speak the naked, unflattering truth.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Lydenberg attributes this to Burroughs’ use of metonymy instead of metaphor: ‘In its extreme form, metonymy helps Burroughs to lay bare the very abuses of word and image that metaphor simultaneously performs and disguises.’ (“Orifice” 65)

This is most evident in the various representatives of power structures or institutions in the novel who expose themselves in speech and action because Burroughs turns their own jargon against them. In *Naked Lunch*, language is always indicative of attempted manipulation and the exertion of power, but the intentions behind these attempts always become transparent in the contrast between form and content. Thus, language itself has become unreliable, and in its unreliability, it has – paradoxically and ironically – become a means of exposing the truth it was meant to hide. This is the main principle behind Burroughs’ constant evocation of language schemas; its purpose is to leave no doubt as to the actual nature of the metaphorical lunch one is constantly spoon-fed by ominous institutions⁵⁷.

Burroughs’ treatment of language schemas differs from the usually instantaneous disruption Burroughs subjects world and text schemas⁵⁸ to. It is actually hardly surprising and, in fact, necessary that in terms of language Burroughs largely uses tried and tested methods of a multitude of spiritual predecessors⁵⁹. The various styles and jargons he employs are mainly left intact except for the occasional daring lexical choice. In stark contrast to Burroughs’ handling of world and text frames of reference, this treatment of language schemas serves to preserve or reinforce them instead of debunking them. This is necessary insofar as a departure from established stylistic norms would undo the effect Burroughs’ imitation of them is set to achieve: by sticking to well-known genres and registers, the gap of moral and cognitive unreliability between the content level and the language level – or between what is told and how it is told – widens, which increases the impact of Burroughs’ disruptive writing even more. Only through the evocation and subsequent reinforcement of certain language schemas, can the text actually ensure that the appropriate world schemas are induced in the reader, since world schemas in literature are more often than not inextricably connected with corresponding language schemas⁶⁰. Through what might, for lack of a better term, be called (language) schema transcending (world) schema preservation (meaning that world schemas are preserved through language schemas that are connected with them and also entail them), the disruption of world schemas becomes all the more striking to the audience. Without distinct stylistic clues, *Naked Lunch*’s appeal – together with its potential for controversy – would be greatly reduced, since the novel’s content would become almost impossible to com-

⁵⁷ The patrons of the restaurant in the quote above do, in fact, realise that they are eating ‘literal garbage’, but fail to act on this knowledge, ‘being too intimidated by the reputation of *Chez Robert* to protest’ (122). This clearly attacks the passivity of the general public towards outrageous political or social conditions.

⁵⁸ See chapter 2.2.1 and 2.2.2, respectively.

⁵⁹ Excluded from this are the extremely fragmented and distorted passages of the text, arguably the most original parts in terms of style. For the moment, this discussion mainly focuses on the various better known styles and jargons seamlessly incorporated in the text; its more unusual parts will be dealt with later in this chapter.

⁶⁰ This connection is exploited in a similar way in satirical writing, as in mock heroic poetry, for instance. In *Naked Lunch*, this mechanism extends to the non-satirical parts of the narrative as well.

prehend (being highly difficult already) and to place in relation with the real world knowledge of the reader.

What I want to illustrate by this is that unreliability in the novel relies mainly on the disruption of world schemas⁶¹ (which is where connections with moral and cognitive norms are made). In order to achieve the correct world schema evocation and disruption, however, language schemas have to be left largely intact, otherwise the right connections could no longer be made and the references would cease to function. For precisely this reason, *Naked Lunch* makes use of distinct language schema preserving voices – otherwise processing the text and identifying ‘its many narrators and many voices, styles and formats that shift kaleidoscopically from straight first person to omniscient third person to sci-fi play or film script, to legal or scientific treatise, from conventional hard-boiled detective fiction to parodies of pornography, lyric poetry, and spy adventures’ (Loewinsohn 561) would not be possible. While this definitely establishes some form of necessary compromise between form and content, the language level is still anything but straightforward. The constantly changing style and lexis, and thus the lack of any uniform narrative voice are strongly indicative of unreliability: their countless overlapping points fail to produce a cohesive or unified picture but instead create a textual universe revealed to the reader in tongues, as it were. Burroughs actively imitates all kinds of language schemas, and while his rendition of them is perfect, there are still innumerable other stylistic, lexical and syntactical oddities that have to be mentioned.

The stylistic foundation on which the whole of the novel in all of its varieties rests is that of pulp detective fiction. All the countless intertexts, references and stylistic imitations are grafted on this common basis or, in terms of deictic shift theory, the narrative’s origin, and most of the novel’s routines stem from or get back to this starting point in due course. As is the case with all the forms the narrative takes on in the course of *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs manages to imitate the canonical voice of hard boiled pulp fiction perfectly. The first person limited, jargon laden narrative of Bill Lee is everything one would expect from a down and out con man stereotype, as the very beginning of his tale (part of which I quoted in chapter 2.2.1 already) unmistakably shows:

I can feel the heat closing in, feel them out there making their moves, setting up their devil doll stool pigeons, crooning over my spoon and dropper I throw away at Washington Square Station, vault a turnstile and two flights down the iron stairs, catch an uptown A train... Young, good looking, crew cut, Ivy League, advertising exec type fruit holds the door back for me. I am evidently his type of character. You know the type comes on with bartenders and cab drivers, talking about right hooks and the Dodgers, call the counterman in Nedick’s by his first name. A real asshole. And right on time this narcotics dick in a white trench coat (imagine tailing somebody in a white trench coat – trying to pass as

⁶¹ Textual schemas do play a role, albeit not in every case. Very often macrostructural disruptions serve merely to create suspense by withholding information from the reader.

a fag I guess) hit the platform. I can hear the way he would say it holding my outfit in his left hand, right hand on his piece: “I think you dropped something, fella.” (17)

What is especially noticeable here are the many underworld expressions Lee uses: ‘the heat closing in’ (17) is the ever-tightening snare of the police in pursuit of Lee, with the ‘stool pigeons’ (17) meaning the eavesdroppers and whistleblowers they employ; the narcotics agent’s ‘piece’ (17) is of course his gun⁶². Together with the expletives used – ‘asshole’, ‘dick’, ‘fag’ (17) – this first paragraph proves to be highly evocative of an underworld slang language schema that in turn serves to flesh out the underworld atmosphere of the novel’s beginning⁶³.

It does not take more than a couple of paragraphs before this uniform voice is broken by what runs through the entire novel as a form of meta-commentary, a ‘scientific or technical voice [that] often intrudes abruptly in *Naked Lunch*, breaking in on the tone of a passage or the development of some farcical and fantastic situation’ (Lydenberg, “How-To” 81):

“Grassed on me he did,” I said morosely. (Note: Grass is English thief slang for inform.) [...] “[...] I can tell you in confidence he is due for a hot shot.” (Note: This is a cap of poison junk sold to addict [sic] for liquidation purposes. Often given to informers. Usually the hot shot is strychnine since it tastes and looks like junk.) (17)

These notes in brackets, always indicative of a change of the narrative’s level of deixis and ‘[representing] visually the splicing in of a different voice in the text’ (Lydenberg, *How-To* 81) serve as literary devices that enhance the text in a multitude of ways. In the above quote, they cause a deictic pop to a metareferential layer of narrative, an authorial layer in which comments on lexis and underworld practices can be made. Again, Burroughs’ imitation of scholarly jargon is brilliantly executed in that it leaves no doubt about the authority of a learned voice explaining unfamiliar language and practices to the ingenuous reader. Placing these comments outside the deictic plane of the narrative is perfectly consistent with Burroughs’ earlier claims⁶⁴ of *Naked Lunch* being journalism, which would warrant regular authorial comments to brief the audience on things they cannot be presumed to know. Including the information in the plane of the narrative would be possible, but the effect would be completely different.

Burroughs makes frequent use of bracketed comments, but as is the case with most of the elements found in *Naked Lunch*, the commentary emancipates itself before long and becomes one of the many narrative voices of the novel in a highly unusual way. For this reason, it cannot be generally determined whether the brackets indicate deictic pushes or pops, which contributes

⁶² One cannot help but notice the Freudian implications of the ‘narcotics dick’ who may be ‘trying to pass as a fag’ with his ‘right hand on his *piece* [my emphasis]’ (17), even more so when considering the underlying homosexual innuendo of the novel.

⁶³ See chapter 2.2.1.

⁶⁴ See chapter 2.1.

greatly to the Gordian knot that is the novel's narrative polyphony. The brackets, and the information they contain, seem to be carefully veiled asides on the practice of commentary as such. While they do provide "background information" in a sense, they do so in such a way that the distinction between commentary and narrative and their respective deictic planes becomes blurred and ultimately dissolved. Their arrangement in the text prevents the formation of a single rather constant deictic plane, an origin, as in most other novels. Instead, the deictic pushes and pops undermine any attempt to determine the actual plot, or whether there even is one to speak of⁶⁵, and thus contribute to the narrative's unreliability in that, among other things, figure and ground are no longer discernible. At the beginning, brackets are always introduced by the highly evocative word "note"⁶⁶, providing the audience with a clue how they are to be read and interpreted. Soon, however, this practice is violated by brackets that offer no real departure from the deictic level of the narrative, being little more than remarks the narrator himself seems to include. Little by little, the two previously distinctive voices seem to fade into each other – the textual hint at correct interpretation in the form of "note" is abandoned, for instance –, and content as well as lexis become a mixture of commentary, digression and narrative increasingly difficult to place as regards deixis.

To complicate matters further, many direct speeches include brackets as well, and it is not always possible to attribute them to the characters talking at the moment. Also, the brackets get longer and longer in the course of the narrative, up to the point where brackets inside brackets are needed⁶⁷. During dialogue, the deictic centre sometimes shifts to well outside the realm of the narrative, as is the case when '[i]nterested readers are referred to the Appendix' (40) during one of Dr. Benway's winding talks on the effects of various drugs he delivers in highly convincing medical jargon. At one point, Burroughs even uses square brackets to suggest further reading in truly academic fashion:

[See article by Nils Larsen M.D., *The Men with the Deadly Dream* in the *Saturday Evening Post*, December 3, 1955. Also article by Erle Stanley Gardner for *True Magazine*.] (67)

Caution as to the actual existence of these sources is advised, however – Burroughs is, as we have already noticed several times, a master of schema preservation, especially when it comes to the technical jargon employed by the academia, doctors or bureaucrats. When one ultimately stumbles across a single right bracket – the left one is missing – one cannot help but think of

⁶⁵ For a tentative answer to this question, see chapter 2.2.1.

⁶⁶ As in '(Note: Yen pox is the ash of smoked opium.)' (21).

⁶⁷ An especially interesting case in point can be found on page 37, in which Burroughs quotes 'from *the author's* [my emphasis; this is of course his very own] article on narcotic drugs', the appendix, further establishing the intertextual links between the outsourced paratexts of the novel.

Burroughs' constant and deliberate mis-use of elements of textual ordering as a commentary on the use of typology itself. As I have said above, Burroughs' imitations of various registers and styles are executed flawlessly, but *Naked Lunch* also encompasses parts and passages that are disruptive of language schemas to the core.

This is most evident in the parts of the novel in which Burroughs mixes and combines all means of typological arrangement at his disposal to create proto-texts that, if at all comparable to other literary works, are probably closest in spirit to visual poetry as proposed by Eugen Gomringer (albeit they are nowhere as polished in execution and visuality). These passages⁶⁸ are the most fragmented and broken parts of the novel, and almost impossible to place on specific deictic planes (which in itself is unreliable narration on an entirely new level – the interpretation of a text of uncertain deixis renders its content unreliable by necessity). They are characterised by the prevalent use of punctuation (specifically ‘. . .’) to create an almost schizophrenic, polyphonic stream of consciousness formed by phrases, words or simply onomatopoeia. In these parts, the novel's nature, its ‘kaleidoscope of vistas, medley of tunes and street noises’ (170) becomes most tangible; at the same time, its content becomes most enigmatic. Burroughs uses capitalisation, italics, abbreviations, indentation and vocabulary from various languages, thereby breaking down the narrative – any narrative for that matter – to its most basic component parts.

At this point, speaking of language schema disruption hardly seems a fitting description for the effects Burroughs' narrative deconstruction has. Rather, his breaking up of any textual structure effectively constitutes schema abandonment. The reader is given nothing but bits and pieces, literature disassembled, its isolated parts placed side by side. This practice immediately draws attention to the physical side of the text, to the fact that ‘[w]ords have a vitality of their own’ (Burroughs and Gysin qtd. in Weinreich 85): by removing what links the pieces of the narrative together, the text – as the physical material it actually is – becomes visible through the various planes of deixis; ‘the words [...] separate in meaningless mosaic’ (*Naked Lunch* 64). Once again, stringing the pieces (that indeed ‘can be had in any order’ [180]) together is entirely up to the reader – echoing in little what the novel does in large, namely the deconstruction of deictic literary structures to subject them to countless reconfigurations and recombinations. This calls into question almost all conventional structures associated with literature. Out of this textual debris new voices, and with them, new stories in different stylistic guises and even different genres constantly emerge.

Earlier in this chapter, the deictic origin of *Naked Lunch*, first person pulp detective fiction told from the perspective of Bill Lee, was mentioned. Within the margins of this novel genre – which is only a part of the textual universe of the novel – Burroughs repeatedly, and unexpect-

⁶⁸ See for instance the ‘ATROPHIED PREFACE’ (172) I have already mentioned several times.

edly, changes point of view and narrative voice from one paragraph to the next. In one exemplary case, Burroughs exchanges the inside perspective for an outside perspective and back again in just a few sentences:

The body knows what veins you can hit and conveys this knowledge in the spontaneous movements you make preparing to take a shot. . . . Sometimes the needle points like a dowzer's wand. Sometimes I must wait for the message. But when it comes I always hit blood.

A red orchid bloomed at the bottom of the dropper. He hesitated for a full second, then pressed the bulb, watching the liquid rush into the vein as if sucked by the silent thirst of his blood. There was an iridescent, thin coat of blood left in the dropper, and the white paper collar was soaked through with blood like a bandage. He reached over and filled the dropper with water. As he squirted the water out, the shot hit him in the stomach, a soft sweet blow.

Look down at my filthy trousers, haven't been changed in months. . . . The days glide by strung on a syringe with a long thread of blood. . . . I am forgetting sex and all sharp pleasures of the body – a grey, junk-bound ghost. The Spanish boys call me El Hombre Invisible – the Invisible Man. . . . (62-63)

Here, the diary-like, confidential first person voice of the first paragraph turns to a matter of fact, focalised third person narrative only to revert back to the diary instantly. The present of the first person narrator becomes the simple past of the third person narrative, further establishing distance between the two narrative stances. It seems obvious that they belong together: general musings on the application and consumption of drugs are interrupted and more general thoughts follow. Still the change of perspectives severely disrupts the flow of the narrative, which is what effectively causes the text's fragmentation. The reader's expectations are flouted by the text as its style and therefore its language schema – with its respective plane of deixis – changes. But not only does the language schema change – the reader's evaluation and knowledge of the acts hinted at in the beginning of the sequence changes and develops with the above insertion as well. I would argue that even the attitude towards Lee changes with the perspective on the action – close and familiar at first, suddenly remote and questionable in the third person narration. In the end, this generates extreme uncertainty on the side of the reader, and it rests on the constant shuffling of language and style in the text.

To make matters even more opaque, however, these stylistic shifts do not always take the same deictic direction (if that can be at all determined), and most of them, in contrast to the quotation above, cannot be connected on the level of content: In the routine 'LAZARUS GO HOME' (65-68), for example, the narrative shifts from a rather authorial, omniscient third person narrative to a highly subjective first person voice, and also to matters that have nothing to do with what comes before at all. It starts out in a coolly detached, authoritative fashion:

Fumbling through faded tape at the pick up frontier, a languid grey area of hiatus miasmic with yawns and gaping goof holes, Lee found out that the young junky standing there in his room at 10 a.m. was back from two months skin diving in Corsica and off the junk. . . . (65)

The routine progresses in the same vein, albeit with the usual inserts and commentaries, pushes and pops that enrich the narrative. Towards the end of the routine, however,

[Lee] decided to visit a colleague, NG Joe, who got hooked during a Bang-utot attack in Honolulu.

[a mock scientific treatise in brackets, complete with references, follows]

An electrode attached to one testicle glowed briefly and NG woke up in the smell of burning flesh and reached for a loaded syringe. He rolled into a foetal position and slid the needle into his spine. He pulled the needle out with a little sigh of pleasure, and realized that Lee was in the room. A long slug undulated out of Lee's right eye and wrote on the wall in iridescent ooze: "The Sailor is in the City buying up TIME."

I am waiting in front of a drugstore for it to open at nine o'clock. Two Arab boys roll cans of garbage up to a high heavy wood door in a whitewashed wall. Dust in front of the door streaked with urine. One of the boys bent over, rolling the heavy cans, pants tight over his lean young ass. He looks at me with the neutral, calm glance of an animal. I wake with a shock like the boy is real and I have missed a meet I had with him for this afternoon. (67-68)

At first, the narrative clearly displays criteria of third person limited narration. How the scene changes from Lee to NG and the choice of simple, non-judgemental lexis and grammar strongly suggest reliability, even if from a limited perspective. Then all of a sudden, the narrative continues in a highly subjective, unreliable first person voice that, for lack of other textual evidence, probably belongs to the previous narrative strand's protagonist, Lee himself. While this scene also clearly violates textual schemas in that it abandons any form of comprehensible continuity inside its textual unit, it also demonstrates Burroughs' ability to replace narrative voice and perspective on the fly, thereby completely altering the reader's perception and evaluation of characters, situations and places through the various stylistic guises he uses. At the same time, the wording and phrasing of the newly introduced fragments always provide enough material for language and (in consequence) world schema evocation and therefore for filling in the slots the narrative leaves empty⁶⁹. Still, the reader is never aware what deictic level the narrative currently inhabits, because hints as to where the narrative pushes or pops are seldom, if ever, made explicit. This further increases the impressions of unreliability: since the narrative has to be taken at face value, an evaluation of its reliability, which would require a somewhat fixed, if just implicit, deictic level to compare against, is downright impossible.

⁶⁹ These fillings may be generic or highly clichéd (depending of course on the individual reader's world and language knowledge), but it is only through them that a reading of the novel as such is at all possible.

Burroughs, however, sees to it that such a connection can never be made in the first place.⁷⁰ The above scene, for instance, dissolves into yet another strand of narrative without any connection whatsoever:

“We expect additional equalizations,” says the inspector in an interview with Your Reporter. “Otherwise will occur,” the Inspector lifts one leg in a typical Nordic gesture, “the bends is it not? But perhaps we can provide the suitable chamber of decompression.” (68)

While the above passage is clearly without any actual meaning, it and many other constantly interchanged fragments of narrative, despite their brief and compact nature, nonetheless allow the reader to immediately construct a background to the scenes that is actually missing. That this is possible is largely due to their highly evocative wording – the above scene, in style, register and syntax, still reads like an interview directly out of a newspaper –, which also renders this quotation a prime example for the satirical implications of the book. The speech of the inspector is not only ungrammatical, but completely devoid of sense, yet the prestigious register and the (a)syntactical arrangement of the words echo newspaper jargon still. It is supplied by a language schema most readers have become used to and are able to place immediately, along with a mixture of advertising talk, psychological humbug and pseudoscience that Burroughs attacks in a similar vein.

Burroughs’ disgust with bogus psychology and psychiatry becomes most obvious during the ‘MEETING OF INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF TECHNOLOGICAL PSYCHIATRY’ (89). The title alone, with its redoubled subordinate prepositional phrase, hints at the fake and overly complicated nature of this event. At this meeting,

Doctor “Fingers” Schafer, the Lobotomy Kid, rises and turns on the conferents the cold blue blast of his gaze:

“Gentlemen, the human nervous system can be reduced to a compact and abbreviated spinal column. The brain, front, middle and rear must follow the adenoid, the wisdom tooth, the appendix. . . . I give you my Master Work: *The Complete All American De-anxietized Man*. . . .”

Blast of trumpets: The Man is carried in naked by two Negro bearers who drop him on the platform with bestial, sneering brutality. . . . The Man wriggles. . . . His flesh turns to viscid, transparent jelly that drifts away in green mist, unveiling a monster black centipede. Waves of unknown stench fill the room, searing the lungs, grabbing the stomach. . . . (89-90)

⁷⁰ Frederick Whiting argues that ‘there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that Burroughs [in writing the dissociated and fragmented narrative that makes up *Naked Lunch*] had in mind a strategic disruption of interpretive possibilities as well’ as ‘[reproducing] the disjunctions of consciousness induced by addiction’. (162)

Psychiatry that would result in such an ‘*All American De-anxietized Man*’ (89) seems to have been among the highest priorities of psychiatrists such as Doctor Schafer, evidently also a strong supporter of the practice of lobotomy. In this kind of psychiatry, the ends – achieving a state without any existential anxiety, or rather, as is evident between the lines, total apathy without resistance – justify the means, Schafer’s ‘Master Work’ (89), however, dissolves into mist and turns out to be a monstrosity⁷¹, which is a bitter commentary on the state of psychiatric research along these lines. In this sense, this scene is definitely one of the most openly critical episodes in *Naked Lunch*, and once again its primary effect is indebted to the language Schafer uses and the name he has assigned his creation.

Unsurprisingly, the fifties’ obsession with gimmicky technical devices directly out of second-rate science-fiction movies features as well. In a brilliant rendition of contemporary advertising talk, Burroughs introduces a housewife complaining about her malfunctioning inventory of machines:

AMERICAN HOUSEWIFE (opening a box of Lux): “Why don’t it have an electric eye the box flip open when it see me and hand itself to the Automat Handy Man he should put it inna water already. . . . The Handy Man is outa control since Thursday, he been getting physical with me and I didn’t put in his combination at all. . . . And the Garbage Disposal Unit snapping at me, and the nasty old Mixmaster keep trying to get up under my dress. . . . I got the most awful cold, and my intestines is all constipated. . . . I’m gonna put it in the Handy Man’s combination he should administer me a high colonic [an enema] aw-ready.” (104)

Even more hilarious than the household appliances putting the moves on the American housewife is her description of the said events. Her ungrammatical, slangy spill of words encapsulates the impact of advertising perfectly – all she can say correctly are the brand names of the items she uses, and their respective features. Other products mentioned are

the Octopus kit for Massage Parlors, Barber Shops and Turkish Baths, with which you can administer a high colonic, an unethical massage, a shampoo, whilst cutting the client’s toenails and removing his blackheads. And the M.D.’s Can Do Kit for busy practitioners will take out your appendix, tuck in a hernia, pull a wisdom tooth, ectomize your piles and circumcize you. (105)

These handy appliances and the appropriately chosen names echo the craze for all-purpose gadgets that do anything and everything, just as the advertisements would claim during the 1950ies (and do today). For the American housewife, the thought of having a machine apply an enema is anything but grotesque – it is what the ads tell her and a feature the machine offers. For

⁷¹ In this context, it might prove insightful to note that to Burroughs, evidently, a centipede ‘is the most abominable of all creatures.’ (*Last Words* 29)

Burroughs, it is only a matter of time until the American public will have circumcisions and appendectomies done by household appliances.

Along with the evocation of political and medial discourse and catchwords from psychiatry, these instances of advertising talk show how registers and styles from highly diverse fields permeate the narrative of *Naked Lunch* and create the polyphonous text the reader is confronted with. While the language and style of the various discourses remain intact, however, their actual content is seen in a distorting mirror: Their implications are warped to extremes, yet their depiction in such a way seems to be much closer to reality than real world representatives of the various fields would want one to believe. As Loewinsohn puts it, ‘Burroughs shows us that the police officers, judges, doctors, lawyers, businessmen, and politicians who run the straight world are every bit as venal and hypocritical as the junkies and dealers.’ (578) While the respective language schemas are left intact, the world schemas implied are disrupted – at times hilariously but usually with rather serious undertones. This practice goes along with Dagmar Busch’s proposition that unreliable narration allows for criticism directed towards collectively accepted norms, practices and morals (53), which is done very elaborately by Burroughs. The above cases are, however, special insofar as they are not explicitly mediated by the narrator. Rather, the narrator as well as the reader assumes the position of a mere witness while the discourse fields, along with the power structures they are supposed to uphold, actually expose themselves.

In all of these passages with zero mediacy it is difficult to find evidence of unreliable narration, as opposed to those strands of narrative in which Lee features more prominently and in which his role in what is revealed to the reader is clearer. Language and style of the non-mediated passages alone are therefore not sufficient to classify the narrative as unreliable, but the events depicted are clearly of a third order informativity, which, in connection with the language schemas and world schemas the text evokes provide enough evidence to call it unreliable. Where the narrative becomes a mere description, what is described is so outrageous and schema disruptive that it can only count as the product of a hallucinating mind. The effect of these episodes is not, as one would expect, an invalidation of what is revealed by them – quite the opposite. It is in these moments of drug fantasies and nightmares that Lee, in his transcendence of waking reality, becomes almost a prophet figure speaking in countless tongues – hence the polyphony and disconnectedness of the text. This is indeed supported by ‘[Burroughs]’ conception of the artist as a (heroic) diagnostician whose function is to “make people aware of the true criminality of our times, to wise up the marks” (Loewinsohn 563).

I have already mentioned *Naked Lunch*'s indebtedness to the picaresque novel above⁷², but there are even more classic models the novel references extensively not only in structural, but also in stylistic terms:

In spite of its postmodern babel of voices, formats, and overlapping structures, *Naked Lunch* actually follows very closely in the footsteps of at least three classic examples of didactic literature, how-to books of moral instruction that teach, by example more than by precept, about the world's double-dealing, how the world presents a deceptive appearance, behind which lurks or indwells a very different reality: Dante's *Inferno*, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*[...]. These are all allegories that recount the extravagant adventures of perfectly ordinary people in far-off, bizarre geographies that—in spite of their remoteness and/or their unabashed fictionality—have a mockingly *familiar* look to them. (Loewinsohn 562-563)⁷³

As I have emphasised several times, familiarity is indeed one of the key features of the novel's narrative, though it is achieved completely differently in *Naked Lunch* than it is in the paradigms of didactic literature Loewinsohn mentions. In *Naked Lunch*, familiarity is established by world and text schema evocation⁷⁴, and among the many text schemas evoked we also find classical literature itself. The model becomes the means, and it is seamlessly incorporated in the corpus at large.

The form and function of this incorporation is one important reason why *Naked Lunch* was described as 'a highly literary work, with allusions to Anglo-Saxon battle poetry, Shakespeare, eighteenth-century mock-heroic, and the "Ancient Mariner," all of them distorted or altered in some way' (Morgan 345) at the Boston obscenity trial. In the polyhistoric and polyphonic narrative of the novel, a voice such as the following may be deemed almost necessary to put certain events into appropriate – i.e. mock heroic – words:

Gentle reader, the ugliness of that spectacle buggers description. [...] I fain would spare you this, but my pen hath its will like the Ancient Mariner. [...] Can tongue or pen accommodate these scandals? (44)

In the scene that unfolds, commented on by the dignified narrator, murder, mutilation and perversion are presented to the reader in an elevated and highly elaborate style reminiscent of classical English literature. The choice of antiquated words and grammar, the old-fashioned reader

⁷² See previous chapter.

⁷³ The point Loewinsohn makes – and with which I agree – might be disputed by other commentators of *Naked Lunch* on grounds of Burroughs' status as a postmodernist writer, which would entail his opposition to allegorical and didactic literature in general (Loewinsohn 563). While such an objection is definitely possible, it fails to actually acknowledge the textual evidence and instead focuses on what might or might not have been Burroughs' ideology as an author.

⁷⁴ See also chapter 2.2.1.

address and also the explicit mention of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner"⁷⁵ are elements that prove highly effective in triggering a world schematic background for what is depicted. An atmosphere of heroism, of epic literature, is thus created and – as might be expected – employed by Burroughs to relate repugnant, chaotic and morbid events to the reader that, for their sheer grotesqueness (which is of course strengthened by the entirely unfitting textual schema used), still attain comedic value.

The entire passage including the above quotation is essentially a teichoscopy – Lee, who is standing alongside Dr. Benway on the roof of Freeland's 'Reconditioning Center' (36), is watching the unfolding chaos which follows the escape of several detainees from that very institution. A corresponding scene in Homer's *Iliad* springs to mind in which Helen of Troy points out the Greek army for Priam, just as Lee does for the reader, of whom he is aware all of a sudden. At precisely this moment in the narrative, his description of unrest in the streets gains an epic quality, and once again it is the total inadequacy of language and the schema disruption it entails that makes the satirical intention of the scene clear. Burroughs here employs a mock heroic style whose effect is exaggerated by the countless disgusting details revealed. Heroisation is essentially indicative of extenuation and cannot successfully accommodate the naked truth, as it were. The description of inner city riots in this passage is situated on a thin line between epic and news coverage, and it is impossible to determine where one begins and the other ends. Lee's narrative seamlessly transforms from that of an immediate bystander to that of an epic poet to what strongly resembles news coverage. The routine ultimately concludes with what seems to be a montage of world news:

Rock and Roll adolescent hoodlums storm the streets of all nations. They rush into the Louvre and throw acid into Mona Lisa's face. [...] they shit on the floor of the United Nations and wipe their ass with treaties, pacts, alliances.

By plane, car, horse, camel, elephant, tractor, bicycle and steam roller, on foot, skis, sled, crutch and pogo-stick the tourists storm the frontiers, demanding with inflexible authority asylum from the "unspeakable conditions obtaining in Freeland," the Chamber of Commerce striving in vain to stem the debacle: "Please to be restful. It is only a few crazies who have from the crazy place outbroken." (47-48)

Media discourses permeate the narrative repeatedly, and they prove to be just as inadequate in describing the events and occurrences as the mock heroic style with which they blend – '[r]ather than pile up references as the scaffolding for a new poem, which is what Eliot does in *The Waste Land*, rather than repeat passages in classical Greek or Chinese that are incomprehensible to the

⁷⁵ The allusion to Coleridge and the "Ancient Mariner" is a twofold one and relates to Coleridge's purported experiments with opium as well as to the compulsive nature of the Mariner's confession. For a discussion of these implications, see Loewinsohn 576-578.

general reader, as Pound does in the *Cantos*, Burroughs' allusions are often throwaway lines, so that you hardly notice them' (Morgan 356)⁷⁶. The constant mutual permeation of discourses and jargons has a powerful effect: it creates a sense of confusion, disorientation and dissolution of reality in the reader that parallels the content of the novel. The disruption of narrative and its inherent implications of unreliability rest both on the random order of the novel's routines and the equally disjointed, but far from arbitrary conglomerate of language and style.

This dissolution of coherent narrative and deixis is then further amplified by Burroughs' abandonment of even the simplest genre conventions, which he achieves by either quoting songs or poetry⁷⁷ or by inserting play-like scenes, which he artfully interlocks with the narrative at large⁷⁸. Apart from several shorter insertions, the routine 'ORDINARY MEN AND WOMEN' (102-119) especially stands out as resembling a play. It begins with a description of the scene:

Luncheon of Nationalist Party on balcony overlooking the Market. Cigars, scotch, polite belches. . . . The Party Leader strides about in a jellaba smoking a cigar and drinking Scotch. He wears expensive English shoes, loud socks, garters, muscular, hairy legs – overall effect of a successful gangster in drag.

P.L. (pointing dramatically): "Look out there. What do you see?"

LIEUTENANT: "Huh? Why, I see the market." (102)

While this passage obviously imitates drama in technique and layout, it still retains prose qualities as well. The mock stage directions, for instance, are not set in italics, and the dialogue is rendered in quotation marks. The narrative seems to bounce back and forth between play and prose:

A street boy climbs over the balcony rail.

LIEUTENANT: "No we do not want to buy any used condoms! Cut!"

P.L.: "Wait! . . . Come in, my boy. Sit down Have a cigar. . . . Have a drink."

He paces around the boy like an aroused tom cat.

"What do you think about the French?"

"Huh?"

"The French. The Colonial bastards who is [sic] sucking your live corpuscles." (102)

Here the text abandons drama conventions by transforming into a mere dialogue in prose, only to pick them up again after the brief chat between the street boy and the Party Leader. This once again shows the novel's defiance of genre conventions at large, and its overall instability, which even extends into the realm of writing conventions. Just as various jargons flow into each other,

⁷⁶ A powerful example of this technique being the hardly noticeable reference to Sir John Suckling's "Song" – 'Why so pale and wan, fair buggers?' (105)

⁷⁷ While this does not happen as often as one might expect, it still occurs fairly regularly. The insertion of Robert Louis Stevenson's sea shanty "Dead Man's Chest" on page 75 may count as an example, apart from other allusions to famous English poetry.

⁷⁸ I have already quoted a longer play-like passage in chapter 2.2.1.

various genres and modes of writing do so as well. But while the transitions between the various narrative situations, discourses and genres are hard or even impossible to pinpoint, their respective traits remain intact. The narrative as such is no uniform or unified whole, but a bricolage of countless interconnected, but separate and distinct small-scale narratives and texts.

This is most evident in those passages of the text that abandon any conventional grammar whatsoever and thus provide the most distorted and broken up parts of the novel. Their heavy fragmentation devoid of any coherence mirrors the novel as a whole by forming small-scale counterparts of the book's text corpus at large. These most daringly unconventional passages of the novel emulate the hectic, broken up, slurred speech of the book's delusional and hallucinating characters. I have already noted that *Naked Lunch* as such mirrors the visions of the drug-influenced mind, and it is in precisely these passages that this becomes most graspable. Burroughs uses them but sparingly, but to great effect:

Old violet brown photos that curl and crack like mud in the sun: Panama City . . . Bill Gains putting down the Paregoric con on a Chinese druggist.
 "I've got these racing dogs . . . pedigree greyhounds. . . . All sick with the dysentery . . . tropical climate . . . the shits . . . you sabe [sic] shit? . . . *My Whippets Are Dying*. . . ." He screamed. . . . His eyes lit up with blue fire. . . . The flame went out . . . smell of burning metal. . . . "Administer with an eye dropper. . . . Wouldn't you? . . . Menstral [sic] cramps . . . my wife . . . Kotex . . . Aged mother . . . Piles . . . raw . . . bleeding . . ." (172-173)

By free association, Burroughs evokes not only the babbling of the drugged-up addict, but also conjures up flashing and blurry images in the mind of the reader. While occasional meaningful connections can be made among the various isolated items in passages such as the above, the text leaves little besides its face value to help with its interpretation. Obscure but nevertheless evocative phrases are strung together. At the same time, they are set apart by textual gaps in the form of ' . . .' that permeate the entire text, but most noticeably those parts of the novel in which Burroughs develops his own distinct stream of (un-)consciousness. It is also in these passages that *Naked Lunch* as such becomes most tangible, since their fragmentation and dissociation once again echoes that of the entire novel, and with it, its inherent unreliability and its transfer of control over organisation and arrangement of material from the side of the author to that of the reader.

Having arrived at the most dissolved parts of *Naked Lunch*, I want to briefly sum up my findings regarding the novel's unreliability before I begin my interpretation of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, which constitutes a follow-up to Burroughs' highly influential novel in various ways. In *Naked Lunch*, unreliability can be found on all three layers of the text, i.e. its content, its structure as well

as its language. On the level of content, Burroughs creates unreliability by a fixation on the use of various drugs (especially of opiates), as well as their mind- and perception-altering effects, which are described in great detail and which the novel's content also mirrors by constant non-sequitur, digressions and uncertain deixis. World schemas are evoked regularly only to be almost instantly disrupted, a notion that holds true for the novel as a whole. On the level of structure, the novel creates undefinability by violating text schemas and thus destroying, or effectively abandoning, any semblance of structure, and, in consequence, of plot and of plot progression. Categories of time and place, as well as of narrator and perspective, all essential ordering principles of narrative literature, fail to work in *Naked Lunch*, and it is entirely up to the reader to make meaning of the corpus of the novel's routines. Most importantly, however, unreliability is reflected in the language of *Naked Lunch*, and its daring mixture of voices, of jargon, slang and different and intersecting style and lexis make the novel a fascinating and challenging read. *Naked Lunch's* narrative, structure and language are in a constant flux, but still Burroughs manages to include extensive and explicit cultural and socio-political critique in his labyrinthine novel. In fact, the book's inherent and omnipresent unreliability even increases the impact of Burroughs' poignant asides about society's deficiencies; his visionary style of writing, therefore, is nothing short of brilliant.

3. HUNTER S. THOMPSON – *FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS*

‘As far as I was concerned, I was writing what happened to me in Las Vegas.’
—Hunter S. Thompson (“Fear and Loathing at 25”)

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas is the main literary work of Hunter S. Thompson. Thompson, born roughly two decades after Burroughs and famous for his strongly fictionalised style of journalism; a style he himself termed Gonzo journalism, and which Scott MacFarlane calls ‘a self-delineated genre of one, since it is made up of only [Thompson’s] own bizarre and unrestrained work.’ (177) It is possible to argue that *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is nothing more than Thompson’s usual routine of semi-fictional, semi-autobiographical news coverage – after all, it first appeared in *Rolling Stone* magazine, for which Thompson wrote as National affairs correspondent –, but the fact remains that its deadpan style, narrative and plot cease to be mere journalism, be it Gonzo or otherwise, in its very first paragraph.

Thompson’s account of Raoul Duke’s and Dr. Gonzo’s ‘savage journey to the heart of the American Dream’ (iii) is, if anything, a spiritual successor to the works of the writers of the Beat generation. It is profoundly satirical, surprisingly deep and remarkably funny, and it is more than possible to read it as a belated follow-up to *Naked Lunch*, for reasons which I will elaborate further in this paper’s conclusive chapter. It is hardly surprising that Thompson’s novel has gained cult status, as has Terry Gilliam’s highly successful film adaptation starring Johnny Depp and Benicio del Toro as the book’s main characters. Despite being a generally well known classic, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* has been largely ignored by literary critics; only a handful of articles about it exist. Compared to the high interest in Thompson as a person, about whom several extensive biographies have been written, this lack of interest in his literary works is almost as disappointing as it is uncalled for. There also seems to be a tendency for those critics that have, in fact, written on the novel, to get muddled in inappropriate biographism⁷⁹, focusing on what Hunter S. Thompson might or might not have actually done on two trips two Las Vegas accompanied by ‘Oscar Zeta Acosta, a 250-pound Chicano activist/lawyer and fellow drug-indulged counterculturalist’ (MacFarlane 177), instead of on the novel’s evident and abundant literary values.

In this respect, I agree with Robert Sickels, who, after giving a terse summary of what can be considered canonical knowledge about Thompson’s actual stays in Las Vegas, sums up the issue in the following way:

⁷⁹ A case in point is Scott MacFarlane, whose otherwise highly insightful writing, which I will reference in the following for the relevant points he makes, lacks in that respect. For him, Raoul Duke, Thompson’s persona in the novel, is, in fact, Thompson himself.

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas originated in “real life” when Thompson (whose fictional counterpart is named Raoul Duke) was sent to Las Vegas by *Sports Illustrated* to cover the 1971 Mint 400 motorcycle race. While in Vegas covering the race, Thompson was concurrently assigned by *Rolling Stone* to cover the annual convention of the National Association of District Attorneys.⁸⁰ Thompson’s friend, attorney Oscar Zeta Acosta (the novel’s Dr. Gonzo [...]), accompanied him to Las Vegas. This much is thought to be “true.” Although many critics have objected to what they see as the disturbing lack of a clear dividing line between fact and fiction, it seems to me that trying to determine what else is “true” about the novel is both impossible and pointless. As far as *Fear and Loathing* is concerned, Thompson is wearing the hat of “novelist,” not “journalist,” in which case whether the events depicted are “true” doesn’t really matter. (64)

For this reason, I will consider *Fear and Loathing* as the work of fiction that it ultimately is. Granted, Raoul Duke intersects with Hunter S. Thompson much like Bill Lee does with William Burroughs, and Thompson plays with the nature of this persona repeatedly, but an actual equation – as, for instance, Scott MacFarlane assumes as given even – is, in my opinion, neither helpful nor adequate. While the novel as such is – especially in comparison with Burroughs’ enigmatic *Naked Lunch* – highly accessible, its narrative, its characters and its cultural critique are no straightforward matter by any means. The world of *Fear and Loathing*, essentially the Las Vegas of the early 1970s, along with its immediate surroundings, is rather strictly defined as regards both place and time of action. This direct anchoring in reality, however, only makes the novel’s unreliable nature stand out all the more.

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas is, in its constant reference to popular culture, a very physical novel, and it brilliantly shows the American fixation on cultural icons. Thompson manages to convincingly portray American society in the 1970s by embedding his story in allusions to outstanding public figures, news items, a broader historical context and, what is probably most remarkable, a best-of soundtrack of the time. Also outstanding are Ralph Steadman’s illustrations of the novel – a most unusual feature in a book for adults –, which take up Thompson’s most nightmarish scenes and not only complement them, but further flesh out the grotesque and often hideous back side of the American Dream that Thompson aptly distils from beneath the surface of American society.

I will start my discussion of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* by examining the more unconventional features of the novel, namely its illustrations in relation to its narrative and the mutual influence these two features exert upon each other. I will also briefly comment on the scarce

⁸⁰ Already at this relatively insignificant detail, accounts differ strikingly. MacFarlane, for instance, in citing Thompson’s biographer Paul Perry, maintains that ‘the visit to Vegas for the Mint “400” off-road race occurred many weeks before the trip to visit the drug enforcement conference.’ (Perry qtd. in MacFarlane 188) Hunter S. Thompson himself has stated in an interview that ‘[t]here was a huge break between the Mint 400 motorcycle race [...] and the DA’s conference.’ (“Fear and Loathing at 25”)

paratexts of the book to determine their influence on a valid interpretation. In this context, the particular mixture of fact and fiction the book poses should also be addressed and explained in some detail in order to show how Thompson's sceptical view of American society is in fact validated by the unreliable position his narrator occupies. I will then proceed in the fashion outlined in the introductory chapters of this thesis, focusing successively on the novel's content, its macrostructure as well as its language to examine how Thompson's unique take on unreliable narration functions on these various levels.

3.1. PRELIMINARIES: FEAR, LOATHING AND SYNAESTHESIA

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, probably more so than most other novels of the 20th century, is a strongly synaesthetic work. Thompson makes use of highly evocative language, which, by means of visually appalling descriptions and likewise illustrations, appeals not only to the eye, but also very much to the ear by making constant direct reference to singers, songwriters and their songs whenever the novel's protagonists encounter – or imagine – music on their quest to find the American Dream. Seeing and hearing are also the two crucial senses on which the narrative's unreliability rests, and by which the degree of deviation from established reality can be most efficiently gauged. Both senses are already appealed to in the novel's various pretexts and thus serve as building blocks for the world and atmosphere of the book even before its pagination actually begins. In this chapter, I want to explore Ralph Steadman's complementary – and often expansive – illustrations of the novel and examine how they serve to further flesh out the atmosphere, text world and characters that Thompson creates. I also want to mention the introductory paratexts of the novel as well as dwell on their implications and briefly comment on the implied soundtrack of the book.

Compared to the paratextual universe that *Naked Lunch* confronts the reader with before the inception of the novel proper, the paratexts *Fear and Loathing* makes do with are of a rather small scale, but they nevertheless serve as important atmosphere building elements right from the beginning. The novel's dedication, its illustrated frontispiece and its epigraph are highly evocative and already contain several of the book's main features in condensed form, and their nature further warrants the book's classification as a novel. Its dedication reads as follows:

To Bob Geiger,
for reasons that need
not be explained here

—and to Bob Dylan,
for *Mister Tambourine Man* (v)

Already in this pretext, the author – as one can indeed assume from the text being a dedication – hides information from the reader. The ‘reasons that need not be explained here’ (v) remain a mystery, and trustworthy though the novel’s narrator – who, as I have already mentioned, shares much with its author – may come across, he will also hide information from the reader. Whether he does so consciously is, of course, an entirely different question. What is, however, also interesting about the dedication is its direct reference to “Mr. Tambourine Man” by Bob Dylan. Similarly, Raoul Duke will regularly reference other artists and their songs in the course of the novel, and their music will always serve as an accompanying soundtrack to the respective scenes in which they are mentioned.

Duke also makes a habit out of repeatedly quoting song lyrics, and for this very reason, it seems more than appropriate to have a closer look at the lyrics of “Mr. Tambourine Man”, the song that evidently sets the scene for *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. While the song’s meaning is not entirely clear⁸¹, several of its verses do seem to hint at some of the major themes Thompson emphasises in his novel. There is, however, one verse in particular – the third, to be precise – that stands out in connection with the novel’s setting:

Though you might hear laughin', spinnin', swingin' madly across the sun,
It's not aimed at anyone, it's just escapin' on the run
And but for the sky there are no fences facin'.
And if you hear vague traces of skippin' reels of rhyme
To your tambourine in time, it's just a ragged clown behind,
I wouldn't pay it any mind, it's just a shadow you're
Seein' that he's chasing. (“Mr. Tambourine Man”)

The aimless ‘laughin’, spinnin’, swingin’ madly across the sun’ can be directly related to the city of Las Vegas, a city that, for Thompson, constitutes the heart of the American Dream, its epicentre, its essence. It is a city concerned with superficiality, in which surface is everything, and in which, in turn, everything is hollow. The undirected and unrelated sounds of joy Dylan sings about are exactly the sort of background noise that Las Vegas elicits from its visitors – people looking for money and fulfilment in a town that can only grant them superficial, disposable gratification. In their pursuit, they become parodies of themselves – ‘ragged clown[s]’ reduced to chasing shadows. Evidently, Thompson’s cultural critique – which I will examine more closely in the following chapters – is very close in spirit to Bob Dylan’s evaluation of what might be called the Ameri-

⁸¹ The most widespread interpretation unsurprisingly connects “Mr. Tambourine Man” to drugs. See, for instance, Marx.

can condition. Thompson, similar to Dylan, sees in the Americans a society blinded by flashy looks and outward appearance that cannot interpret the signs of its own demise, of the degradation underneath – and what better city to illustrate this contrast than the glittering mock paradise of Las Vegas?

What follows the dedication is Ralph Steadman's frontispiece to the novel (see FIG. 1), a large black and white ink drawing that spans two pages and shows the novel's protagonists, Raoul Duke and Dr. Gonzo, on their trip through the desert:

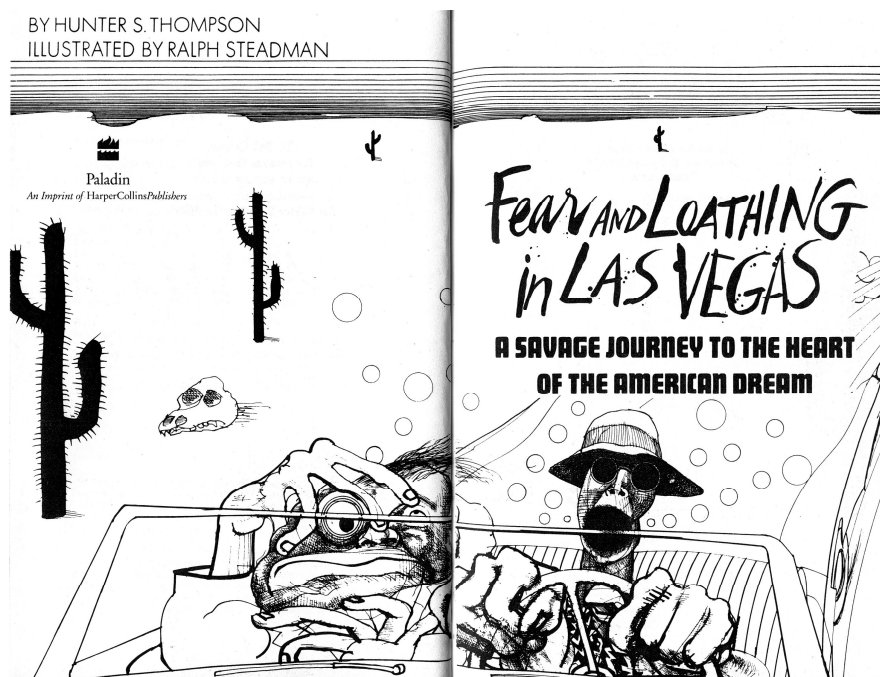


FIG. 1. Frontispiece to the Novel, ink drawing from Ralph Steadman *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1993) vi-vii.

Steadman's illustrations for the novel are all heavily stylised, and his characters, while still resembling humans in physique and posture, are almost always grotesquely distorted and full of bizarre features. Steadman's images mirror the narrative of the novel, in which the influence of various drugs regularly leads to nightmarishly distorted figures in the perception of Duke and Gonzo. They themselves are no exception: Dr. Gonzo⁸², in accordance with his portly stature, is presented as a large, bulky and misshapen blob of meat; Duke is similarly distorted, but clearly made to resemble an otherworldly Hunter S. Thompson – he sports, for instance, Thompson's trademark bucket hat. Floating above them like air bubbles, white circles can be seen that Steadman

⁸² Dr. Gonzo, as stated above, is based on lawyer Oscar Acosta.

uses to indicate the influence of the strong psychedelic drug LSD on the characters and, in consequence, on the scene.

The next image the reader encounters seems to be a follow-up to the frontispiece: while the frontispiece shows Duke and Gonzo from up front, with the desert behind them, the title image of the novel's first part shows them from behind, their heads turned back towards the reader, driving to what can only be Las Vegas (see FIG. 2):

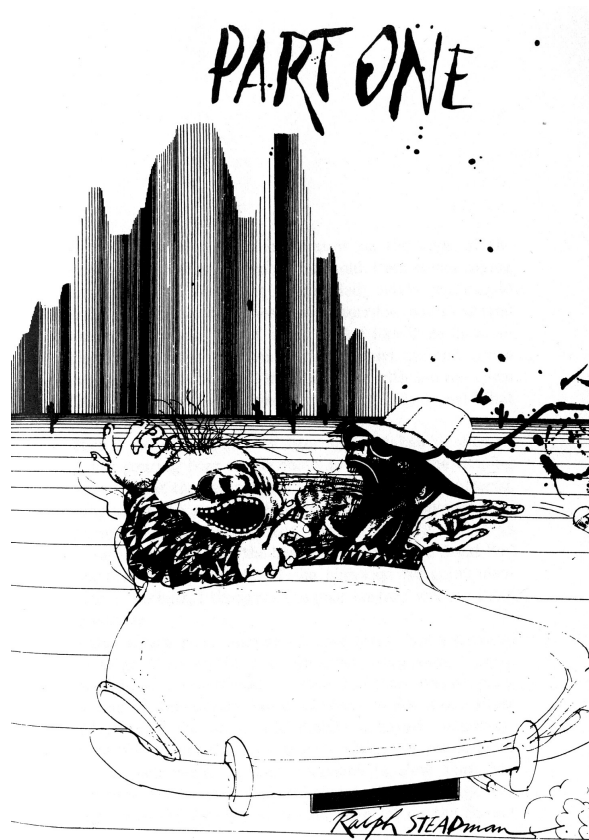


FIG. 2. Illustration of Part One, ink drawing from Ralph Steadman, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1993) 1.

What is especially interesting in this image is Steadman's depiction of Las Vegas, a blurry shape of vertical lines, which gives the look and feel of a mirage – what John Hellmann calls an 'ominous distortion of the landscape produced by the Las Vegas architecture' (76) on a similar note. This builds on Thompson's evaluation of the superficiality of the American Dream, a concept closely connected with the city of Las Vegas as its epitome; as it turns out, there is, in fact, nothing beneath the surface in Las Vegas. The city – and the hopes and dreams connected with it – is a mere illusion, a Fata Morgana in the vast desert that is American society. What is also important in this respect is that the reader is left behind on Duke's and Gonzo's journey to the American

Dream embodied by the fleeting image of Las Vegas; he is looking towards the journey's destination, seeing the protagonists move away from him in the car. Thus the reader's role in the whole of the novel is revealed: namely that of the uninvolved observer, watching the story unfold from a fixed vantage point. Nevertheless the narrator is aware of the reader, looking towards him, referring to him, but the entirety of events is not, or rather cannot be, revealed to the reader, who ultimately remains an outsider to the world of the novel.

The guiding principle of Steadman's illustrations to *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is one of exaggeration: In a sense, he delivers in pictures what Thompson only mildly hints at by depicting, and thereby fully realises Thompson's grotesque scenes and characters in explicit detail. This is especially noticeable in his take on the police officers attending the narcotics conference in the second part of the novel (see FIG. 3): Not only do they all look exactly alike in terms of clothing, stature and facial expression; their bodies are jagged mountains of excess body fat and their attitude is one of angry annoyance. Steadman's depiction of casino patrons is similarly revolting and shows stone-faced, aged and worn figures with empty eyes and Nazi side partings, their attention fixed entirely on the gambling table (see also FIG.3).

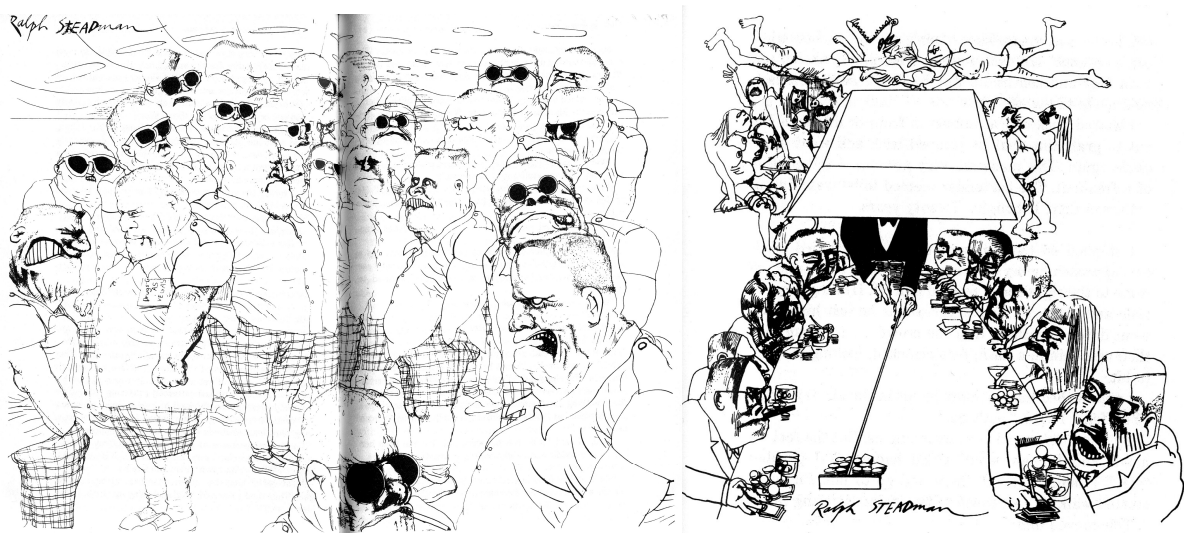


FIG. 3. Cops and Casino Patrons, ink drawings from Ralph Steadman, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1993) 112-113; 49.

Implications of National Socialism are an especially prevalent part of Thompson's cultural critique, and Steadman realises this by making the casino patrons and the cops – whom Duke only calls 'pigs' (110) – at the conference apparent Nazis. That fascism and racism are an intrinsic part of American culture becomes most obvious with the hitchhiker Duke and Gonzo pick up at the beginning of the novel (see FIG. 4):



FIG. 4. The Infamous Hitchhiker, ink drawing from Ralph Steadman, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1993) 7.

His t-shirt shows Mickey Mouse in a gesture of political triumph, forming the victory sign with both hands, and sporting an, albeit reversed, swastika on his chest.⁸³ This image is especially interesting because Thompson makes no mention of the hitchhiker's t-shirt in the text, yet the accompanying image catches the spirit of Thompson's writing perfectly and serves as a logical extension of the text. Whether Steadman envisioned the National Socialist Mickey Mouse as an aside towards its creator Walt Disney, who allegedly sympathised with Nazi ideology, or whether one is to read this simply as a statement about the position of American cultural icons is unclear. Regardless of its background, however, the image retains a highly disruptive – and therefore highly satirical – quality. It evokes one of America's best known cartoon characters and combines it with one of the most universally condemned symbols⁸⁴, thus forging a link between the two elements. This addition, an accretion of new information to the reader's knowledge and evalua-

⁸³ It cannot be determined whether the original image in my edition of the text has been mirrored for the printing process. Ralph Steadman's signature, however, indicates that the swastika is, in fact, intended to point to the left.

⁸⁴ That swastikas have been used as religious and even holy symbols for many millennia is beside the point here. Clearly, Steadman's depiction of Mickey Mouse relates to the swastika as a symbol for Germany's Nazi party during the first half of the 20th century.

tion of Mickey Mouse, is what sheds new light on the darker implications of the figure. Like Steadman, Thompson also repeatedly uses schema accretion to reveal the nature of American culture and American society.

In the novel's second part, Steadman's illustrations even start to literally spill over into Thompson's text. Steadman's characteristic spattered ink appears on several pages of text and covers the writing repeatedly towards the end of the novel (see FIG. 5).

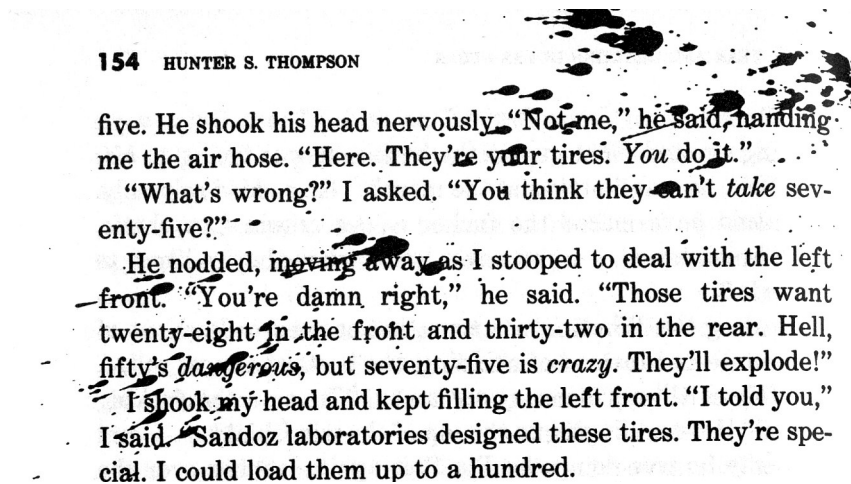


FIG. 5. Ink Blots on the Text, ink drawing from Ralph Steadman, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (London: Flamingo-HarperCollins, 1993) 154.

While the text remains readable – no words or even letters are covered entirely –, the spilt ink adds an atmospheric component to the book as a physical object. Thompson, at several points in the novel, refers to the text as a collection of notes he took on napkins, notepaper and other materials while under the influence of various drugs⁸⁵, and the spots of ink give the book a condensed facsimile quality. While the book is of course typeset in its entirety, the ink spots evoke notions of the candid, authentically reproduced notes that the novel, albeit only purportedly, comprises and all their imperfections and spots of ink, blood, coffee or whatever else. Nothing is ever entirely clean and neat in the world of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and the book itself reproduces this quality as a physical object.

The physical substance of the novel is further enhanced by its continuous allusion to songs and artists of the 1960s and 70s, as I have already mentioned above. Their music, even if only hinted at, serves as the soundtrack to many of the novel's key scenes as envisioned by Thompson. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, therefore, is a novel that contains its own soundtrack; a soundtrack that is often deeply satirical in implication. Already at the novel's very beginning,

⁸⁵ For a detailed discussion of these metafictional scenes and their implications, see the following chapter.

explicit mention is made of the music accompanying Duke's and Gonzo's trip to Las Vegas. The car stereo blares out Brewer & Shipley's "One Toke Over the Line", while Duke "[grapples] with a tape recorder turned all the way up on [the Rolling Stones'] "Sympathy for the Devil."" (*Fear and Loathing* 4) Dr. Gonzo is even

humming along with the rhythm section and kind of moaning the words: "One toke over the line, Sweet Jesus . . . One toke over the line . . ." (4)

Clearly, the lines of the song's chorus are even more evocative than its title, which is also mentioned. For "Sympathy for the Devil", such a reminder is apparently not necessary. The reader, however, can immediately imagine the cacophony 'between the wind and the radio and the tape machine' (5). Music often sets the scene in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and at this point in the novel, the awful mixture between "One Toke Over the Line" and "Sympathy for the Devil" is highly evocative of the book's atmosphere. Brewer & Shipley's 1970s hippie hymn with the Rolling Stones' 1968 hit over-imposed on it not only serves as a musical accompaniment to the drug frenzy of the novel's beginning, but the two songs also serve to locate the novel in the early 1970s – an in-between period of American history on whose apparently contradictory and odd nature Thompson frequently dwells and which is responsible for many of the curious characters and attitudes one finds in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

Duke, the novel's narrator, is frequently rather outspoken as regards his evaluation of the music he encounters at various stages of his journey. What he hears – or, at some point or other, imagines to hear – always has an immediate impact on his mood, and in consequence also on the mood and atmosphere of the respective scenes in the novel; ultimately, therefore, even on a reading of said scenes. The music Thompson evokes thus becomes an intrinsic part of the novel's ground, but, in passages such as the above, also serves as figure. This is especially true for one of the novel's most memorable scenes, in which Dr. Gonzo, who, sitting in a bathtub, has chewed up 'the whole blotter [i.e. LSD]' (58) and '[seems] on the verge of some awful psychic orgasm' (60). He then asks Duke to play Jefferson Airplane's iconic song "White Rabbit": "[“]And when it comes to that fantastic note where the rabbit bites its own head off, I want you to throw that fuckin [sic] radio into the tub with me.” ’ (60) This clearly shows that the music, while it usually serves as a world-building element for Thompson, frequently is employed as a function-advancing proposition and is thus an important part of the novel's impact as a whole.

As I have already stated, many of the novel's most memorable scenes are set to music in a similar fashion, even by way of recurring musical leitmotifs. Among these are, for instance, Bob Dylan's "Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again", but also the above-mentioned

“Sympathy for the Devil” and even “One Toke Over the Line”. As the novel draws to a close, however, Duke, boarding a plane at the Las Vegas airport, states that

[s]omewhere down the corridor a jukebox was playing “One Toke Over the Line.” I listened for a moment, but *my nerve ends were no longer receptive* [my emphasis]. The only song I might have been able to relate to, at that point, was “Mister Tambourine Man⁸⁶.” Or maybe “Memphis Blues Again. . . .”
 “*Awww, mama . . . can this really . . . be the end . . . ?*” (197)

This scene illustrates the strong impact music has on the novel’s narrative – the end of the novel, Duke’s departure from Las Vegas, is also, in a sense, the end of an era⁸⁷, where the songs of the past lose their evocative power, and maybe even their meaning. Song lyrics repeatedly permeate the narrative akin to the above passage; some even become part of the narrative proper⁸⁸. Still, one can never be sure of the nature of the music thus evoked. As Duke hears, or imagines to hear, “The Battle Hymn of Lieutenant Calley” (29), he ponders:

No! I *can’t* be hearing this! It must be the drug. (32)

Similarly, upon hearing “Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again” (which is by far the song most alluded to in the novel), Duke asks himself whether he has ‘actually *hear[d]* that fucking thing on the jukebox right now’ (84). Apart from being evident signs of unreliability on Duke’s part (who is never certain whether or not the music he hears is just in his mind), these and similar appeals to common knowledge make the world of the novel highly accessible to the audience; they evoke, or maybe even trigger sensual (in this case auditive) experiences. While the readers, as I have stated above, ultimately remain outsiders to the world of the novel, these instances nevertheless enable them to share Duke’s and Gonzo’s cognitive horizon to a far greater extent than would be possible otherwise. It is for precisely this reason that music is such an integral part to the synaesthetic qualities *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* undoubtedly possesses. That songs repeatedly trigger important scenes in the novel, and that song lyrics enter the narrative proper at various points, sometimes even without being set off from the rest of the text and

⁸⁶ Compare the novel’s dedication, which I have quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

⁸⁷ This evidently has to do with ‘this doomstruck era of Nixon’ (178) the United States are in in 1971. It is worth noting that Thompson directly and openly attacks Richard Nixon in several of Duke’s asides. Despite their explicit nature, however, they remain no more than side notes for the novel at large, which is why I will not discuss them further.

Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail ’72, Thompson’s indirect follow-up to *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, deals with Nixon much more explicitly. For more information, see Sue Matheson’s account of “Caricature, Secular Shamanism, and Cultural Compensation in Hunter S. Thompson’s *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail ’72* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.”

⁸⁸ See, for instance, *Fear and Loathing* 72.

thereby occupying the same deictic level as the narration itself, is only additional evidence of the high significance Thompson gives music in his novel.⁸⁹

Before I begin my discussion of the novel's content layer, however, I want to examine the novel's epigraph, which, together with its dedication and frontispiece, prepares the reader for that which is to come:

“He who makes a beast of
himself gets rid of the pain of
being a man.”

—DR. JOHNSON (ix)

I have already mentioned the epigraph in connection with the dehumanising effect of (drug) addiction that befalls the characters of *Naked Lunch*; the characters in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* suffer from a similar loss of humanity. It is inherently the quality of life in Las Vegas that brings out the beast in its visitors – gambling, alcohol and prostitution serve as the mind numbing pain-killer that Las Vegas' patrons are so eager to find in this city 'built on providing desperate people with false hope.' (Sickels 62) Thus making a beast of oneself is not restricted to the novel's two protagonists; on the contrary, it is almost a prerequisite for any visitor to Las Vegas, or – as explained above – to the heart of the American Dream. The book's epigraph, in turn, is at the heart of Thompson's critique of American society – a society which is all about reverting to a stage of primal, unmitigated rage.⁹⁰ This finding concludes the discussion of the novel's synaesthetic qualities, its illustrations, and paratexts, and leads directly to an analysis of the novel's content layer.

⁸⁹ That *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* first appeared in *Rolling Stone*, a magazine noteworthy for its coverage of popular music, certainly serves to explain Thompson's preoccupation with music to some point. Still, the fact remains that his constant allusions to popular songs and artists add a special quality to the novel that remains unchanged even against the background of it first appearing in a music magazine; there are no actual performances of music in the novel, and neither do any artists appear. The few seconds Duke and Gonzo manage to witness Debbie Reynolds on stage before being thrown out of the casino she is performing in (44) cannot even remotely count as an exception in this respect.

⁹⁰ Robert Sickels, in his article “A Countercultural *Gatsby*”, makes the interesting point that the United States at large have, over the last twenty years, begun to resemble Las Vegas, and the society and lifestyle it entails, more and more (62-63), which he considers an alarming development:

When reading Thompson's ridiculing treatment of Vegas today, it no longer seems quite as funny, although it certainly seems even more applicable; this is because in the years since its publication, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* has gone from being specifically about Las Vegas to applying to America as a whole. (63)

While this is certainly true, the novel has, in my opinion, always been about the United States as a whole; Las Vegas, in its representing the American Dream, is, as I have outlined above, merely the distilled essence of what it means to be an American.

3.2. UNRELIABILITY IN *FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS*

3.2.1. CONTENT: A RUDE AWAKENING FROM THE AMERICAN DREAM

Compared to the impenetrable fog of text that *Naked Lunch* throws at the reader, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is a fairly straightforward read. The novel follows a rather conventional structure⁹¹ and makes use of a relatively uniform narrative voice that reveals the plot to the reader. However, the novel's narrator is no more to be trusted than the many unreliable voices Burroughs allows to speak in his novel, perhaps even less so. In this chapter, I want to explore how unreliability is realised on the content level of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* despite its apparently highly conventional outset. It is also at this point that questions of cultural critique are most relevant, since Thompson has his narrative persona criticise many aspects of American society and culture very openly and explicitly. I want to begin my analysis of the novel's unreliability by looking at its mediating instance: Raoul Duke, alleged original author *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

Indeed, '*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* by 'Raoul Duke' first appeared in *Rolling Stone* magazine, issue 95, November 11, 1971, and issue 96, November 25, 1971.' (*Fear and Loathing* iv) Duke is to Thompson more or less what Lee is to Burroughs: a persona, a stand-in, an intersecting personality between fact and fiction 'which the actual Hunter Thompson manipulates as calculatingly as Laurence Sterne did Tristram Shandy.' (Hellmann 69) Just as the America of the early 1970s is surprisingly, sometimes terrifyingly real in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, its protagonist Raoul Duke, who shares more than just a few features with his creator Hunter S. Thompson, is surprisingly real as well. Clearly, '[t]he author-as-narrator-as-journalist-as-character is evidently a highly complex, multiple, self-reflexive, self-conscious literary construct.' (DeKoven 91) Thompson even plays on the relationship between Duke, who, being 'a doctor of journalism' (19), goes to Las Vegas for two major writing assignments, and himself by having Duke's attorney Dr. Gonzo use Thompson as an alias for Duke in a telegram:

"This telegram just came for you," [the hotel clerk] said. "But actually it *isn't* for you. It's for somebody named Thompson, but it says '*care of Raoul Duke*'; does that make sense?" [...]

I nodded, barely able to speak. "Yes," I said finally, "it makes sense." I accepted the envelope and tore it open:

URGENT SPEED LETTER

HUNTER S. THOMPSON
C/O RAOUL DUKE
SOUNDPROOF SUITE 1850

⁹¹ The novel's structure will be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter.

MINT HOTEL LAS VEGAS (76)

The novel's unreliability, therefore, already begins at the feigned uncertainty of its alleged original author, who always poses as the chronicler of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Still, Duke and Thompson intersect to a large extent; their names, in fact, are made interchangeable by Dr. Gonzo's speed letter. Whether one is to take Thompson or Duke for the narrator of the story is a question that cannot be easily answered, and even Duke, who wants to assure the hotel clerk that everything, in fact, "makes sense" (76) soon is forced to acknowledge a different relationship between alleged sender, addressee and actual recipient:

"Look," I said. "That telegram was all scrambled. It was actually *from* Thompson, not *to* him. Western Union must have got the names reversed." I held up the telegram, knowing he'd already read it. "What this *is*," I said, "is a speed message to Dr. Gonzo, upstairs, saying Thompson is on his way out from L.A. with a new assignment—a new work order." (78)

By mirroring the narrative situation, this scene perfectly illustrates the omnipresent unreliability that defines Duke's idiosyncratic – and strongly individualistic – take on the events and characters he presents. The reader, despite viewing the action from an outside perspective, is as confused as the hotel clerk trying desperately to make sense of the telegram that arrived for Hunter S. Thompson and/or Raoul Duke. The exact relationship between Duke and Thompson is never cleared up, but is rather put to use by Thompson to instigate a permanent uncertainty in the reader.⁹²

The contents of the letter itself are similarly difficult to understand. As it turns out, even Duke himself is rather surprised at the outrageous contents of the letter:

"Holy Shit!" I muttered. "This can't be true." (77)

Clearly, Duke himself is also in a position of not knowing what to make of the letter he receives. Quite frequently, he hears or sees things whose existence he, and with him also the reader, has

⁹² The confusion between Duke and Thompson culminates hilariously in the novel's penultimate chapter:

[The bouncers] confronted me with a big photograph of me and my attorney sitting at a table in the floating bar.
I shrugged. "That's not me," I said. "That's a guy named Thompson. He works for *Rolling Stone* . . . a really vicious, crazy kind of person. And that guy sitting next to him is a hit-man for the Mafia in Hollywood. [...]" (195)

The impact of this passage, and the uncertainty incited, is all the greater for the fact that *Fear and Loathing* was originally published under the name of Raoul Duke (see above).

Scott MacFarlane offers, as I have already stated above, a different point of view on the identity of Raoul Duke, whom he equates entirely with Thompson (176). I have voiced my disagreement with such a treatment, in line with Robert Sickels, in chapter 3.1.

reason to doubt the existence of. What he subsequently does – and what the reader does as well – is apply the information received to various world schemas he is familiar with, albeit usually unsuccessfully. Not only is he hard pressed to make sense of the telegram from the above passage for himself (which, as his reaction indicates, is anything but easy), but the clerk also wants its contents explained. Duke, who himself is not sure about the rather obscure meaning of Dr. Gonzo's telegram, has to come up with a plausible explanation for the telegram. This is a highly exemplary instance of unreliability in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*: More often than not, Raoul Duke does not know what happened to him and Dr. Gonzo for sure, which makes his account highly unreliable. This unreliability is in turn exacerbated by Duke's almost compulsive tendency to rationalise and somehow explain the often disturbing and hardly comprehensible results of his and Gonzo's drug excesses.⁹³ As the novel progresses, even Duke's rationalisations – to the reader, to himself, and to the various characters he encounters – become more and more fantastic and utterly unbelievable, and the fact that he repeatedly offers several different takes on what might or might not have happened in his and Gonzo's drug-induced frenzies – one for himself, usually an implied one for the reader, and an entirely different one for the officials, as it were – does not make constructing a factual sequence of events any easier.

From a cognitive point of view, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is interesting insofar as its protagonist and narrator Raoul Duke relies heavily on schema knowledge in his perception of himself and of the world surrounding him. His constant use of psychoactive drugs renders his perceptions untrustworthy, which leads to permanently supplied re-evaluations of ultimately unknowable facts and events. The reader, who does not know any more about what happened than Duke does, and often even less⁹⁴, is witness to Duke's attempt to apply basic schematic knowledge to the various dissociated things he thinks he can actually remember, a practice that usually fails and does not offer any real clues towards what happened. The reader thus witnesses the unreliable narrator of the story trying to piece together a plausible version of reality, to apply world schema knowledge to bits and pieces that cannot be subsumed by it, which is why the effort is always doomed to end in schema disruption. The reader is just as hard pressed as the narrator to try and fit the events of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* into common world schemas, but the task is as impossible for the audience as it is for the narrator himself. The unreliability thus created becomes even more drastic through the novel's realistic and highly plausible setting and its clear and precise indication of time and place, which increases the incompatibility between Duke's and Gonzo's distorted perception of reality and the real world in which the novel is set.

⁹³ A case in point is Duke's description of his and Gonzo's hotel room at the Flamingo (187-188), which contains 'evidence [...] of excessive consumption of almost every type of drug known to civilized man since 1544 a.d.' (188)

⁹⁴ I will account for this in the following chapter.

From the novel's very beginning, Duke's narrative makes painstakingly clear that whatever he tells is to be taken with a grain of salt at best:

We were somewhere around the edge of Barstow when *the drugs began to take hold* [my emphasis]. I remember saying something like "I feel a bit lightheaded; maybe you should drive. . . ." And suddenly there was a terrible roar all around us and the sky was full of what looked like huge bats, all swooping and screeching and diving around the car, which was going about a hundred miles an hour with the top down to Las Vegas. And a voice was screaming: "Holy Jesus! What are these goddamn animals?" (3)

The hold of the drugs Duke and Gonzo are constantly consuming will not be broken for the entire novel. The above paragraph serves as a prime example for Raoul Duke's warped perception of reality, one that the reader is forced to share for lack of other, more reliable perspectives on the unfolding scene. All of this has to be taken at face value, and the narrator's confusion at the sight of 'what looked like huge bats' (3) soon becomes the reader's as well. As it stands, one merely knows that 'the drugs began to take hold' (3), which may or may not explain the 'terrible roar all round [the car]', the 'huge bats [...] swooping and screeching and diving round the car' and a screaming voice demanding an explanation (3). Of course, no explanation is given – Dr. Gonzo merely asks "What the hell are you yelling about?" (3), as the screaming voice is of course Duke's very own⁹⁵, who meanwhile has evidently realised the psychoactive cause of the bats he sees:

No point mentioning those bats, I thought. The poor bastard will see them soon enough.
(3)

This leaves no doubt of Duke's distorted perspective: What he sees or hears has no foundation in reality, a fact the reader is able to extrapolate from Duke's take on the situation, as well as his reaction to Gonzo's question. After all, he sees no point in arguing about the bats – he apparently realises they do not exist, but he also knows that his attorney, whose consumption of drugs rivals Duke's, will soon be able to see them himself. The only thing Duke is absolutely sure of, the only thing he can actually know at this point, is that '[v]ery soon, [...] [he and Dr. Gonzo] would both be completely twisted.' (3) This definitive statement stands in stark contrast to the generally tentative language Duke usually employs, thereby always indicating his own doubts regarding the va-

⁹⁵ A similar dissociative episode occurs when Duke and Gonzo check into the Mint Hotel (see also below). Duke informs the reader that 'when [they] finally arrived at the Mint Hotel [his] attorney was unable to cope artfully with the registration procedure.' (23) It is, however, Duke, and not Gonzo, who fails to act inconspicuously on that occasion. This is merely one example of Duke's common self-contradictions.

lidity of what he perceives.⁹⁶ It marks the only certainty the reader, and Duke, for that matter, can cling to in the course of the entire novel.

With this in mind, the reader learns that Duke and Gonzo are on their way to the ‘fabulous Mint 400’ (3), a desert race held in Las Vegas:

[...] I was, after all, a professional journalist; so I had an obligation to *cover the story*, for good or ill.

The sporting editors [of the magazine Duke writes for] had given me \$300 in cash, most of which was already spent on extremely dangerous drugs. The trunk of the car looked like a mobile police narcotics lab. We had two bags of grass, seventy-five pellets of mescaline, five sheets of high-powered blotter acid, a salt shaker half full of cocaine, and a whole galaxy of multi-colored uppers, downers, screamers, laughers . . . and also a quart of tequila, a quart of rum, a case of Budweiser, a pint of raw ether and two dozen amyls.

[...] Not that we *needed* all that for the trip, but once you get locked into a serious drug collection, the tendency is to push it as far as you can. (4)

Duke, as it turns out, goes about very dutifully in covering the story for the reader; the only thing he does not cover is his actual assignment, but the events surrounding it are documented to the best of his – cognitively restricted – abilities. The above passage shows Duke’s heavily confessional voice, always explaining to the audience what they cannot be presumed to know. Duke also presents the novel’s catalogue of drugs, which appears to be an irreverent postmodernist parody of the ancient literary tradition to start an epic tale with a catalogue of ships (as in the *Iliad*) or armies (as in countless medieval novels). Duke, after describing his and Gonzo’s arsenal of drugs and thereby evoking in the reader the schema of drugs and drug addiction – and the unreliability this entails –, is quite outspoken about what he expects to happen next:

The only thing that really worried me was the ether. There is nothing in the world more depraved and helpless than a man in the depths of an ether binge. *And I knew we’d get into that rotten stuff pretty soon* [my emphasis]. [...] We had sampled almost everything else, and now—yes, it was time for a long snort of ether. And then do the next hundred miles in a horrible, slobbering sort of spastic stupor. (4)

This quotation displays Duke’s almost scientific curiosity about the effects of drugs and his astounding ability to connect with the readership: while it is he himself who will be ‘depraved and helpless’ (4) soon, his deadpan and unaffected delivery of his and Gonzo’s plans makes him a seemingly trustworthy, serious voice. Once again, the only thing that he can say with absolutely certainty is that ‘[he and Dr. Gonzo would] get into that rotten stuff pretty soon’ (4), which will lead to a ‘horrible, slobbering sort of spastic stupor’ (4) the reader will be made a firsthand witness of. Over the course of the novel, Duke offers several similar insights into the effects of the

⁹⁶ A detailed discussion of unreliability in the novel’s language will follow in chapter 3.2.3.

various drugs he and Gonzo consume. In each case, the narrative mirrors the altered states of consciousness Duke experiences explicitly.⁹⁷

Clearly, the world schema of drugs and drug addiction is omnipresent in the novel; the reader's understanding and knowledge thereof is even further added to by Duke's at times almost scholarly, instructive voice. By means of repeated status updates, he constantly informs the reader of what he and Gonzo have been taking and even describes the metabolic impact of the respective drugs responsible for their behaviour. Upon entering the Circus-Circus, a particularly horrible casino⁹⁸, for instance, they consume the anaesthetic ether:

This is the main advantage of ether: it makes you behave like the village drunkard in some early Irish novel . . . total loss of all basic motor skills: blurred vision, no balance, numb tongue—severance of all connection between the body and the brain. Which is interesting, because the brain continues to function more or less normally . . . you can actually *watch* yourself behaving in this terrible way, but you can't control it. (45)

After this passage, the reader is confronted with theory put into practice: Duke and Gonzo stumble through the turnstiles of the Circus-Circus and confirm every notion about the effects of ether Duke has mentioned. Similar accounts on mescaline (most strikingly 48), LSD (especially 144) and other drugs follow, thereby accreting the world schema of drugs and their effects dramatically over the course of the novel.⁹⁹ The narrative then immediately takes on the qualities Duke has previously outlined, and the reader learns about the various drugs' impact on Duke's and Gonzo's perception of things.

Related to the drugs' immediate mind-warping (and thus narrative-warping) effects, however, is also something else: in the beginning (and also later), Duke's narrative shows, above all, clear signs of paranoia. The symptoms worsen when he and Dr. Gonzo decide to pick up the aforementioned hitchhiker¹⁰⁰, which triggers the following reflection in Duke:

How long can we *maintain*? I wondered. How long before one of us starts raving and jabbering at this boy? What will he think then? This same lonely desert was the last known home of the Manson family. Will he make that grim connection when my attorney starts screaming about bats and huge manta rays coming down on the car? If so—well, we'll just have to cut his head off and bury him somewhere. Because it goes without saying that we can't turn him loose. He'll report us at once to some kind of outback nazi [sic] law enforcement agency, and they'll run us down like dogs.

⁹⁷ I will return to this below.

⁹⁸ 'The Circus-Circus is what the whole hep [sic] world would be doing on Saturday night if the Nazis had won the war.' (46)

⁹⁹ It is in these instances that Thompson also evokes medical jargon by having Duke, whom he portrays as an informed layman, use an assortment of medical terminology, as is evident in the quote above. Compared to Burroughs' approximation of *Naked Lunch* to a medical treatise, however, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* only rarely contains such passages, which is why I will not discuss this matter in greater detail.

¹⁰⁰ See previous chapter.

Jesus! Did I *say* that? Or just think it? Was I talking? Did they hear me? (5)

Apart from exhibiting many linguistic signs of unreliability¹⁰¹, this scene is highly instrumental for Thompson's strategy of unreliable narration (which, in this case, is increased by its uncertain deictic level: Duke, and with him the reader, is not sure whether his thoughts were actually voiced; a clear indication in the form of quotation marks is also missing). Here, the character of Raoul Duke shows awareness of his – and Dr. Gonzo's – demented state of consciousness¹⁰², and of the disruptive quality their state of mind and in consequence they themselves entail. The 'grim connection' Duke establishes between the desert and 'the last known home of the Manson family' is an act of world schema evocation, and it is exemplary of Duke's general tendency to relate his experiences to the American media discourse which permeates the entire narrative and is intrinsically connected with Duke's own occupation of a journalist. As a journalist, he constantly echoes and hints at the discourse of the conservative media, which he evokes in all its outrageousness and immediately debunks, as is the case here: In order to hinder the hitchhiker from '[reporting Duke and Gonzo] to some kind of outback nazi [sic] law enforcement agency', '[they'll] just have to cut his head off and bury him somewhere.' (5) Needless to say, the passage is fiercely ironic and attacks precisely the brand of sensationalist journalism an 'outback nazi [sic] law enforcement agency' would lap up, but Duke himself is not aware of this at the moment; he is not even aware of the form – spoken or merely thought – his reflections have actually taken.

In scenes like the above, the narrative essentially strings together three layers of meaning: the actual facts, which are usually implied and hardly ever stated outright, or the *histoire* of the story, which is complemented or overshadowed by Duke's paranoia-induced vision of the *histoire* as reported by conservative sensationalist media, which is in turn covered up or rationalised by Duke in an effort to render his and Gonzo's behaviour socially acceptable, or at least explainable by reasons other than the abundant consumption of illegal drugs. In this fashion Duke attempts to justify his and Gonzo's antics to the hitchhiker, 'who is a comic stand-in for the reader, innocently picked up by this narrative and carried, unwilling and increasingly appalled, into the absurd, grotesque, ludicrous, violent nightmare of Duke's and Gonzo's quest' (DeKoven 93):

¹⁰¹ A detailed discussion of unreliability on the level of language, and of the evident linguistic signs of paranoia therein, will follow in chapter 3.2.3.

¹⁰² A similar awareness is shown by Dr. Gonzo regarding his and Duke's imminent arrival at their hotel in Las Vegas:

"You're full of acid, you fool. It'll be a goddamn miracle if we can get to the hotel and check in before you turn into a wild animal. Are you ready for that? Checking into a Vegas hotel under a phony name with intent to commit capital fraud and a head full of acid?" (22)

Scenes like the above show Duke's and Gonzo's occasional realization of the nature their exploits take; they also serve as scarce affirmations for the reader's own take on the story. The reader is of course fully aware of what Duke and Gonzo hardly ever recognise, but Duke's narration skilfully distracts from that fact.

Maybe I'd better have a chat with this boy, I thought. Perhaps if I *explain* things, he'll rest easy.

[...]

"Can you *hear* me?" I yelled.

He nodded.

"That's good," I said. "Because I want you to know that we're on our way to Las Vegas to find the American Dream." I smiled. "That's why we rented this car. It was the only way to do it. Can you grasp that?" (6)

Of course, Duke's explanation makes just as little sense to the hitchhiker as it makes to the reader; his logic has deteriorated beyond reasoning. However, he is still very outspoken and abundantly clear about the actual nature of his assignment, which consists of '[finding] the American Dream' (6).¹⁰³ It is for this reason that the following utterance of Duke's not only rings true for the specific situation it occurs in (i.e. during the ordeal with the hitchhiker), but for the novel as such:

I whacked the back of the driver's seat with my fist. "This is *important*, goddamnit! This is a *true story!*" The car swerved sickeningly, then straightened out. "Keep your hands off my fucking neck!" my attorney screamed. The kid in the back looked like he was ready to jump out of the car and take his chances.

Our vibrations were getting nasty—but why? I was puzzled, frustrated. Was there no communication in this car? Had we deteriorated to the level of *dumb beasts*?

Because my story *was* true. I was certain of that. And it was extremely important, I felt, for the *meaning* of our journey to be made absolutely clear. (8)

Regardless of the actual story Duke is supposed to cover, and which has not even happened yet, he assures the hitchhiker – and the reader, for that matter – that '[t]his is a *true story*', and an important one at that – he is 'certain of that.' (8) The 'meaning of [Duke's and Gonzo's] journey', which Duke wants to make 'absolutely clear' (8), however, is not mentioned; indeed if it were, it could serve as little more than a hollow excuse for the essentially meaningless accidents that make up the plot of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

Duke, contradicting himself, in fact admits as much only a few pages later:

But what *was* the story? Nobody had bothered to say. So we would have to drum it up on our own. Free Enterprise. The American Dream. Horatio Alger¹⁰⁴ gone mad on drugs in Las Vegas. Do it *now*: pure Gonzo journalism. (12)

¹⁰³ That Duke and Gonzo are actually going to Las Vegas to cover the 'fabulous Mint 400' (3) becomes a mere pre-text before the race has even properly started. Contingency and chance, as it turns out, are responsible for many of the events of the novel.

¹⁰⁴ For a detailed analysis of Thompson's repeated asides about the author Horatio Alger and the concept of the American Dream he propagates in his books, see Delia Falconer's article "From Alger to Edge-Work: Mapping the Shark Ethic in Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*".

Not even Duke himself is sure about what he is supposed to cover in Las Vegas; as a result, he resorts to ‘pure Gonzo journalism’¹⁰⁵ (12), which explains not only the structure of the novel¹⁰⁶, but also its distinct narrative voice¹⁰⁷ and the events it is concerned with. Instead of ‘the story’, therefore, the reader is forced to follow where Duke and Gonzo lead, and more often than not they themselves do not know or even care where that might be.¹⁰⁸ Strikingly, Duke explicitly states that ‘[they, meaning both him and Dr. Gonzo] would have to drum [the story] up on [their] own’ (12), thereby acknowledging that it is not just him who is telling the story, but Dr. Gonzo as well. While Duke always retains control over the narrative as such, he is repeatedly influenced by Gonzo’s narrative voice as well.

In fact, Dr. Gonzo assumes control over Duke – and thus over the narrative – at several occasions. In these instances, he is even less reliable than Duke, since he is an outright liar¹⁰⁹. His often outrageous stories, which the reader can only access indirectly, namely through Duke’s rendition of Gonzo’s direct speech (which exponentiates the unreliability), also washes back on Duke. The following scene, which is best quoted in full, illustrates how Duke’s narrative is complemented – and completely transformed – by Gonzo’s influence:

[Dr. Gonzo] was laughing out of control. “What the fuck are we *doing* here out in this desert?” he shouted. “Somebody call the police! We need help!”
 “Pay no attention to this swine,” I said to the hitchhiker. “He can’t handle the medicine [amyls he and Dr. Gonzo have taken on account of Gonzo’s allegedly bad heart]. Actually, we’re *both* doctors of journalism, and we’re on our way to Las Vegas to cover the main story of our generation.” And then I began laughing. . . .
 My attorney hunched around to face the hitchhiker. “The truth is,” he said, “we’re going to Las Vegas to croak a scag [slang term for heroin] baron named Savage Henry. I’ve known him for many years, but he ripped us off—and you know what that means, right?”
 I wanted to shut him off, but we were both helpless with laughter. What the fuck *were* we doing out here on this desert, when we both had bad hearts?

¹⁰⁵ Hunter S. Thompson, as mentioned above, dubs his style of journalistic writing Gonzo journalism; in a wider context, he belongs to the New journalism movement of the 1960s and 70s. That Duke, like Thompson, also professes to writing Gonzo journalism is another indication of the blurry line between author and narrator in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

¹⁰⁶ See the following chapter.

¹⁰⁷ See chapter 3.2.3.

¹⁰⁸ As it turns out, Duke himself is far from certain what he is actually doing in Las Vegas:

What were we doing out here? What was the meaning of this trip? [...] Was I just roaming around these Mint Hotel escalators in a drug frenzy of some kind, or had I really come out here to Las Vegas to work on a *story*? (56)

By constantly having Duke contradict and revise himself, Thompson brilliantly manages to increase his narrator’s unreliability and, in turn, the reader’s uncertainty at Duke’s story.

¹⁰⁹ While Duke does lie constantly when pressed for an explanation of his and Gonzo’s behavior or shenanigans by other characters, he still tries to present the reader with a faithful account of the trip as best he can. When he is deceptive, he is so to himself first and foremost, and only second to the reader. Gonzo, on the other hand, is completely unrestricted in his narration. Still, Duke’s narrative remains problematic on the same grounds as Gonzo’s. See below for more on this topic.

“Savage Henry has cashed his check!” My attorney snarled at the kid in the back seat.
 “We’re going to rip his lungs out!”
 “And eat them!” I blurted. “That bastard won’t get away with this! What’s going on in this country when a scumsucker like that can get away with sandbagging a doctor of journalism?” (19)

The truth value of Duke’s and Gonzo’s explanations is constantly undercut by their compulsive laughter, which is evident to the hitchhiker as well as to the reader. As the beginning of the scene clearly shows, Duke’s and Gonzo’s perception of their surroundings has completely broken down, but still they manage to explain to the hitchhiker the nature of their trip. This explanation, started by Duke earlier, goes through several transformations until it ends up being about Duke’s and Gonzo’s business with an alleged Las Vegas drug baron. The story about Savage Henry as concocted by Gonzo is immediately picked up and added to by Duke, who also suddenly wonders about them being in the desert with a heart condition probably neither of them actually has.¹¹⁰ In the course of the conversation, Duke’s and Gonzo’s story becomes more and more outrageous, and both the conversation itself and the narrative proper become less and less reliable.

The question now is: Where does such a scene leave the reader? While the audience has to assume to be in the know about the nature of Duke’s and Gonzo’s stories¹¹¹ – after all, Duke confesses to the reader what really happened (or does he?) –, there is still the possibility that Duke is pulling the same trick on the reader as he and Gonzo are pulling on the various characters in the novel. When it comes down to it, the story Duke tells the reader is no less outrageous than what he and Gonzo tell the people they meet, and the borders between the various deictic levels of the text are often blurry (which results in an increasingly difficult decision as to where the purported story for the novel’s characters ends and the allegedly actual story for the reader begins). Furthermore, how is one to trust a narrator who confesses to being an almost pathological liar in conversation with others? The fact that the audience is made witness to the constant and immediate creation of stories to explain to other characters what they (the audience) believe to know the reasons for makes the entire narrative inherently and irredeemably unreliable.

¹¹⁰ In fact, it remains unclear whether Duke or Gonzo actually have a heart condition, as both of them frequently mention a heart condition, but only to other characters.

¹¹¹ At one point in the novel, Duke and Gonzo even make up such a story among themselves. When Gonzo spills their ‘salt shaker containing the cocaine’ (21), the following dialogue ensues:

“Oh, *jesus* [sic]!” [Gonzo] moaned. “Did you see what God just did to us?”
 “God didn’t do that!” I shouted. “You did it. You’re a fucking narcotics agent! I was on to your stinking act from the start, you pig!” (21)

The fact that Duke and Gonzo even have such conversations among themselves increases their unreliability even more.

However, it is in these inserted tales of explanation and justification that Duke – and Gonzo, for that matter – prove veritable masters of world schema evocation. Whatever they come up with conforms to one or the other world schema that the American media society creates and promotes repeatedly. The above quote, for instance, evokes notions of organised crime that most readers will be able to relate to on account of the mafia’s medial representation in film, television and the news media. Essentially, Duke and Gonzo put up an act wherever they go and whomever they talk to. However, as Duke is checking in at the Mint Hotel, ‘[a]ll [his] *well-rehearsed lines* [my emphasis] [fall] apart under that woman’s [the clerk’s] stoney glare.’ (23) To make matters worse, ‘[t]he woman’s face was changing: swelling, pulsing’ (23) as a result of Duke’s previous consumption of LSD¹¹². Thankfully, Gonzo steps in:

“I’ll handle this,” he said to the [...] woman. “This man has a bad heart, but I have plenty of medicine. My name is Doctor Gonzo. Prepare our suite at once. We’ll be in the bar.” (24)

For the clerk, an alleged medical condition serves to justify Duke’s previous gibberish – as soon as Duke is a sick person and Gonzo is evidently his doctor, which is what Gonzo elegantly and swiftly evokes as a world schema, the clerk is satisfied.

The most absurd – and most significant – scene in this respect occurs in the novel’s second part, when, as Duke later tells the reader, an unsuspecting maid ‘wandered into the [hotel] room and startled my attorney, who was kneeling, stark naked, in the closet, vomiting into his shoes’ (181). After a grapple ensues between Dr. Gonzo and the maid, Duke is forced to step in:

I was out of bed in a flash, grabbing my wallet and waving the gold Policemen’s Benevolent Assn. press badge¹¹³ in front of her face.

“You are under arrest!” I shouted.

[...]

“What made you do it?” I asked her. “Who paid you off?”

[...]

I turned to my attorney. “This means they know what we *have*,” I said. “So they sent this poor old woman up here to steal it.”

“No!” she yelled. “I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

“Bullshit!” said my attorney. “You’re just as much a part of it as they are.”

“Part of *what*?”

“The dope ring,” I said. [...]

She stared at us, trying to speak but only blubbering. “I *know* you’re cops,” she said finally. “But I thought you were just here for the convention. I *swear!* All I wanted to do was clean up your room. I don’t know anything about *dope!*” (182)

¹¹² I will return to the narrative’s rendition of a drugged-up mind below.

¹¹³ Duke first mentions the badge during an encounter with a highway patrol officer on his way back to Los Angeles. On remembering Dr. Gonzo’s speed letter (89-96), however, he turns around and drives back to Las Vegas.

Duke and Gonzo, as I already mentioned before, make heavy use of clichéd stereotypes, of well-known world schemas that they manage to evoke instantly. Here, they once again rely on their knowledge of cop thrillers and mafia movies, only this time they pose as investigators, i.e. this time they are on the other end of the spectrum as compared to the tale the tell the hitchhiker¹¹⁴. Their evocation of world schema knowledge is so convincing, in fact, that the maid instantly believes them:

My attorney seemed to think for a moment, then he leaned down to help the old lady to her feet. “Maybe she’s telling the truth,” he said to me. Maybe she’s *not part* of it.”
 [...]
 “Well . . .” I said. “In that case, maybe we won’t have to put her away . . . maybe she can *help*.”
 “Yes!” she said eagerly. “I’ll help you all you need! I *hate* dope!”
 “So do we, lady,” I said. (183)

In a sense, the story Duke and Gonzo create for the maid is their masterpiece. While the reader is, at that point in the novel, already quite familiar with Duke’s and Gonzo’s usual practices of lying their way out of trouble, this scene is the ironic culmination of their previous efforts. Not only does it show how doubtful and inherently unreliable Duke’s and Gonzo’s accounts – and the entire novel – actually are, but it also shows how sheepishly naive or deliberately ignorant the people they encounter are. However,

These scenes do not show contempt for particular individuals so much as they reveal the fears and appetites which make people capable of tolerating, or even of perpetrating, barbarism. The pranks are thus partly satirical in their motivation. (Hellmann 78)

For precisely this reason the maid, who is trying hard to make sense of what she has witnessed, is thankful for every bone Duke and Gonzo throw her so as not to have to face the horrible reality she has stumbled upon. She is so thankful, in fact, that she agrees to be recruited by Duke and Thompson, whom she thinks she ‘*know*[s]’ (182) to be cops, and whom she is therefore eager to please. Incidentally, the two also offer her a considerable sum due monthly for her alleged information services, thereby once again clarifying that ‘[i]n greed-dominated Las Vegas, money is the only real law.’ (Grassian 107) Before Duke and Thompson send their new informant on her way, they teach her the “password” in case she is approached by other “officers”:

“ ‘One Hand Washes the Other,’ ” I said. “The minute you hear that, you say: ‘I fear nothing.’ That way, they’ll *know* you.”

¹¹⁴ See above.

She nodded, repeating the code several times, while we listened to make sure she had it right.
 [...] She moved towards the door. “ [...] I can’t tell you how sorry I am about what happened . . . but it was only because I didn’t *realize*.” (184-185)

What the maid ‘*realize[s]*’ (185) is what the media have taught her. Duke and Gonzo appeal to her world schema knowledge, and only because American society is permeated by film and television, and because stories like the one Duke and Gonzo tell her are among the common ones in these media, can the maid react in such a way. The act Duke and Gonzo put up even swaps over into the deictic level of the narrative proper – after all, ‘[they] listened to make sure she had it right.’ (184) This once again illustrates how unreliable Duke’s account actually is, since there is no difference in narrative voice between this passage and the rest of the novel. To sum up, Duke’s and Gonzo’s practices only work because of constant manipulation by the media. According to Thompson, it is the media that raises the children and nurtures the adults in the United States, and the city of Las Vegas lies at the very heart not just of the American Dream, but also of the media-induced artificiality of American society. In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, life, at least if it goes according to Duke and Gonzo, imitates television.

For Thompson, the maid’s reaction – and the clerk’s, for that matter – is typical of United States society, which can be found in its purest and most concentrated form in Las Vegas:

This is one of the hallmarks of Vegas hospitality. The only bedrock rule is Don’t Burn the Locals. Beyond that, nobody cares. *They would rather not know* [my emphasis]. If Charlie Manson checked into the Sahara tomorrow morning, nobody would hassle him as long as he tipped big.¹¹⁵ (105-106)

Thompson attests Las Vegas locals a tendency to deliberately overlook anything and everything, as long as it can be more or less properly explained and as long as they themselves will not get into trouble.¹¹⁶ In the case of the maid, they will even play along if they believe they can benefit from it.¹¹⁷ As long as the surface, the official version, remains intact, Thompson suggests, anything and everything goes: ‘In a closed society where everybody’s guilty, the only crime is getting caught.’ (72) This is truer for Las Vegas than it is for any other American city; Las Vegas is the

¹¹⁵ On a similar note, Duke states that ‘people like doormen and floorwalkers [...] assume that anybody who acts crazy, but still tips big, must be important—which means he should be humored, or at least treated gently.’ (190)

¹¹⁶ In relation with Duke’s and Gonzo’s excessive substance abuse, Lindsey Michael Banco notes that ‘depending on the economic or cultural machinery at work beyond the drug tourist’s control, drugs can be easily domesticated.’ (139) This becomes most evident at the Circus-Circus, where the bouncers mistake Duke’s and Gonzo’s ether intoxication for mere drunkenness and therefore ‘put [them] through the turnstiles and [turn them] loose inside.’ (46) ‘In embracing them as fuel for its capitalist machinery, Vegas tames their alienating narcotic and brings their drug-inflected marginality into the mainstream.’ (Banco 139)

¹¹⁷ Duke and Gonzo promise the maid ‘a Big One [a thousand dollars] each month, depending on what she comes up with.’ (183)

epitome of a polished surface one is not supposed to look beneath. It is a city where everyone is forced to act their parts or accept the possibly fatal consequences of deviancy, and in this it is Thompson's metonymy for American society – 'a place that is simultaneously a bastion of law and order and the American capital of sex shows, plentiful booze, quick marriage, easy divorce and legal gambling.' (MacFarlane 176)

The above revelation is at the core of Thompson's cultural critique, and it is directly connected with Thompson's account of the phenomenon Las Vegas as such. In one of the most heavily ironic passages in the book, Duke states the following:

But our trip was different. It was a classic affirmation of everything right and true and decent in the national character. It was a gross, physical salute to the fantastic *possibilities* of life in this country—but only for those with true grit. And we were chock full of that. (18)

Instead of affirming 'everything right and true and decent in the national character' (18), however, Duke and Gonzo find out about the ugly, dishonest and incredibly shallow underbelly of American culture. The 'fantastic possibilities of life in this country' (18) turn out to be impassable for most people, and it is exactly these people who swarm to Las Vegas to distract themselves from their everyday reality. For Thompson, the American Dream is no more than a cheap vaudeville show intended to keep society intact, and the tax payers in line. As Daniel Grassian states, the city, with all its underlying meanings and indications relating to the United States and the ideology of the American Dream, is governed by a 'postmodern form of Social Darwinism [...] based more on arbitrary luck than on class, ethnicity, or inherent talent.' (106) It comes as no surprise, then, that in one of the most fragmented parts of the novel¹¹⁸, Duke and Gonzo actually manage to "find" the American Dream – which, in a discussion with the employees of an all-night diner¹¹⁹, has beforehand turned out to be 'the old Psychiatrist's Club' (164), 'a mental joint, where all the dopers hang out' (165):

[...] *almost two hours later Dr. Duke and his attorney finally located what was left of the "Old Psychiatrist's Club"—a huge slab of cracked, scorched concrete in a vacant lot full of tall weeds. The owner of a gas station across the road said the place had "burned down about three years ago."* (168)

Connecting this passage with Duke's reflections about the middle of the 1960s at the time of the novel, the 'foul year of our lord 1971' (201), one realises that 'that sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil' (68) that characterised the period, along with 'a fantastic universal

¹¹⁸ More on this in chapter 3.2.3.

¹¹⁹ 'A waitress and cook, mistaking [Duke's and Gonzo's] questions in a scene which burlesques the significance of the search for literary abstractions, give them directions to a club [formerly] called The American Dream on Paradise Boulevard.' (Hellmann 84)

sense that whatever [they, i.e. probably the acid culture Duke can be considered a part of¹²⁰] were doing was *right*, that [they] were winning' (68), was deceptive. When, as Duke, puts it, 'the wave [he and others were metaphorically riding at that time] finally broke and rolled back' (68), it marked the end of the American Dream proper. Of the ideals of the United States' forefathers, nothing but '*a huge slab of cracked, scorched concrete in a vacant lot full of tall weeds*' (168) remains: this is the devastating conclusion at which Thompson arrives in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

Before I turn to the novel's structure and the unreliability contained on the structural level of the novel, I want to briefly return to Duke's reflections about drugs and the consumption of drugs, which play an important role for establishing unreliability in the narrative. While the influence of drugs is established at the very beginning of the novel, their relevance would be quickly forgotten in the more sane passages of the narrative if it were not for Duke's constant mention of their effects. As a sort of leitmotif to the novel, Duke constantly reminds the reader of his and Gonzo's altered states of consciousness and, similar to Lee in *Naked Lunch*, provides a philosophy of drug taking as well. Interestingly, however, Duke's frequent hallucinations are never explicitly marked as such, but flow seamlessly into the more believable narrative. When he and Gonzo register at the Mint Hotel, he states, among other things¹²¹, that

[...] [t]errible things were happening all around us. Right next to me a huge reptile¹²² was gnawing on a woman's neck, the carpet was a blood-soaking sponge—impossible to walk on it, no footing at all. (24)

At this point, Duke is convinced that he and Gonzo are 'right in the middle of a fucking reptile zoo' (24), an idea Ralph Steadman (30-31) has taken up as an illustration as well. This highly suspicious passage is the first one of its kind in the novel, and while any reader can easily deduce the reasons for Duke's disturbing experience, it is only later that he actually acknowledges that he may have, in fact, been hallucinating all along:

[...] By this time the drink was beginning to cut the acid and my hallucinations were down to a tolerable level. The room service waiter had a vaguely reptilian cast to his features, but I was no longer seeing huge pterodactyls lumbering around the corridors in pools of fresh blood. (27)

¹²⁰ See chapter 3.2.3.

¹²¹ He also mentions the hotel clerk's face changing, an instance I have quoted above.

¹²² Sue Matheson reflects at length about 'the average American's ability to shape-shift into a predator: that is to become a dangerous weasel, eel, or huge blood-sucking reptile at a moment's notice.' (87) This is precisely what the novel's epigraph (see above) is about, and '[i]f Thompson is to be believed, this destructive force, deeply embedded in the individual's mind, is also a fundamental part of the American psyche.' (Matheson 87)

What remains of this passage is a high degree of distrust towards Duke's narration: while his shady antics and admittedly distorted perception have emphasised his unreliability from the beginning, it is only now that the reader actually notices how gradually the narrative actually transforms from what might still be taken as authentic (i.e. of first-order informativity) to an outrageous drug-induced vision (which is clearly of third-order informativity). The changes are slow and unmarked, which means that the reader stumbles into Duke's drug visions in a similar way to Duke himself. It is often only later that Duke admits as much or even realises that his experiences have been completely altered by drugs.

The only thing Duke regularly and repeatedly not only admits, but actually emphasises, is his and Gonzo's continued and excessive drug abuse. All this serves to strengthen the notion of constant unreliability in the text – nothing Duke tells the reader can be taken without a grain of salt, yet everything has to be taken at face value. The deictic plane of the text rests with Duke most of the time, and when it does pop to a metareferential level¹²³, it usually fails to give any useful hints towards a re-evaluation of Duke's account. Interestingly, it is in these instances that Gonzo's perspective serves as a kind of corrective for Duke's narrative:

“You bastard,” he said. “I left you alone for *three minutes!* You scared the shit out of those people! Waving that goddamn marlin spike around and yelling about reptiles. You're lucky I came back in time. They were ready to call the cops. I said you were only drunk and that I was taking you up to your room for a cold shower. Hell, the only reason they gave us the press passes was to get you out of there.”
He was pacing around nervously. “Jesus, that scene straightened me right out! I *must* have some drugs. What have you done with the mescaline?” (28)

Not only is this scene missing in Duke's version of the previous events¹²⁴, it also stresses the stark contrast between Duke's unacceptable and disorderly behaviour and the casino patrons he disturbs – a relationship that, as far as Duke is concerned, is actually the other way around. Clearly, this is a matter of perspective, and as such this moment is central to understanding the unreliable implications of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. What is narrated is subject to constant re-evaluation and perspective shifts, but instead of clarifying matters, Thompson instead obfuscates them even more. After all, Gonzo is just as untrustworthy as Duke, if not even more so: only briefly after the above-quoted ordeal, Duke remarks that Gonzo's ‘brain had gone off to that campground beyond the sun’ (32), which happens regularly over the course of the novel.

Ultimately, Duke's and Gonzo's narratives complement each other, just as the two characters complement each other in various situations, or ‘narrow escapes’ (42), as Duke calls them.

¹²³ This happens occasionally and will be discussed in detail in chapter 3.2.3.

¹²⁴ Thompson employs this technique of structural unreliability quite frequently. I will give an account of this in the following chapter.

Since the deictic level mostly rests with Duke, however, the occasional pushes (in the form of dialogues) between Duke, Gonzo and the various characters of the novel already have a removed quality; they do not form the basis of the narrative as such. This, and Duke's explicit mention of Gonzo's outrageous behaviour, his shameless lying and inclination to violence and obscenity make him an even shadier character than Duke himself is, and still the reader has to rely on Gonzo's explanations to fill in the gaps Duke leaves empty because he either does not bother to tell the whole story or because he is simply not able to provide the remaining information. Duke's narrative, as the above analysis has shown, is inherently unreliable due to his and Gonzo's excessive and explicit consumption of an entire catalogue of drugs whose effects on perception and mind are described in meticulous detail.

Furthermore, Duke and Gonzo are masters of world schema evocation when it comes to interaction with other characters. In order to distract from their countless criminal offenses, they employ schematic knowledge to fool the characters they encounter – and, to some extent, also the reader – into believing in film and television realities instead of in their own eyes and ears. The fact that one sees Duke and Gonzo constantly lying their way in and out of trouble is reason enough to suspect that the novel as such, *Fear and Loathing* in its entirety, is in fact just one more fictitious story pretending to be a confession that constantly undermines and calls into question its own reliability and trustworthiness. Apart from the obvious schemas of drug philosophy and drug addiction, which are accreted massively in the course of the novel, the world schemas most alluded to stem mostly from fictionalised organised crime. While they remain entirely fictional even within the novel as such (Duke and Gonzo only evoke, but never act according to them, after all), these schemas are preserved in that they are repeated by Duke and Gonzo over and over again. World schemas of the American Dream and of the often glamorised city of Las Vegas, the 'main nerve' of said dream (48), on the other hand, are disrupted brutally and completely and constitute the main pillar of Thompson's scathing critique of American society and the values and practices it entails.

3.2.2. MACROSTRUCTURE: DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

While unreliability in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is already striking at the content level, implications thereof can also be found in the novel's structure. In this chapter, I want to trace the general structural models that *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* follows and reveal how these guiding principles, straightforward as they may be, still leave abundant room for structural unreliability in the process. It is my intention to show that while the structural layout of the novel is rather conventional, especially in comparison with Burroughs' radical renunciation of structure, Thompson

still manages to create structural unreliability by flouting expectations. In order to find out how disruption can be effectively achieved in such a fixed and well-established textual layout, one has to consider the basis the novel is constructed upon. In very general terms, Thompson's textual and structural basis for *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is a twofold one: on the one hand, the novel strongly resembles a journalistic text, and on the other hand, it once again picks up the schema of the picaresque novel that also figures prominently in *Naked Lunch*. Before any discussion of the novel's structure proper can begin, these two pillars of its textual layout have to be examined.

Of the two structural building blocks mentioned – journalism and the picaresque novel –, at least the former should come as no surprise. I have already hinted at Hunter S. Thompson's journalistic background above¹²⁵; it is a background that manifests itself mainly in the novel's structure and language. His own distinctive brand of journalism, termed Gonzo journalism¹²⁶, takes the textual genre of journalism to new extremes, but it leaves its structural building blocks mostly intact. This means that the novel's structure follows, or rather mirrors, the American media's predilection for preformatted and even pre-interpreted information. For this reason Raoul Duke, Thompson's fictional alter ego and self-proclaimed 'Doctor of Gonzo Journalism' (199), is keen on accommodating the reader. Similar to Burroughs insisting on *Naked Lunch* being a journalistic text¹²⁷, Duke explains slang expressions as well as drugs and their effects, highlights connections the reader might not make, and puts his narrative into a wider socio-political context. Like a true journalist, he mediates the 'story' he and Gonzo are covering¹²⁸ to the reader. Despite this, 'the Gonzo journalist embraces, arguably one may say flaunts, the inherently limited and biased perceptions of any first person narrator.' (Matheson 87)

Apart from these microstructural traits of journalistic style, the novel's macrostructure echoes a journalistic text (and thereby evokes the textual schema of stories in magazines and newspapers) as well: *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* consists of two large parts of about equal length (approximately a hundred pages each), simply called 'PART ONE' (1) and 'PART TWO' (97), which form a mini-series in novel form and which conform to the way in which the novel was originally published in the *Rolling Stone* in 1971 (iv). Part one in turn consists of twelve chapters or subsections, part two of fourteen. These subsections function like individual articles, which is further confirmed by their headings. These headings mirror newspaper or magazine headlines in both form and content. Set in bold print above the text proper, the headings always

¹²⁵ See chapter 3.

¹²⁶ It is argued that Thompson is, in fact, the only writer of Gonzo journalism proper. The term is notoriously difficult to define, and since it is not directly relevant to my argument, I will not attempt a definition either. I will, however, try to outline the most striking contrasts between Gonzo journalism and regular journalism below in order to draw attention to Thompson's disruption of journalistic textual schemas.

¹²⁷ See especially chapter 2.1.

¹²⁸ See previous chapter.

contain a lead to draw the reader in, as it were. The second subsection in part two, for instance, reads

**Another Day,
Another Convertible...
& Another Hotel
Full of Cops (103)**

Not only are the content words all capitalised, as they would be in newspaper and magazine headlines, their large typeface also clearly indicates their headline character and thus preserves the textual schema of similar journalistic texts. In fact, even the novel's title and subtitle, its lead and subheading, conform to the notion that *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is, in fact, a journalistic text. Tape transcripts and news bulletins quoted in full¹²⁹ inserted in the text further support this idea. Still, I would argue that *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is very much a novel, albeit one that brilliantly imitates, and transforms, the textual schemas that make up journalistic texts.

Among other things, this has to do with the fact that it employs one of the best established textual schemas fiction has to offer, namely the picaresque novel¹³⁰, and combines it with Thompson's trademark of a foul-mouthed, daring and unconventional approach to journalism that outright rejects objectivity and a fixation on what is purported to be hard facts in other media. Gonzo journalism, one of the two pillars of the *Fear and Loathing* narrative, is in itself more than journalism already. It disrupts the textual schemas of journalistic writing by explicitly abandoning objectivity, language conventions and even the basic journalistic indebtedness to empirical truth (if there is such a thing). Even more indicative of Thompson's abandonment of the journalism schema is Duke's complete neglect of the 'the story' (12) he and Gonzo ought to be covering, which results in 'a journalistic spoof on the conventional "news story."' (MacFarlane 189) While he does state that it is important '[n]ever [to] lose sight of the primary responsibility' (12), the Mint 400 hardly features in the text (one does not even learn who won the race) and the Drug Conference is no more than a backdrop to Duke's and Gonzo's interactions with the attending cops and the observations triggered by these encounters, along with some highly explicit criticism of law enforcement in the United States. According to Scott MacFarlane, '[t]he story is much more about Hunter S. Thompson's¹³¹ drug-warped attempts to make sense of his assignment via

¹²⁹ I will discuss these in detail in the following chapter.

¹³⁰ According to Sue Matheson, Duke's and Gonzo's journey is a spiritual, even a shamanistic one, as becomes evident by Duke's and Gonzo's abundant consumption of mind-altering drugs. See "Caricature, Secular Shamanism, and Cultural Compensation."

¹³¹ As I have already stated above, along with my disagreement, Duke equals Thompson for Scott MacFarlane. His statement, however, is true nonetheless.

the American Dream of Vegas, which turns into both an indictment of his own sanity and that of the broader culture.’ (177)

By all these measures Thompson not only deviates from the original textual format *Fear and Loathing* purports to use¹³², but he approximates the textual schema of journalism to that of narrative fiction: author, journalist and protagonist intersect, as do story, narrative and novel. The borders between fact and fiction thus become indistinguishably blurred. The narrative’s status between journalistic writing and novel is just as problematic, especially since there are purported hints of editorial changes to the text as would be found in newspaper articles (more on this later). This creates constant uncertainty on the side of the reader, who can never fully decide what textual schema to apply to the text, which is exacerbated by Thompson’s disruption of and deviancy from said schemas. Furthermore, the novel’s two parts are, in essence, two long and winding digressions from the actual assignments – and in extension, plots – Duke pretends to work on. Just as Duke and Gonzo never manage to cover the story proper, the reader is denied the plot proper. Admittedly, Duke’s and Gonzo’s exploits are probably far more interesting than any regular coverage of both the race and the conference could be, but this must not distract from the fact that the novel’s structure thereby becomes a prime example of unreliability. The plot Duke promises is never fully realised, and the reader ends up with something entirely different. Ultimately, ‘what is reported is the state of the persona’s [i.e. Duke’s] mind and, metaphorically, of the nation.’ (Hellmann 74)

As I already mentioned, this deviancy from established journalistic text schemas is complemented by the novel’s underlying picaresque structure that also extends to its characters. John Hellmann calls Duke ‘[a] descendant of the trickster character of folklore, the Vice of medieval drama, the picaro of early prose narratives, [...] a self-portrait of the journalist as rogue’ (71), and what applies to Duke applies just as much to Gonzo. The novel’s plot follows their redoubled journey to and from Las Vegas. The actual accounts of their exploits – their “adventures”, as it were – are highly episodic and strung together mostly without meaningful, i.e. plot-driven, connections. In fact, their journey is of a highly random nature – Duke admits as much when he states that

“[...] Jesus, just one hour ago we were sitting over there in that stinking baiginio [the Polo Lounge], stone broke and paralyzed for the weekend, when a call comes through from some total stranger in New York, telling me to go to Las Vegas and expenses be damned—and then he sends me over to some office in Beverly Hills where another total stranger gives me \$300 raw cash for no reason at all . . . I tell you, my man, this is the

¹³² Indeed, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* pretends to be journalism on several occasions, some of which I will discuss below.

American Dream in action! *We'd be fools not to ride this strange torpedo all the way out to the end* [my emphasis]." (11)

Duke's implicit metafictional comment towards the end of the quote not only describes the novel's structure and plot progression, but it also indicates that he and Gonzo in fact have little or even no control over what is happening to them.¹³³ They are in for a wild ride, but they have no idea where it is going to take them in the end, and neither has the reader. Furthermore, Duke's take on the assignment – essentially strangers 'telling [him] to go to Las Vegas' and giving him '\$300 raw cash for no reason at all' (11) – is in fact typical of the entire interaction between the two and the rest of the novel's cast. The characters they encounter and the places they visit usually feature only once and thus remain inconsequential to the story as a whole.¹³⁴ The novel's two parts follow the same basic structure, but the slots of participants and places are filled differently, which results in iterative amplification. Both parts start with a trip to Las Vegas, both in cars – the 'Red Shark' and the 'White Whale', respectively. What follows is the check-in to the hotel, which is the Mint Hotel in the first and the Flamingo in the second part. Afterwards, the mayhem starts; Duke and Gonzo set out to "fulfil" the writing assignments. But while the Mint 400 'had been an *observer* gig, [...] [the Drug Conference] would need *participation*' (109), which is another indication of the generally raised stakes in part two.¹³⁵ After the excessive consumption of 'heinous chemicals' (12), Duke and Gonzo ultimately escape from Las Vegas¹³⁶ in both parts.

¹³³ On a similar note, Duke, checking in at the Mint Hotel in the first part, fatalistically states that 'all of it [i.e. the entire process of checking in and signing up for press passes with all expenses covered] [was] bogus, totally illegal, a fraud on its face, *but of course it would have to be done* [my emphasis].' (22) The wording suggests a greater necessity for Duke's and Gonzo's actions that seems to go far beyond personal choice. I will examine this together with the novel's generally tentative language in the subsequent chapter.

¹³⁴ This is true for almost all characters except the hitchhiker and Lucy, Dr. Gonzo's fatal love interest in the novel's second part. Their role in the second encounter remains limited to eye contact, upon which Duke and Gonzo immediately try to get away from them as fast and as far as possible.

¹³⁵ Interestingly, both the Mint 400 and the drug conference already prove very hard to compass, let alone communicate, in themselves, even without Duke's and Gonzo's massive consumption of mind-altering substances. As regards the Mint 400, which is a desert motorcycle race, Duke comments that

[a]t first it was possible to watch [the racers] out to a distance of two hundred yards from the starting line. But this visibility didn't last long. [...] by the time they'd sent off the first hundred (with still another hundred to go), our visibility was down to something like fifty feet. We could see as far as the hay-bales at the end of the pits. (37-38)

The impossible sight conditions, on which Duke elaborates further (especially 38-39), are complemented in the novel's second part by the drug conference's amateurishly set up PA system (137-138), on which Duke remarks that 'the delay [from the speakers] was just enough to keep the words disconcertingly out of phase with the speaker's gestures.' (138) Quite in accordance with Duke's observation, one notices that '[r]eality itself is too twisted.' (47) The implications are, of course, manifold, especially as regards Duke's journalistic responsibility – he himself states, for instance, that 'the idea to "cover [the Mint 400]" in any conventional press sense was absurd' (38), which is just as valid for the drug conference. Still, he and other representatives of the press are obliged to 'cover the story', as it were, a task that inevitably results in accounts that have little to do with actual reality. This in turn necessitates an even more unreliable account thereof in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. This interpretation also conforms perfectly with Thompson's highly critical stance towards journalism (see the following chapter).

¹³⁶ Interestingly, it is always Dr. Gonzo who leaves the scene first, and in both cases by plane. Duke sees him off and proceeds to leave by car.

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, as the above account of the novel's structure shows, heavily relies on parallel scenes¹³⁷ to create feelings of uncertain déjà vu in the reader. Its parallel structure serves to create a double climax at the end of both of the novel's parts. In order to illustrate just how accurately the two parts match, I want to quote Duke's drug catalogue as presented in the novel's second part; it complements that of the first part (quoted in the previous chapter) perfectly:

The stash was a hopeless mess, all churned together and half-crushed. Some of the mescaline pellets had disintegrated into a reddish-brown powder, but I counted about thirty-five or forty still intact. My attorney had eaten all the reds, but there was quite a bit of speed left . . . no more grass, the coke bottle was empty, one acid blotter, a nice brown lump of opium hash and six loose amyls . . . Not enough for anything serious, but a careful rationing of the mescaline would probably get us through the four-day Drug Conference.

On the outskirts of Las Vegas I stopped at a neighborhood pharmacy and bought two quarts of Gold tequila, two fifths of Chivas Regal and a pint of ether. (100)

This passage not only echoes that found in the first part, it also shows the above-mentioned iterative amplification taking place and mirrors the advancing disintegration of the narrative. While the novel's first part is rather cohesive, the second part is much more fragmented, which is made obvious by ink spatter on the pages and by the fact that whole sections of text are claimed to be missing entirely by an alleged editorial instance (see below). Thus the 'hopeless mess' of the stash conforms to the 'hopeless mess' of the narrative, which turns out to be 'all churned together and half-crushed' (100) as well. As Scott MacFarlane remarks, 'Thompson [...] uses textual turbulence as a literary device to help him depict the fractured nature of the drugged state in a way that emulates the chaos and destructiveness of the modern American state.' (186)

On reaching the second part of the novel, the reader has become used to taking *Fear and Loathing* as a sequential narrative, one in which, apart from a few exceptions¹³⁸ and some clearly marked sections of recollection and retrospection, Duke reveals the events in chronological order. Towards the end of the first part, however, the narrative's deictic level becomes increasingly difficult to determine. Duke's account jumps back and forth between the deictic origin and flashbacks, sometimes without any indication of a deictic push and always confusing the reader in the process. In the second part, this narrative tendency increases even further. Sue Matheson offers the following explanation for this development:

¹³⁷ Compare, in this respect, also the correspondence between the Mint 400 and the drug conference. See footnote 135.

¹³⁸ A case in point is, for instance, Duke's 'scene at the press table' (28), an event that is only revealed by Dr. Gonzo after it has already taken place. Needless to say, Gonzo's account may be disputed as well. I have quoted part of the dialogue surrounding the scene in the previous chapter. Similar instances will be discussed in the subsequent chapter in respect to language.

Functioning on the level of his instincts, Duke begins to experience information instead of processing it rationally. The result is a collage of impressions. As Duke's ability to create causal and chronological relationships disappears [...], the narrative sequence of his story falls apart. Anecdotes, paragraphs, and even sentences are left unfinished. The reader encounters fragmented jottings, material ripped from newspapers, and bits of press releases. Even the visual aids to the text, Ralph Steadman's graphics, are out of the narrative's control: they splatter themselves over the text, often dripping blobs of ink which partly obscure words on the following page.¹³⁹ Finally, when the text and Duke's intellect break down completely, the reader experiences the actual breakdown itself which is presented as a transcript of the muddled conversations that occurred during the narrator's frenzied search for Paradise Boulevard[.] (92)

It is in these deviancies from and disruptions of the traditionally strictly sequential schema of the picaresque novel that the novel's structural unreliability becomes most tangible. As stated by Matheson, this tendency peaks for the first time in the second part's ninth chapter, aptly titled 'Breakdown on Paradise Blvd.' (161):

EDITOR'S NOTE:

At this point in the chronology, Dr. Duke appears to have broken down completely; the original manuscript is so splintered that we were forced to seek out the original tape recordings and transcribe it verbatim. We made no attempt to edit this section, and Dr. Duke refused even to read it. There was no way to reach him. The only address/contact we had, during this period, was a mobile phone unit somewhere on Highway 61—and all efforts to reach Duke at that number proved futile.

In the interests of journalistic purity [my emphasis], we are publishing the following section just as it came off the tape—one of many that Dr. Duke submitted for purposes of verification—along with his manuscript. (161)

The entire chapter marks a complete departure from the previously linked narrative; it stands isolated from the entire novel. It is interesting because in its complete disruption or even abandonment of the established textual order, it actually pretends to be authentic and is therefore printed '*in the interests of journalistic purity*' (161). The alleged editor of this seemingly journalistic piece of writing steps in to provide the reader with parts of the story that would have otherwise been missing; these take on the form of tape transcripts of a conversation between Duke and Gonzo mostly. The passage feigns authenticity by pretending to be in accordance with journalistic textual schemas and journalistic integrity in general.

'This device of course is intended to make the reader feel that s/he has reached the heart of the book's narrative authenticity, its "journalistic purity"; no longer a memoir-style, "subjective" reconstruction of events, but a direct recording of a dialogue that actually took place.' (DeKoven 106-107) However, the passage written in matter-of-factly style quickly dissolves into something different, thereby instantly disrupting the text schema evoked:

¹³⁹ I have provided an example of this in chapter 3.1.

According to the tape, this section follows an episode involving Duke, his attorney and a waitress at an all-night diner in North Vegas. The rationale for the following transaction appears to be based on a feeling—shared by both Duke and his attorney—that the American Dream would have to be sought out somewhere far beyond the dreary confines of the District Attorneys’ Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

The transcription begins somewhere on the Northeast outskirts of Las Vegas—zooming along Paradise Road in the White Whale. . . . (161)

Here, the alleged ‘EDITOR’S NOTE’ (161) all of a sudden begins to resemble Duke’s narrative voice, albeit in a more distanced and reflective way. Not only does the text get more and more speculative, it also marks a complete departure from any even remotely journalistic register and thus illustrates Thompson’s abandonment not only of language schemas (which I will discuss in detail in the following chapter), but also of text schemas. This passage illustrates Thompson’s general way of breaking down text schemas: what happens here in about a page is a phenomenon that actually extends over the entire novel and thus also imitates the breakdown or dissolution of Duke’s and Gonzo’s perception and mirrors their warped point of view.¹⁴⁰

Thompson’s most daring defiance of text schemas, however, occur towards the end of the novel especially after Duke has already seen his attorney off at the airport for the second time. Without Gonzo, there is no complementary perspective on Duke’s narrative. Now that the reader has to rely solely on Duke’s point of view, the text becomes outright absurd. Duke is in his hotel room at the Flamingo, when all of a sudden the phone starts to ring:

Suddenly the phone was ringing, jerking me out of my fantasy stupor. I looked at it. Riiiiinnnnnggggggg . . . Jesus, what now? Is this *it*? [...]

So I picked up the phone. It was my friend Bruce Innes, calling from the Circus-Circus. He had located the man who had wanted to sell the ape I’d been enquiring about. The price was \$750.

“What kind of a greedhead are we dealing with?” I said. “Last night it was four hundred.” (188)

Until that moment, the reader has never heard about or Duke’s friend Bruce Innes, much less ‘the ape [Duke had] been enquiring about’ (188), yet the narrative proceeds as if the necessary details had been supplied beforehand.¹⁴¹ In fact, they should have, since the reader has been following Duke all the time.¹⁴² While there are, as was stated above, several structural inconsistencies

¹⁴⁰ This effect of course relies on and is complemented by the other disruptive practices Thompson employs. See the previous and the following chapter, respectively.

¹⁴¹ Clearly, the scene’s disruptive effect also stems from Duke’s innocuous wording. I will discuss Thompson’s particular language use in this context on the basis of a similar scene in the following chapter.

¹⁴² It is of course difficult to determine when exactly the scenes anteceding the phone call are set, but it can be rightfully assumed that an account of what would be ‘last night’ (188) has, in fact, been given by Duke in either chapter eight or chapter nine of the novel’s second part.

of varying disruptive quality in the course of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, it is this one that stands out above the others. Duke's account has never been even remotely trustworthy, but up until that point there have not been any comparably blatant gaps in the structure of the narrative.¹⁴³ The above break in the sequence catches the reader off guard; the audience starts to wonder what else Duke has been either deliberately hiding from or simply not telling them. Thompson thereby manages to raise Duke's unreliability – and the disorientation of the reader it entails – to an entirely new level, especially since the ultimately unsuccessful attempt at purchasing the ape is subsequently played out in its entirety. This is all the more striking since but a handful of the novel's episodes display similar closure; Thompson is content to supply brief slices of the action at most.

In general, one notices that while the structure of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* does evoke the two main text schemas of journalistic writing and of the picaresque novel, it does so in a highly irreverent manner. Both of these text schemas form the ground of the novel and thereby evoke its structural, but also its stylistic layout to a great extent (more on this in the following chapter). However, Thompson preserves the text schemas he employs only briefly; before long, the novel turns out to be more and more disruptive of them, especially in its second part. Thompson's main strategy of creating uncertainty in his readership and flouting structural expectations is that of abandoning the novel's strictly sequential narrative as warranted by the textual schemas it rests on, which are mostly preserved in the first part of the novel. As the novel progresses, the fragmentation increases until the order of events becomes completely chaotic and large gaps in the narrative become obvious. The sense of disorder and breakdown the text thus creates is complemented by Steadman's ink spills and repeated unexpected textual insertions. At a glance, Thompson's structuring models for *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* might seem straightforward or even conventional, but a closer look reveals that a large part of the novel's unreliability rests on the minute and sometimes hardly noticeable disruption of these schemas. Compared to the obvious textual mess of *Naked Lunch*, the apparent order of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* falls apart only upon closer inspection, which nevertheless creates an atmosphere of insidious uncertainty. This is further complemented by Duke's constant doubts and contradictions, traits which become manifest in his highly tentative manner of speaking which, along with the novel's language schemas and typology, will be the main concern of the next chapter.

¹⁴³ While it can be argued that other blank spaces can possibly – or even probably – be determined in Duke's account, they ultimately remain without consequence to the story proper. The episode with the ape, however, does not.

3.2.3. STYLE: AT WIT'S END AND BEYOND

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas boasts a highly unusual and idiosyncratic style unique to Hunter S. Thompson. Much of the novel's effect, especially in terms of its cultural critique, rests on its outspoken, disrespectful and bold language. Its main narrative voice, that of narrator Raoul Duke, is relatively consistent over the course of the book, yet it does change depending on his situation and his current intake of alcohol and/or drugs. In general, Duke's state of mind is always deducible from his language; it can be measured in degrees of fragmentation, quality of voice and use of register or language schema.¹⁴⁴ In Duke's semi-philosophical reflections on American culture and history¹⁴⁵, for instance, his narrative voice is a very different one compared to the one used to describe the novel's actual plot (in terms of cognitive deixis: the authorial, reflective level reads differently than the novel's deictic origin, its basic plot level). In addition, the reader is frequently confronted with textual insertions – complete with respective typological traits – and Duke mimicking various official registers and jargons. All this is further complicated by Thompson's creative use of syntax, which I will now discuss, along with the rest of the novel's remarkable stylistic traits.

Before I examine the more specific elements of Thompson's language use in the novel, however, I want to address the linguistic unreliability that permeates the entire narrative. In the course of the whole novel, Duke constantly calls his own perception – and therefore his own narrative – into question. This is achieved by the use of auxiliary verbs on the one and rhetorical questions on the other hand. One of the book's best known passages in that respect (parts of which I have already quoted in chapter 3.2.1. as well) is Duke's interior monologue on picking up the hitchhiker:

O Christ, I thought, he's gone around the bend [meaning Gonzo for picking up the hitchhiker and talking gibberish]. "No more of that talk," I said sharply. "Or I'll put the leeches on you." He grinned, *seeming to understand* [my emphasis]. Luckily, the noise in the car was so awful—between the wind and the radio and the tape machine—that the kid in the back seat couldn't hear a word we were saying. *Or could he?* [my emphasis] How long can we *maintain?* I wondered. How long before one of us starts raving and jabbering at this boy? What will he think then? [...] ¹⁴⁶ Jesus! Did I *say* that? Or just think it? Was I talking? Did they hear me? I glanced over at my attorney, but *he seemed oblivious* [my emphasis] [...]. (5)

¹⁴⁴ MacFarlane, in his equation of Duke and Thompson, in fact argues that "[i]t is not unreasonable to suggest that the two primary types of drug influencing the prose in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* are speed and psychedelics' (189), both of which Thompson apparently used in copious amounts while writing.

¹⁴⁵ It is in these passages that Duke most obviously becomes a mouthpiece for Thompson's cultural critique. This is evident not only from the difference in style between commentary and narrative, but also from the clear distinction Duke introduces between the reality of the story and the reality of "his" reflections. See below.

¹⁴⁶ For the rest of the quote, which is inconsequential at this point of my discussion, see chapter 3.2.1.

From this passage, one can easily see how Thompson manages to create an atmosphere of constant doubt and uncertainty in the reader, rendering Duke an inherently unreliable narrator in the process. Duke knows that his perception cannot be trusted, and his outspokenness about his warped perspective is perhaps the only thing the reader may actually rely on in the novel. ‘Ironically, the reader comes to trust him as a protagonist, not because of all the drugs, but because he is so blatantly honest about his malfeasance as a journalist.’ (MacFarlane 190) In the above quote, most of the sentences indicate that their truth value may be disputed; the reality of the situation ultimately remains unclear. Duke even takes back his evaluation of the ‘noise in the car’ (5) – as it stands, he himself is uncertain of what is actually happening at that moment. Along with the constant questions he asks himself – and for which neither he nor the reader has an answer –, this calls into question almost every detail of Duke’s account, which he openly admits on a regular basis.

There are, however, also occasions on which the readers simply are not told what happens – or has happened – until Duke incidentally fills them in.¹⁴⁷ As I have already stated above, it seems that much of Duke’s and Gonzo’s story is – deliberately or by coincidence – kept from the reader. These instances, however, are formulated in a way that incites uncertainty in the reader and makes Duke’s unreliability even more evident:

[...] The room looked like the site of some disastrous zoological experiment involving whiskey and gorillas. The ten-foot mirror was shattered, but still hanging together—bad evidence of that afternoon when my attorney ran amok with the coconut hammer, smashing the mirror and all the light bulbs.

We’d replaced the lights with a package of red and blue Christmas tree lights from Safeway, but there was no hope of replacing the mirror. My attorney’s bed looked like a burned-out rat’s nest. Fire had consumed the top half, and the rest was a mass of wire and charred stuffing. Luckily, the maids hadn’t come near the room since that awful confrontation on Tuesday.¹⁴⁸ (180-181)

This scene is different from the ones discussed above in that Duke does, in fact, know how the destruction of the hotel room has come about, but has not told the reader – a difference that shows clearly in the language used. As he surveys the room, he matter-of-factly informs the reader of what has occurred in the meantime. The audience is not told the details, however, and the accident with Dr. Gonzo’s bed is not explained at all. All the while Duke’s language is highly unobtrusive, which, in combination with his use of deictic expressions (of none of which the reader knows the respective sources), creates the notion that reader should, in fact, be aware of the room’s disastrous condition as a matter of course. While this and similar passages are, of

¹⁴⁷ I have already mentioned the most striking example, the failed purchase of the gorilla, in the previous chapter to show how the novel violently disrupts text schemas in doing so.

¹⁴⁸ I have quoted this encounter at length in chapter 3.2.1.

course, not lies in the sense of the word, they do give the impression that Duke is somehow cheating on the reader by simply not telling – or forgetting to tell – the reader certain details. When he finally does so, his use of language schema seems to indicate that he is just repeating what the audience knows already. Clearly, this shameless pretension is yet another reason to doubt Duke’s narration, since both his ability and his motivation to inform the reader evidently vary strongly.

Apart from Duke’s admitted unreliability and cases of withheld information in passages like the above, the novel frequently includes insertions indicating that Duke has lost control over his own narrative entirely. It is also at these moments that the novel refers to its purported genesis as a journalistic text, all the while renouncing any conscious authorship at the hands of its fictionalised creator Raoul Duke. On arriving at the Mint Hotel (a key scene I have already mentioned above), Duke’s narrative almost seems to develop a life of its own:

Go through all the official gibberish, get the car into the hotel garage, work out on the desk clerk, deal with the bellboy, sign in for the press passes—all of it bogus, totally illegal, a fraud on its face, but of course it would have to be done.

“KILL THE BODY AND THE
HEAD WILL DIE.”

This line appears in my notebook, for some reason. [my emphasis] Perhaps some connection with Joe Frazier. Is he still alive? Still able to talk? I watched that fight in Seattle—horribly twisted about four seats down the aisle from the Governor. (22)

At that point, the arrival at the hotel dissolves into a lengthy musing about the end of the sixties, triggered by an unrelated line in Duke’s notebook, which is only one of the means he uses to record his thoughts and observations to ‘cover the story’. This passage conforms perfectly to two instrumental criteria of unreliable narration outlined by Gaby Allrath (66): not only does Duke show a clear tendency to digress; he also openly admits deficiencies in his memory and perception of things. To add, Duke implicitly rejects any connection between himself and the contents of his notebook, which supposedly forms the basis of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Indeed, Duke’s speculations about ‘some connection with [boxing champion] Joe Frazier’ (22) read as if he were deciphering somebody else’s notes, which perfectly complements the random and arbitrary nature of Duke’s and Gonzo’s trip I have outlined above¹⁴⁹. In a similar fashion, Duke frequently finds himself confronted with situations he has no idea of how they arose in the first place, to which he usually responds with surprise and confusion. To give just two examples: On packing his car towards the end of the novel’s first part, he ‘suddenly notice[s]’ a ‘plastic briefcase

¹⁴⁹ See chapter 3.2.1.

[...] right beside [him] on the front seat.’ (70) On another occasion, Duke and Gonzo discover ‘two Mint Hotel Room keys’ (53), asking themselves where the second one comes from. In both cases, the surprise at the obvious memory loss Duke and Gonzo both experience becomes tangible through Duke’s tentative language. Ultimately, confusion at such and similar accidental discoveries is incited in the reader as well.

As the novel progresses, passages like the above increase in regularity and fragmentation. All the while they serve to keep the text schema of journalistic writing intact in that they show the novel as a purported compilation from Duke’s notes. The content of these notes, however, proves highly disruptive. At one point, Duke concedes that

[m]emories of [Saturday midnight] are extremely hazy. All I have, for guide-pegs, is a pocketful of keno cards and cocktail napkins, all covered with scribbled notes. Here is one: “Get the Ford man, demand a Bronco for race observation purposes . . . photos? . . . Lacerda/call . . . why not a helicopter? . . . get on the phone, *lean* on the fuckers . . . heavy yelling.”

Another says: “Sign on Paradise Boulevard—‘Stopless and Topless’ . . . bush-league sex compared to L.A.; *pasties* here—total naked public humping in L.A. . . . Las Vegas is a society of armed masturbators/gambling is the kicker here/sex is extra/weird trip for high rollers . . . house-whores for winners, hand jobs for the bad luck crowd.” (41)

While some connection with the Mint 400 race can still be found in the first case, the second is almost completely nonsensical. Treating *Fear and Loathing* as a journalistic text, the reader wonders how the story, i.e. the novel, came into being. After all, the novel pretends to be made up from notes such as the above, which completely undermine anything that might pass as journalistic coverage. In a twist reminiscent of *Tristram Shandy*, Duke never even mentions what his story is allegedly about, which is why his confession about results of the Mint 400 – a race he was supposed to report on – comes as no surprise:

I didn’t even know who’d won the race. Maybe nobody. For all I knew, the whole spectacle had been aborted by a terrible riot—an orgy of senseless violence, kicked off by drunken hoodlums who refused to abide by the rules.

I wanted to plug this gap in my knowledge at the earliest opportunity: Pick up the L.A. *Times* and scour the sports section for a Mint 400 story. Get the details. Cover myself. (84)

Therefore, Duke’s coverage, his story about the Mint 400 and also about the District Attorney’s Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, is no less than a case of false labelling. While he constantly stresses his being a ‘doctor of journalism’, what he comes up with is – even admittedly – something entirely different. What the above passage also communicates is that if the audience is inclined to be informed about the Mint 400, they had better pick up a copy of the L.A. *Times* as well. Still, Duke’s constant mention of journalistic coverage, of the ever-fleeting story, as it were,

evokes and even preserves language schemas of journalistic texts, as do allusions to alleged censorship: in an episode involving a ‘former Astronaut’ (192), the reader learns via footnote that the name of said astronaut has been ‘deleted at insistence of publisher’s lawyer’ (192). It is through these constant reminders that the reader is, in fact, reading journalism, that Thompson’s disruptions of world and text schemas¹⁵⁰ gain additional momentum. Ultimately, nothing comes of all these pretensions of journalism: Duke, as I already mentioned, never presents the results of his allegedly extensive coverage and thus becomes a prime example of an unreliable narrator in his utter abandonment of what he terms the story – despite his maxim to ‘[n]ever lose sight of the primary responsibility’ (12).

Another clear indication of unreliability in Duke’s narrative is his open concession to frequent paranoid delusions. As his and Gonzo’s clashes with Las Vegas locals and casino patrons increase in intensity, Duke’s mind gives way to more and more elaborate paranoid fantasies. The first major episode in this regard occurs when Duke decides to escape from the Mint Hotel towards the end of the novel’s first part. Thompson brilliantly manages to give Duke’s narrative a confused and highly agitated feel by choice of words, but also by breathless syntax. In the following passage Duke’s warped state of mind comes across very well:

The decision to flee came suddenly. Or maybe not. Maybe I’d planned it all along—subconsciously waiting for the right moment. The bill was a factor, I think. Because I had no money to pay it. (69)

Duke’s revelations are highly fragmented, which evokes a hectic atmosphere, especially in connection with the notion of his apparent need to escape. Thompson, through syntactical arrangement, cleverly delays the reason for Duke’s ‘decision to flee’ (69), which, together with the incomplete, huddled sentences, creates an immediate sense of confusion in the reader that is strengthened by the episode’s unexpected and unwarranted onset¹⁵¹. By holding back the cause of Duke’s evident anxiety, the abrupt start of paranoid symptoms is exacerbated. Duke’s constant paranoia, which ‘establishes the core tension sustaining the narrative’ (MacFarlane 179) and which he voices regularly, evokes notions of pulp crime fiction as well:

It was a weird feeling to sit in a Las Vegas hotel at four in the morning—hunkered down with a notebook and a tape recorder in a \$75-a-day suite and a fantastic room service bill¹⁵², run up in forty-eight hours of total madness—knowing that just as soon as dawn comes up you are going to flee without paying a fucking penny . . . (72)

¹⁵⁰ See chapters 3.2.1. and 3.2.2., respectively.

¹⁵¹ The episode, which marks the beginning of a new chapter, is preceded by a lengthy reflection on the end of the 1960s in the previous chapter and occurs entirely without prior indication. The text thus imitates Duke’s sudden realisation in language and structure.

¹⁵² Shortly before, Duke has informed that reader that

In these passages, Thompson approximates *Fear and Loathing* to crime stories in a fashion similar to Burroughs.¹⁵³ After all, Duke and Gonzo are ultimately con men as well, and despite ‘several narrow escapes’ (42) very successful at that.¹⁵⁴ In these and similar passages, Duke and Gonzo become criminals on the run from whatever ominous (and basically imagined, see below) force may be threatening them.

Duke is clearly on the edge during the entire situation, which begins to manifest strikingly in his language:

BOOM. Flashing paranoia. [...] Has somebody followed me here? Does the bartendress know who I am? Can she see me behind these mirrors?
[...]
Jesus, bad waves of paranoia, madness, fear and loathing—intolerable vibrations in this place. Get out. Flee . . . (85)

Once again, frequent rhetorical questions undermine Duke’s reliability and create uncertainty in the reader. Duke’s anxiety is emulated by Thompson’s hectic and torn style; the narrative’s fast pace creates a sense of uneasy urgency that permeates the entire novel. As Duke goes about executing his escape plan, the ‘bad waves of paranoia, madness, fear and loathing’ (85) reach an almost unbearable level, culminating in the following scene: while waiting for his car to be brought up from the parking lot, Duke suddenly hears someone call his name:

“Mister Duke! We’ve been looking for you!”
I almost collapsed on the curb. Every cell in my brain and body sagged. No! I thought. I must be hallucinating. There’s nobody back there, nobody calling . . . it’s a paranoid delusion, amphetamine psychosis . . . just keep walking towards the car, always smiling . . .
“MISTER DUKE! Wait!”
Well . . . why not? *Many fine books have been written in prison.* [my emphasis] And it’s not like I’ll be a total stranger up there in Carson City. The warden will recognize me; and the Con Boss—I once interviewed them for *The New York Times*. [...]
[...] I turned to face my accuser, a small young clerk with a big smile on his face and a yellow envelope in his hand. “I’ve been calling your room,” he said. “Then I saw you standing outside.”
I nodded, too tired to resist. By now the Shark was beside me, but I saw no point in even tossing my bag into it. *The game was up. They had me.* [my emphasis] (75-76)

[w]e never knew the total, but—just before we left—my attorney figured we were running somewhere between \$29 and \$36 per hour, for forty-eight consecutive hours. (69)

¹⁵³ Daniel Grassian evaluates *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* in its entirety as a re-appropriation of the Hard Boiled Detective Novel, as a ‘postmodern noir that unmasks American ideology and morality in the tradition of film noir and noir fiction’ (“Half-Baked Cultural Detective” 99).

¹⁵⁴ I will return to this and other similarities between the novels in the conclusion.

Of course the clerk just delivers Gonzo's telegram¹⁵⁵, but Duke's paranoia has a firm grip on his account. His narrative evokes the language schema of a severe paranoiac as he himself wrongly applies the world schema of a chased – and apprehended – criminal to increasingly ridiculous situations in the course of the novel. In the above passage, Duke already imagines himself as a prison inmate. He has already given in to his pursuer, who turns out to be a completely harmless hotel clerk, a schema mismatch that the reader only really discovers when Duke does as well. In fact, Duke appropriates the clerk's language and behaviour to the respective language and world schemas, which necessarily leads to schema disruption as Duke realises his error. The reader, who has to rely on Duke's account, is compelled to share Duke's interpretation of events, but in time learns to doubt him more and more.

As the story progresses, Duke's paranoid delusions become more and more elaborate, and the reasons for doubt increase exponentially. In the novel's second part, Duke's and Gonzo's ordeal with Lucy and brushes with several other characters spark off entire tirades of imagined litigation, court proceedings and even of the punishment imposed¹⁵⁶, all of which illustrate Duke's twisted state of mind – which he, as always, makes no secret of, along with the rest of his offenses. At several key moments in the novel, however, his voice becomes coherent, clear and lucid. It is at these rare moments of (relative) sobriety that Duke introduces an implicit, but nevertheless crucial distinction between what he considers reality and what, in contrast, the majority of his narrative is composed of:

All these horrible realities began to dawn on me: Here I was all alone in Las Vegas with this goddamn incredibly expensive car, completely twisted on drugs, no attorney, no cash, no story for the magazine—and on top of everything else I had a gigantic goddamn hotel bill to deal with. (70)

This account is entirely different from Duke's usually drug addled tale; his language, especially compared to the heavily fragmented passages above, is entirely straightforward and cleaned up. Clearly, Duke's state of mind is deducible from his language use, and it is in passages like the above that Thompson has the sobered up Gonzo journalist voice his cultural critique the loudest. In fact, Thompson sees to it that reader makes the connection with reality, or with the 'horrible realities' (70) not only of Duke's and/or Gonzo's condition, but of the United States in general. It is at these shifts to an authorial level of deixis that *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* has the harshest and most outspoken criticism of American society in store, and that Duke's – or, in this case, rather Thompson's – observations gain universal validity.

¹⁵⁵ I have quoted its contents in chapter 3.2.1.

¹⁵⁶ See especially chapters three and four in the novel's second part.

What Thompson blatantly criticises by means of Duke's semi-philosophical observations is something Duke himself has to be considered guilty of¹⁵⁷:

This was the fatal flaw in [1960s LSD guru] Tim Leary's trip. He crashed around America selling "consciousness expansion" without ever giving a thought to *the grim meat-hook realities* [my emphasis] that were lying in wait for all the people who took him too seriously. [...]

Not that they didn't deserve it: No doubt they all Got What Was Coming To Them. All those pathetically eager acid freaks who thought they could buy Peace and Understanding for three bucks a hit. But their loss and failure is ours, too. What Leary took down with him was the central illusion of a whole life-style that he helped to create . . . a generation of permanent cripples, failed seekers, who never understood the essential old-mystic fallacy of the Acid Culture: the desperate assumption that somebody—or at least some *force*—is tending that Light at the end of the tunnel. (178-179)

The above quote is highly complex in its evocative language; it makes use of several language schemas at once to fuel its criticism. The 'horrible realities' from before resurface, now having become 'grim meat-hook realities' (178) that are in store for the followers of psychedelics-advocate Timothy Leary. The phrase 'No doubt they all Got What Was Coming To Them' (178) echoes the language schema of moralising slogans attributed to stereotypically American organisations of fundamentalist Christians and/or concerned parents alike, preaching against the dangers of drug abuse, premarital sex and other sins. That this is, in fact, a sound bite is unmistakably indicated by its words being capitalised; the "I-told-you-so"-mentality of the statement thus becomes painfully obvious.

But what exactly did Timothy Leary's followers do to deserve 'What Was Coming To Them' (178)? For Duke, who clearly functions as Thompson's mouthpiece in critical passages such as the above, it is the belief in 'somebody—or at least some *force*—[that] is tending that Light at the end of the tunnel.' (179) This belief, however, is impossible to reconcile with the 'grim meat-hook realities' (178) of life in the 1960s and 70s, so it comes as no surprise that said realities have turned an entire generation of naive 'pathetically eager acid freaks who thought they could buy Peace and Understanding for three bucks a hit' (178) into 'permanent cripples [and] failed seekers'¹⁵⁸ (179). 'But their loss and failure is ours, too' (178) – the belief in the possibility of 'Peace and Understanding' (178) is, after all, central not just to the 'Acid Culture' (179) of the American sixties, but to a considerable number of powerful movements:

¹⁵⁷ He does, in fact, admit as much (63-68). 'Ultimately, drugs are not the weapon the counterculture wants them to be.' (Banco 138) In this context, Scott MacFarlane notes that 'as a tool for pointing out political and spiritual hypocrisy, [Duke's rants succeed] just as pointedly in highlighting how pathetically little [Duke's] excessive drug culture offers the society it lampoons.' (186) This probably constitutes the most brutally honest confession the novel has to offer.

¹⁵⁸ This is obviously an allusion to The Who's "The Seeker".

This is the same cruel and paradoxically benevolent bullshit that has kept the Catholic Church going for so many centuries. It is also the military ethic . . . a blind faith in some higher and wiser “authority.” The Pope, The General, The Prime Minister . . . all the way up to “God.”

One of the crucial moments of the Sixties came on that day when the Beatles cast their lot with the Maharishi. It was like Dylan going to the Vatican to kiss the Pope’s ring.

First “gurus.” Then, when that didn’t work, back to Jesus. And now, following Manson’s primitive/instinct lead, a whole new wave of clan-type commune Gods like Mel Lyman, ruler of Avatar, and What’s His Name who runs “Spirit and Flesh.” (179)

In a sweeping blow, Thompson manages to criticise several pillars of what he considers (not exclusively) United States culture: ‘a blind faith’ (179) not just in religious figures, but in institutions, in popular culture, and, ultimately, in almost anyone who claims authority.¹⁵⁹ By explicitly naming leading figures of religions, cults and popular culture, Thompson manages to highlight the connection between them; a connection that is made even more evident by their larger-than-life representation in the media¹⁶⁰. It is not just ‘pathetically eager acid freaks’ (178) who never understood ‘the essential old-mystic fallacy’ (179), but devotees to religious leaders, cultists and pop stars alike – and the borders between them are blurry at best. How fitting then that Las Vegas, apart from being the ‘main nerve’ (48) of the American Dream, is the city where religion and popular culture almost intersect seamlessly.

For Thompson, however, the matter cannot rest here. He further expands his scathing cultural critique by having Duke repeatedly imitate and mock the language and register of the American everyman, of ordinary people. At various points in the novel, Duke’s narrative assumes the opinions, world view and language of the people he encounters, thereby shamelessly exposing their faults even without direct commentary. It therefore comes as no surprise that Duke’s prayer upon leaving Las Vegas for the first time exposes religious devotees as blame-shifters who want to exculpate themselves first and foremost, no matter their offenses:

Jesus Creeping God! Is there a priest in this tavern? I want to confess! I’m a fucking *sinner*! Venal, mortal, carnal, major, minor—however you want to call it, Lord . . . I’m guilty. But do me this one last favor: just give me five more high-speed hours before you bring the hammer down; just let me get rid of this goddamn car and off of this horrible desert.

¹⁵⁹ All throughout the novel, Duke himself repeatedly claims authority by posing as a police officer (at the scene with the maid I have quoted above, for instance) and even, towards the end of the book, as a minister. Being asked for identification at a drugstore, he provides the clerk an ‘Ecclesiastical Discount Card—which identifies [him] as a Doctor of Divinity, a certified Minister of the Church of the New Truth’ (203), which is of course bogus:

She inspected it carefully, then handed it back. I sensed a new respect in her manner. Her eyes grew warm. She seemed to want to touch me. “I hope you’ll forgive me, Doctor,” she said with a fine smile. “But I had to ask. We get some *real freaks* in this place. All kinds of dangerous addicts. You’ll never believe it.” (203)

All these passages illustrate Duke’s/Thompson’s assumption about the effects of ‘blind faith’ (179) in authority perfectly.

¹⁶⁰ Unsurprisingly, the mass media feature prominently in Thompson’s cultural critique as well; see below.

Which is not really a hell of a lot to ask, Lord, because the final incredible truth is that I am not guilty. All I did was take your gibberish *seriously* . . . and you see where it got me? My primitive Christian instincts have made me a criminal.

[...] After all, I made no binding agreements; this is an *institutional debt*—nothing personal. This whole goddamn nightmare is the fault of that stinking, irresponsible *magazine*. Some fool in New York did this to me. It was *his* idea, Lord, not mine.

And now look at me: half-crazy with fear, driving 120 miles an hour across Death Valley in some car I never even wanted. You evil bastard! This is *your* work! You'd better take care of me, Lord . . . because if you don't you're going to have me *on your hands*. (86-87)

This irreverent outburst of allegedly religious thoughts is highly disruptive of the language schema of passionate and reverent prayer, but still manages to evoke it. Duke's disrespectful invocation of the Lord, whom he blames for his condition, still sports many of the characteristics of a devout believer's prayer; Duke, as an American, clearly remembers his undoubtedly comprehensive Christian education. Still, his use of Christian terminology and Biblical allusions is sprinkled with expletives, which instantly flouts the language schema of honest prayer and turns the idea of praying on its head. But despite all this, the pretended believer Duke shares what Thompson considers a common fault with the rest of the United States' Christian population: after all, '[a]ll [he] did was take [the Lord's] gibberish *seriously*' (86), which is exactly what Thompson viciously attacks in the evaluation of society, culture and religion I have quoted above. Subsequently, he shifts the blame first to the magazine, and afterwards even to God himself. By blaming his failure on the Lord, Duke takes Christian reasoning ad absurdum and exposes religious devotion as inherently hypocritical and fuelled by self-interest.

Blame-shifting and a focus on self-interest, however, not only occur in connection with religion in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. I have already discussed how Las Vegas locals tend to overlook and allow outrageous behaviour¹⁶¹; Thompson presents this – almost universal – phenomenon from the offender's perspective:

I wondered what [the druggist] would say if I asked him for \$22 worth of Romilar [over the counter cough syrup known to be abused as a recreational drug] and a tank of nitrous oxide. Probably he would have sold it to me. Why not? Free enterprise . . . Give the public what it needs—especially this bad-sweaty, nervous-talkin' fella with tape all over his legs and these godawful Aneuristic flashes every time he gets in the sun. *I mean this fella was in bad shape, officer. How the hell was I to know he'd walk straight out to his car and start abusing those drugs?* (101)

Here, Thompson attacks the druggist's denial of responsibility over selling possibly dangerous drugs to shady characters. Duke's truthful self-description once again causes a pop of deictic level from the origin to a meta-layer which allows for explicit commentary: in the name of '[f]ree en-

¹⁶¹ See chapter 3.2.1.

terprise' (101), everything goes – even if the customers have ‘Aneuristic flashes everytime [they get] in the sun.’ (101) The druggist’s explanation to the police, set in italics, is given as well, written in broad dialect to imitate both mentality and intellectual horizon of such rednecks. Thompson here highlights the widespread lack of responsibility not just in druggists, but in retailers in general; dealers in firearms immediately spring to mind as well. In very general terms, Thompson mainly attacks the faint-hearted stupidity and ignorance that, for him, seems a widespread trait of the United States population.

What remains to be discussed is Thompson’s take on journalism, or rather the journalism that the mainstream media practise. At several instances in the novel, he inserts newspaper clippings into the text. While they seem highly authentic at a glance, they prove to be just as disruptive as the parts surrounding them upon closer inspection:

SHIP COMMANDER BUTCHERED
BY NATIVES AFTER
“ACCIDENTAL” ASSAULT
ON GUAM

(AOP)—*Aboard the U.S.S. Crazy Horse: Somewhere in the Pacific* (Sept. 25)—The entire 3465-man crew of this newest American aircraft carrier is in violent mourning today, after five crewmen including the Captain were diced up like pineapple meat in a brawl with the Heroin Police at the neutral port of Hong See. Dr. Bloor, the ship’s chaplain, presided over tense funeral services at dawn on the flight deck. The 4th Fleet Service Choir sang “Tom Thumb’s Blues” . . . and then, while the ship’s bells tolled frantically, the remains of the five were set afire in a gourd and hurled into the Pacific by a hooded officer known only as “The Commander.”

Shortly after the services ended, the crewmen fell to fighting among themselves and all communications with the ship were severed for an indefinite period. Official spokesmen at 4th Fleet Headquarters on Guam said the Navy had “no comment” on the situation, pending the results of a top-level investigation by a team of civilian specialists headed by former New Orleans district attorney James Garrison.

. . . Why bother with newspapers, if this is all they offer? [United States Vice President Spiro] Agnew was right. The press is a gang of cruel faggots. Journalism is not a profession or a trade. It is a cheap catch-all for fuckoffs [sic] and misfits—a false doorway to the backside of life, a filthy piss-ridden little hole nailed off by the building inspector, but just deep enough for a wino to curl up from the sidewalk and masturbate like a chimp in the zoo-cage. (200)

This passage is exemplary of the many outrageous newspaper clippings Thompson puts in his novel. Its language, style and even its typographical layout – complete with headline, press affiliation and italicised location information – immediately evokes the language schema of newspaper articles, but its contents are clearly highly disruptive. The event covered is a grotesque outrage, which, in itself, could not be considered as schema disruptive of journalism – similar events do

occur in reality, after all. Its presentation, however, and the details surrounding the event, are indicative of Thompson's critical stance towards journalistic writing and media-filtered information in general even without the explicit commentary inserted after the article proper. The gory death of the crewmembers is made irredeemably ridiculous by its description; their encounter with the 'Heroin Police' (200), after all, resulted in their being 'diced up like pineapple meat' (200). The entire funeral service is absurd, which is exacerbated by its being incidentally set to probably yet another Bob Dylan song, namely "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues". The grotesque climax of the ceremony occurs when the crewmembers' cremation in a gourd is immediately followed by a burial at sea, upon which the crewman 'fell to fighting among themselves' (200) for no apparent reason.

For Duke, or, in this case, rather Thompson, stories like the above are 'all [newspapers] offer' (200): distorted coverage of nonsensical and violent accidents.¹⁶² While it should be the media's concern to present the evident 'horrible realities' (70) of the world in a sober, reliable and matter-of-fact manner, the information they distribute is in fact watered-down, blurred and straining for effect. Thompson, in his outspoken attack on the press, ascribes to his fellow journalists a vulture-like quality in that they jump at anything reeking of scandal and bloodshed, trying to enter that 'false doorway to the backside of life' (200). In their pursuit of a story, they will climb through the metaphorical 'piss-ridden little hole nailed off by the building inspector' (200), but all they manage to unearth in their shameless practice is the dirt left behind by others. But the blow Thompson/Duke delivers to his colleagues he delivers to himself as well; in an ultimate twist, he approximates *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, the 'story', to the newspaper stories inserted, and vice versa, so that both intersect and share each other's qualities of unreliability, foul intentions and senselessness.¹⁶³

As the above investigation has shown, much of the unreliability *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* displays, and the uncertainty and disorientation it causes in the reader, is due to Thompson's creative use of language, and of language conventions. While Raoul Duke's voice is a fairly consistent one in the course of the novel, his language still always echoes his state of mind, and his perception of things changes depending on the drugs he consumes. Unreliability is created not only through Duke's constant expression of self-doubt, but also through evidence of information kept from the reader and sudden insights on Duke's part, which become sudden insights on the reader's part as well. Furthermore, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is full of explicit cultural

¹⁶² This is, in fact, consistent with the other articles Thompson inserts into *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. All of them consist of either drug-related, highly violent or politically alarming events – or all of the above. Their headlines speak for themselves: 'TRIO RE-ARRESTED IN BEAUTY'S DEATH' (72-73), 'GI DRUG DEATHS CLAIMED' (73), 'TORTURE TALES TOLD IN WAR HEARINGS' (73), 'FIVE WOUNDED NEAR NYC TENEMENT' (74), 'PHARMACY OWNER ARRESTED IN PROBE' (74) and 'SURGERY UNCERTAIN AFTER EYES REMOVED' (101-102).

¹⁶³ Compare, in this respect, also footnote 135.

critique, which Duke voices in moments of clarity – which becomes evident also in his suddenly ordered and clear language – and in which he evidently becomes a mouthpiece for Thompson’s ideas and attitudes towards American society in general. But Thompson also criticises aspects and facets of American culture by having Duke’s narrative echo and imitate the voices and opinions of the very people and institutions he attacks most – the faint-hearted and often outright stupid “ordinary people” that inhabit not only Las Vegas, but the entire United States, and institutions such as religion, the media, and the state.

This complements the strategies of schema evocation and disruption Thompson utilises in regard to world schemas and text schemas alike that I have outlined in the previous two chapters respectively. Duke and Gonzo, the novel’s odd couple of con men, are masters in schema evocation in interaction with other characters. Duke, who is constantly reminding the reader of his and Gonzo’s consumption of drugs, proves to be a savant when it comes to substance abuse. His constant rationalisations and Gonzo’s inserted correctives of Duke’s account make them highly unreliable, even more so considering their practice of lying their way out of trouble, which raises the question whether *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as such is not just one more con Duke and Gonzo are pulling on the audience. As far as textual schemas are concerned, Thompson evokes both that of journalism and that of the picaresque novel, only to irreverently disrupt, intermix and ultimately overcome both in the course of the book. Duke, who pretends to present a straightforward narrative, is deceiving the reader also in this point, as his account proves to be anything but straightforward upon closer inspection; often, the audience learn of events only by the by or even accidentally and thus start to wonder what has been kept from them. The sequence of events is broken regularly, and the textual schemas the novel frequently evokes are overturned before long. In connection with Thompson’s scathing and outspoken cultural criticism on all fronts, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* turns out to be both an incredibly unreliable and impressively insightful attempt at coming to terms with the faults in 1970s American society. Despite the evident shortcomings in Duke’s untrustworthy narrative, his iconoclastic take on the American Dream rings truer than the romanticised master narratives – ‘all the hired bullshit’ (67) – the United States have, according to Thompson, been cultivating for centuries.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1. FROM INTERZONE TO LAS VEGAS: EVIDENCE OF A SILENT SUCCESSION

Now that *Naked Lunch* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* have been thoroughly examined and analysed as regards both their unreliability and their often daringly formulated evaluation of American culture, it seems reasonable to compare the two novels on these grounds to determine the similarity of the strategies Burroughs and Thompson respectively use to achieve their effects. Even at a glance, the two books seem remarkably close in conception and execution, a likeness that even extends to their publication in the same series nowadays (i.e. Flamingo Modern Classic, an imprint of HarperCollins), and their length of about two hundred pages. The question remains, however, of what connects Burroughs, part of the Beat cultural movement's big three alongside Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, and Thompson, basically a countercultural hippie¹⁶⁴ with a background in New Journalism, and resulted in them writing their respective literary legacies so remarkably close in spirit.

An answer to this question has to shed some light on both Burroughs' and Thompson's cultural backgrounds, which means that the Beat movement and the hippie culture have to be examined in their relationship to one another. Essentially, 'both the Beats and the hippies can be seen as reacting to mainstream culture with a Dionysian, a Bacchanalian mode of response.' (MacFarlane 10) This in turn warrants the view that the Beats of the 1950s, of which Burroughs was not only the oldest, but also probably the most eminent member, paved the way for the hippies in the 1960s, albeit with considerable ideological and stylistic differences as regards their respective literary production.¹⁶⁵ Clearly, the scene had been set for the countercultural writers of the 1960s, among them a young Hunter S. Thompson who, according to Marianne DeKoven, considers William Burroughs 'one of his major influences' (106).

Looking at *Naked Lunch* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* one immediately notices how much the two novels have in common, which, considering their respective cultural origins and the periods in which they were published, hardly comes as a surprise. Still, the sheer extent of congruence among the two works is nothing short of astonishing and reveals much about their conception and their effects. Almost every aspect of *Naked Lunch* I have examined is paralleled by similar instances in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*: To begin with, both Burroughs and Thompson make use of elaborate semi-autobiographical personae through whose drug-addled minds they present the world of their novels to the audience. Both Bill Lee and Raoul Duke are petty

¹⁶⁴ For an explanation of the term, see MacFarlane 9.

¹⁶⁵ See MacFarlane, 9-21.

criminals, con men, postmodern picaros whose accidental adventures make up the lion's share of their stories. Lee's and Duke's accounts are highly doubtful not only because of their obsession with mind-altering substances, but also because of their tendency to lie, cheat and steal; one can never be sure whether what they tell the audience is not just one more con they are pulling. Lee and Duke thus combine the two archetypes of unreliable narrators in their being both morally and cognitively deficient; it is the mixture of these two elements that makes their narrative so intriguing. Strictly speaking, they are neither complete madmen nor conscienceless criminals, but they retain elements of both. What Lee and Duke also share, apart from their large appetite for all kinds of dangerous drugs and their criminal energies, is their irreverent and critical stance towards the societies, or rather the society – American society, that is –, they find themselves caught up in.

One of both Burroughs' and Thompson's pet peeves in this respect seems to be the government's official representation of drug addiction and drug addicts, which mainly serves to incite fear (and loathing) in people's perception thereof and has, according to Burroughs and Thompson, nothing whatsoever to do with reality. In order to illustrate how remarkably similar Burroughs' and Thompson's take on the matter is, I want to quote two passages alongside each other. Burroughs, in picking up the language schema of 1950s educational television, writes:

You know how this pin-and-dropper routine is put down: "She seized a safety-pin caked with blood and rust, gouged a great hole in her leg which seemed to hang open like an obscene, festering mouth waiting for unspeakable congress with the dropper which she now plunged out of sight into the gaping wound. But her hideous galvanized need (hunger of insects in dry places) has broken the dropper off deep in the flesh of her ravaged thigh (looking rather like a poster on soil erosion). *But what does she care? She does not even bother to remove the splintered glass, looking down at her bloody haunch with the cold blank eyes of a meat trader. What does she care for the atom bomb, the bed bugs, the cancer rent, Friendly Finance waiting to repossess her delinquent flesh . . .* [my emphasis] Sweet dreams, Pantopon Rose."

The real scene you pinch up some leg flesh and make a quick stab hole with a pin. Then fit the dropper *over, not in* the hole and feed the solution slow and careful so it doesn't squirt out the sides. . . . (23)

By explicitly mentioning it, Burroughs immediately calls the validity of 'this pin-and-dropper routine' (23) into question. The speech he then presents echoes governmental scare tactics to the dot despite its permeation with some of *Naked Lunch's* recurring phrases. Ultimately, the reader learns '[t]he real scene' (23), as opposed to the official version of the 'pin-and-dropper routine' (23). The latter is, however, the very same view of drug addiction and addicts that one of the keynote speaker at *Fear and Loathing's* drug conference, propagates:

[...] Dr. E. R. Bloomquist, MD, was the keynote speaker, one of the big stars of the conference. He is the author of a paperback titled *Marijuana*, which—according to the cover—“tells it like it is.” [...]

According to the book jacket, he is an “Associate Clinical Professor of Surgery (Anesthesiology) at the University of Southern California School of Medicine” . . . and also “a well known authority on the abuse of dangerous drugs.” Dr. Bloomquist “has appeared on national television panels, has served as a consultant for government agencies, was a member of the Committee on Narcotics Addiction and Alcoholism of the Council on Mental Health of the American Medical Association.” His wisdom is massively reprinted and distributed, says the publisher. He is clearly one of the heavies on that circuit of second-rate academic hustlers who get paid anywhere from \$500 to \$1000 a hit for lecturing to cop crowds.

[...]

This is the kind of dangerous gibberish that used to be posted, in the form of mimeographed bulletins, in Police Department locker rooms:

Indeed: *KNOW YOUR DOPE FIEND. YOUR LIFE MAY DEPEND ON IT! You will not be able to see his eyes because of Tea-Shades [slang term for sunglasses, according to Bloomquist], but his knuckles will be white from inner tension and his pants will be crusted with semen from constantly jacking off when he can't find a rape victim. He will stagger and babble when questioned. He will not respect your badge. The Dope Fiend fears nothing. He will attack, for no reason, with every weapon at his command—including yours. BEWARE. Any officer apprehending a suspected marijuana addict should use all necessary force immediately. One stitch in time (on him) will usually save nine on you. Good luck.*

The Chief (138-139)

The outrageous bulletin Thompson inserts towards the end of the quote is a perfect example of the ‘state bullshit’ (139) self-proclaimed authorities like Dr. E. R. Bloomquist, MD, spread by means of books, conferences and even nationwide television appearances. What both Burroughs and Thompson thereby viciously attack is the deliberate misinformation spread about drugs and drug addiction by official institutions; while the reality is anything but pretty (neither *Naked Lunch* nor *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, in their off-putting descriptions of the physical and psychological effects of drugs, can be said to glorify drug consumption), the ghost stories alleged specialists like Thompson’s Bloomquist come up with are not helping the matter at all: ‘the National District Attorneys’ Association is about ten years behind the grim truth and harsh kinetic realities of what they have only just recently learned to call “the Drug Culture” in this foul year of Our Lord,1971.’ (201)

What springs to mind as another similarity in this context is the place of action both Burroughs and Thompson employ to mirror American society – Interzone and Las Vegas, respectively. While the former is an otherworldly pastiche of metropolises, the latter is based on the actual gambling paradise in the middle of Nevada. What Interzone and Las Vegas share, however, is their intersection of cultures, peoples, architectures and attitudes; both “cities” are conglomerates, composite constructions that incorporate contradictory and conflicting elements into

a larger, often disturbing whole. Both *Interzone* and *Las Vegas* as depicted in Thompson's novel are unreal and unsettling syntheses of disparate cultural artefacts that reflect all the faults Burroughs and Thompson detect in United States society. Arguably, *Interzone* is more cosmopolitan, i.e. more applicable to the rest of the world, but it still encompasses more than just a few traits the States can be criticised for. The underworld both *Interzone* and *Las Vegas* represent has to be entered, and ultimately left – by Lee and Duke, respectively –, in both novels.

Incidentally, both *Naked Lunch* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* also draw heavily from the picaresque novel (which they pick up in its Americanised form, i.e. as a road movie, or, in this case, road novel) in terms of structure by loosely stringing episodes together whose connections often remain obscure. Both novels employ a high degree of contingency to disorient the reader in addition to Lee's and Duke's unreliable narrative, which makes for a challenging, but nevertheless rewarding read in both cases. Despite being the earlier of the two novels, *Naked Lunch* is the more unconventional novel of the two; Burroughs, by abandoning any conventional structure, has the audience come up with their own sequence of events. Still, Thompson includes more than enough sequence-breaking stops and starts in his novel to disorient his readership as well. What is also remarkable about both works is their reliance on journalism, a connection Burroughs feigns with paratextual introductions and depositions and Thompson's Raoul Duke makes self-evident by his profession as a journalist. In the case of *Naked Lunch*, however, the journalistic pretence is a vindication of the novel; in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, it is ultimately rejected and transformed to Gonzo journalism.

Stylistically, both Burroughs and Thompson employ heavy fragmentation to reflect their protagonist's mental conditions in writing. Both also make repeated use of inserted texts, as well as different styles to create a disjointed, polyphonous narrative. While Burroughs is also in this respect decidedly more modern than Thompson, Thompson does employ similar tactics, albeit not remotely to the same extent. Still, both manage to expose and criticise facets of society by imitating various "official" registers and thereby evoking their respective language schemas, which they then turn upside down. Schema disruption is one of the main ways in which the two authors effect not only unreliability and reader disorientation, but also outspoken cultural critique. But how do Lee's and Duke's accounts retain their validity when it comes to criticism, when everything else is constantly called into question by themselves and by evident signs of unreliability in their narrative?

The answer is a simple, but enormously effective trick that makes the authors' cultural criticism stand out from the rest of the narrative as the only really trustworthy parts. What John Hellmann remarks about Duke's narrative is just as true for Lee's:

Presenting journalistic events through the perceptions of this maddened, even hallucinating, persona, Thompson presents his black humorist vision of those actual events without violating their actuality. Like a mad seer or a holy fool, this persona can reveal aspects of events not readily apparent to those with normal perception. (69)

MacFarlane, in this respect, concludes that

[t]here is also a trust that the author [rather the narrator], if he can risk being so bluntly straightforward about the drugs, then, logically, has no reason to distort the spirit of his observations. It is not the spirit, but the letter of his [in this case Duke's] drug-addled, who-what-why-when-where reports that will never be deemed reliable by the reader. (190)

Both statements are true for *Naked Lunch* just as much as for *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and it is the stark contrast between the distorted and fragmented overall narrative and the surprisingly lucid social commentary that makes Burroughs' and Thompson's satirical remarks ring all the more true. Clearly, the outsider perspective both Lee and Duke occupy does not in the least prevent them from making valid observations about the society on whose edge they stand; rather, it adds validity and perspective to them that more conventional narrators could never claim to the same extent. Precisely because of Lee's and Duke's status as moral outsiders, they are allowed to say, and thereby to unearth, what would be unacceptable otherwise – and what they manage to expose is what ultimately sinks in. No matter how outrageous *Naked Lunch* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* may be, no matter how unreliable its protagonists may come across, there is no denying the grain of truth behind many of the accusations Burroughs and Thompson have their personae make in the course of their works. On a closer look, there only seems to be a contradiction between unreliable narrators from the margin and truthful commentaries on practices of a society that they reject: Lee and Duke not only lack morals and reliable perception; they also lack bias and prejudices engendered by the community. By rejecting the moral and behavioural constrictions imposed on them, they have become able to speak the naked, unadulterated truth. Despite their unreliability, their accounts are full of a brutal, unadorned honesty that their society only grants those that have already fallen from grace – those that have nothing left to lose are also those that have nothing left to hide.

4.2. CLOSING REMARKS

As I conclude my thesis, I want to sum up very briefly what I have sought to establish. The basis of my analysis has been the assumption that unreliability and reader disorientation in fiction can be traced and explained via schema theory, a psychological concept that has been made applicable to literature by the emergent field of cognitive poetics. I have outlined an evident connection

between Gaby Allrath's assumption that unreliability works on three distinct levels of a literary work – content, structure and language or style – and the three types of schemas Peter Stockwell establishes – world schemas, text schemas, and language schemas. In my in-depth analysis of these three layers of unreliability in *Naked Lunch* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, I have stressed how schema disruption is one of the most fruitful means by which both William Burroughs and Hunter Thompson create often inherently unreliable narratives; their repeated schema violation is an important hint for the reader how to read Bill Lee's and Raoul Duke's fragmented and drug-addled accounts. It has further been my aim to show that cultural criticism, an important part of the overall effect of the two novels discussed, is not only not invalidated by Lee's and Duke's status as narrators who are not to be trusted; in fact, their observations on (American) culture and society gain additional urgency and momentum in their stark contrast to the rest of Lee's and Duke's narratives.

In fact, unreliable narration seems to be a fruitful means of commenting on and satirising cultural master narratives and artefacts in a decidedly more irreverent voice than would be possible otherwise. Bill Lee and Raoul Duke are postmodern jesters, and as such enjoy the jester's licence to say whatever comes to mind. While there may not be enough works to warrant an entire sub-genre, novels unreliably narrated by drug addicts and petty criminals do often play out in a similar fashion – no matter how warped the protagonists' perspectives may be, no matter how deceptively they narrate, they still manage to lucidly point towards faults in their respective social environments. Cases in point are, among others, Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*, Martin Amis' *Dead Babies* or Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*. In each case, the moral and psychological corruption of the individual ultimately opens the reader's view for the corruption of society, a corruption against which the individual's offenses are 'pale and meaningless.' (*Fear and Loathing* 74)

What warrants further investigation in this context are also the film versions of several of the above novels, including David Cronenberg's rendition of *Naked Lunch* and Terry Gilliam's adaptation of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* for the screen. Drawing from intermedial and cultural studies, one might investigate not only how the novels' unreliability has been translated into the semiotic language of film (i.e. how directors create visual unreliability; I would claim that also in this case much of the effect is due to schema evocation and schema disruption of familiar cinematic ways of representation), but also how the material's adaptation into different media affects one's interpretation of the source. This is especially interesting since, for example, Cronenberg and Gilliam take completely different approaches to adapting *Naked Lunch* and *Fear and Loathing*, respectively – while the former essentially re-imagines the novel as a 'bildungsroman' (Murphy 71), re-appropriates several key scenes and adds a strong biographical tint to the material, the latter remains almost slavishly faithful to the source and omits but few minor events. Still, both

Cronenberg and Gilliam achieve similar effects, and so does Danny Boyle in his film adaptation of *Trainspotting*, a novel very close in spirit to the ones discussed in this thesis.

Unreliable narration is, in its rejection of well-established literary norms, a fascinating field of study that, in actively engaging the reader, manages to transcend the boundaries of traditional narrative. It is for precisely this reason that cognitive poetics, in its focus on the reader and on the cognitive processes behind reading literature, is a highly suitable approach to describe not only the ways in which authors can create unreliability, but also the effects thereof. *Naked Lunch* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* are both prime examples of unreliability in both form and content and have both left a large impact on the way contemporary novels are read, but also conceived. Ultimately, this thesis has sought to contribute to and incite an academic discussion of both these works and their transgressive means of storytelling, which so far have been given little critical attention. Burroughs' and Thompson's carefully orchestrated and beautifully crafted chaos is after all, a true sign not only of their times, but of our times as well; their novels are literary testament to the postmodern condition that affects global society at the dawn of the 21st century.

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Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht das Phänomen des unzuverlässigen Erzählens unter Zuhilfenahme von Erkenntnissen aus der Kognitionswissenschaft anhand von William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* sowie Hunter S. Thompsons *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (dt. *Angst und Schrecken in Las Vegas*). Zusätzlich soll die Validität der von Burroughs sowie von Thompson in deren Romanen vorgebrachten Kulturkritik beleuchtet werden, die ja vor dem Hintergrund der Unzuverlässigkeit *prima facie* nur zweifelhafte Gültigkeit besitzen kann.

Die theoretischen Aspekte sowie die Terminologie der Arbeit, die in knappen Einleitungskapiteln dargelegt werden, fußen einerseits auf den Studien zu unzuverlässigem Erzählen von Ansgar Nünning, Dagmar Busch sowie Gaby Allrath sowie andererseits auf der Einführung in kognitive Poetik von Peter Stockwell. Die von Allrath proklamierten drei textuellen Ebenen, auf denen Unzuverlässigkeit auftreten kann – Inhalt, Makrostruktur sowie Sprache bzw. Stil –, werden unmittelbar mit ihren korrespondierenden Schemata aus der kognitiven Schema-Theorie in Zusammenhang gebracht – Welt-Schemata, Text-Schemata sowie Sprach-Schemata –, was einen klaren analytischen Rahmen schafft, der zur Untersuchung der beiden Romane herangezogen werden kann.

Die so geschaffene Analyseverfahren wird im Folgenden an die beiden Romane angelegt, wobei in vorausgehenden Einleitungskapiteln auf die besonderen Eigenarten der Werke – die ausufernden Paratexte im Fall von *Naked Lunch*, sowie die Illustrationen und synästhetischen Qualitäten im Fall von *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* – eingegangen wird. Im Zuge der Untersuchung der Texte zeigt sich, dass sowohl bei Burroughs' als auch bei Thompsons Roman Erzählinstanzen vorliegen, die nicht nur kognitive, sondern auch moralische Defizite aufweisen und so die beiden Formen, in denen Unzuverlässigkeit nach Nünning auftauchen kann, elaboriert vermischen. Zusätzlich scheint Unzuverlässigkeit auf den verschiedenen Ebenen des Textes stets mit einer Störung der entsprechenden kognitiven Schemata in Zusammenhang zu stehen. Mit anderen Worten: Verletzungen des Welt-, Text- und Sprachwissens sowie der Literaturkompetenz der Leser sind nicht nur indikativ, sondern konstitutiv für die Unzuverlässigkeit der beiden Romane.

Ergebnis der Arbeit ist schließlich die Erkenntnis, dass die oft respektlos und offensiv vorgebrachte Kultur- und Gesellschaftskritik in den behandelten Romanen nicht nur nicht durch die evidenten moralisch-kognitiven Defizite der Texte entwertet, sondern im Gegenteil deren Validität eben dadurch sogar gesteigert wird. Die ausufernde Unzuverlässigkeit beider Werke sichert ihren Erzählern die sprichwörtliche Narrenfreiheit, jenseits von Anstand und Dekorum agieren und sprechen zu dürfen, weshalb ihre Kommentare eine ungeschönte Wahrheit vermitteln können, die vergleichbaren zuverlässigen Erzählern weitgehend versagt bleiben muss.

This thesis explores the phenomenon of unreliable narration in William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* and Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* by considering relevant findings in cognitive studies. Additionally, Burroughs' and Thompson's cultural critique, which they put forward in their respective novels, is subject to analysis. Against the background of unreliable narration, their criticism can *prima facie* entail only questionable validity.

The theoretical aspects as well as the paper's terminology, accounted for in concise introductory chapters, are based on studies in unreliable narration by Ansgar Nünning, Dagmar Busch and Gaby Allrath on the one hand, and on Peter Stockwell's introduction to cognitive poetics on the other hand. Allrath's three textual layers of unreliability – content, macrostructure and language or style – are put into context with their corresponding schemas from schema theory – world schemas, text schemas and language schemas –, which provides a clear analytical frame to examine the two novels with.

This framework is then applied to the works, whose peculiarities – overflowing paratexts in the case of *Naked Lunch* and illustrations and synaesthetic elements in the case of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* – are presented in preliminary chapters. The analysis of Burroughs' and Thompson's novels shows that the narrative instances in both cases are not only cognitively, but also morally deficient and thus constitute an elaborate blending of the two types of unreliable narrators Nünning proclaims. Furthermore, unreliability on the various levels of text always seems to concur with a disruption of the respective cognitive schemas. To put it differently: disruptions of world, text and language schemas as well as of the readers' literary competence are not only indicative, but constitutive for both novels' unreliability.

Ultimately, this paper establishes that the irreverently and offensively voiced cultural and societal criticism in the novels covered not only is not invalidated by their moral and cognitive deficiencies, but that its validity is in fact increased by precisely these shortcomings. The overflowing unreliability in both works grants their narrators the proverbial jester's licence to be allowed to act and speak regardless of decency and decorum. For this reason, their commentaries are able to convey a sense of unadulterated truth that must largely remain denied comparable reliable narrators.

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HINWEIS

Diese Diplomarbeit hat nachgewiesen, dass der betreffende Kandidat befähigt ist, wissenschaftliche Themen selbstständig sowie inhaltlich und methodisch vertretbar zu bearbeiten. Da die Korrekturen der Beurteilenden nicht eingetragen sind und das Gutachten nicht beiliegt, ist daher nicht erkennlich, mit welcher Note diese Arbeit abgeschlossen wurde. Das Spektrum reicht von sehr gut bis genügend. Es wird gebeten, diesen Hinweis bei der Lektüre zu beachten.