

## Culture Industry, Intoxication and Naturalization: The Taming of *Naked Lunch*

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### Resumo:

*The notoriety of Burroughs' Naked Lunch (1959) can be accounted both on the book's shocking depiction of all sorts obscenity and abjection and its experimentalism by an extensively employment of a vigorous technique of rupture with formal and cohesive text syntax immediately associated with modernist transgressive writing. This essay discusses Cronenberg's Naked Lunch film version by investigating a series of cinematic devices that favors an attainable meaning, promptly denied by the book, but fundamental to guarantee the circulation of any cultural product. The argument seeks to demonstrate that whereas Burroughs' oeuvre is epitomized by the motto "nothing is true: everything is permitted", the film departs from the author's defense of intoxication as a means to achieve a truly creative literary process to develop a narrative structure built upon a coercive naturalization of images and analogous to the procedures of homogenization of reality perception pointed out in the critique of Culture Industry.*

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### 1 Introduction

In the initial sequence of *Naked Lunch* (1991), a David Cronenberg's film loosely based on some fictional writings and life events of William S. Burroughs, the dialog between Hank and Martin (Nicholas Campbell and Michael Zelniker) draws particular attention in a scene that can be described as trivial, if compared to profusion of creatures, bizarre characters and hallucinations who populate the film. In this scene, two friends, who are writers, expose heatedly their distinct visions regarding writing process. While for the former the singularity of the experience engendered in the writing process could only be kept if the text does not undergo any sort of edition, which could possibly interfere in the spontaneity and word rhythm; the latter believes that it is only through a laborious and continuous process of rewriting that a text can fully attain a state of excellence, "of equilibrium", as he states. In fact, it is not necessary much effort to identify in this brief episode a reenactment of a confrontation of antagonist concepts embedded into the core of avant-garde esthetics, which marked the first decades of the last century. On one hand, the desire for the absolute control of writing process, result of an obstinate and diligent work of writing depuration, alludes to modernist writers' style, as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot. On the other hand, the plead for randomness and causality as central forces proceedings in creation process echoes the notorious Dadaist and Surrealist movements, and, at the same time, signals a patent suggestion on the influence that such esthetic experiments exerted on the following generation of artists such as John Cage. In Burroughs' case, the cut-up method for instance represented a vigorous device of rupture with formal and cohesive text syntax. This compositional technique that consists of a random compilation of a series of independent phrases and texts was exhaustively employed by Burroughs as an important experiment to collect writing fragments that bestowed *Naked Lunch*, as well as the other later texts, the insignia of discontinuous and obscure.

Yet, with particular regards to Cronenberg's film, the dissonance produced between the confrontation of novel's stylistic elements such as fragmentation and rupture and a conventional cinematic narrative codes turns into a potent matter (apparently contradictory), from which

Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* is elaborated and, therefore, can be interpreted. Our argument then states that the film's narrative structured, unlike the book, produces what could be called as "a dialectics of intoxication" by inverting the conventional opposition valences between the categories of hallucination and sobriety. Such assertion, as the film's close reading will demonstrate, diverges distinctively from the readings of other critics (BEARD, 2006; ROSENBAUM, 2000) which, for example, sees in the adaptation made by the Canadian film-maker a form of *roman à clef*, in which the film narrative fictionalizes the process of intoxication and its delusional effects experienced by Burroughs and which was eventually be converted by Burroughs himself into the literary material of *Naked Lunch*. In this sense, it is conspicuous that the disagreement between Hank and Martin described above already harbingers a form tension that can be particularly described as film motto, and a recurrent theme at Cronenberg's carrier as film-maker. Namely, the fragility of the notion of reality as a stable category (potentially ordered, based on a collective experience and fundamentally endowed with cohesion and tangible sense), in opposition to a sweeping configuration of existence forged by an overwhelming use of all sorts substances, and shaped, above all, in the individualization of perceptive experience, fragmentation and absolute absence of factual order.

In Cronenberg's films, the tension above described does not constitute exclusively as central theme. And his film version of *Naked Lunch*, it is also a formal principle and a creative proceeding. Namely, Cronenberg's choice in not limiting the film at a conventional adaptation, only circumscribed to Burroughs' book, but bringing about a myriad of other sources related to writer's work, besides recreating some events and factual events of his conflicting life, signals as a major ambivalence which features the film's form and content. By doing so, the filmmaker avoids an easy path of portraying a hallucinated and stylized biography Burroughs, as some interpretative readings propose. Besides that, if, in one hand, the director's own reading process underlying his film version already presupposes the text intelligibility (which is not at all guaranteed), generating a sense of meaning little provided by *Naked Lunch* the book; on the one hand, that same organization suggests a latent fragility in any attempt to convey such meaning. It comes with no surprise then that such ambivalence that in the film pervades both characters and plot emulates *noir* genre, known for its deceitfulness, in which nothing is actually what seems to be.

As we shall demonstrate, the ambivalence in Cronenberg's film can be described in form of "dialects of intoxication" for in its structure two distinctive forces play an equal role. Namely, while the film resorts to a series of cinematic elements that favors an interpretation, promptly denied by the book, at the same time it also evinces the director's extreme effort of emulating Burroughs fragment syntax. The film's diligence in forging a narrative oriented by a rupture with any sense of objectivity, translated into the metaphor of the character's plunging into an empire of psychic disorder and abject transmutation (as a result of the protagonist's intoxication), certainly dramatizes Burroughs's major composition proceedings as wells as a frequent theme in Cronenberg's filmography. Nevertheless, an apparently little explored aspect of this intoxication reveals that its potentiality is indeed far from being a channel able to drag the individual to other (totally transformed) realm of perception, as other readings suggest, but acts in fact as potent means of structuring one's perception closely analogous to the idea of an "administered world". If Burroughs artistic oeuvre can be summed in nothing but an immense effort against any given convention of expression (both artistic and personal), it sounds ironic and should be taken with a certain distrust, to say the least, when the such unconventional material is thematized by the cinema – a medium whose very nature is historically associated with the potential of transformation perception. It thus is exactly on this question, so recurrent into Cronenberg's films that we will intend to discuss.

## **2 The metamorphosis of writing**

The book *Naked Lunch*, published in 1959, turned in a few years into a reference for all

readers' generation, who saw in it the expression of transgressive modernist writing, due especially to a proceeding of fragmented and random collage of text phrases: a proceeding that, at the same time obstructed a production of an univocal sense, opened up possibilities for countless ways of interpretations. In its structure, the book is totally devoid of any linear narrative and, unlike Cronenberg's film, does not even have a central character. Its organization consists fundamentally of a sequence of sketches, called by Burroughs, in his long correspondence with Ginsberg and Kerouac, "routines" (BURROUGHS, 1994). Given the almost episodic brevity of each sketch, the few characters with some consistence, like Dr. Benway and Joselito, for example, do not get into any kind of conflict and lack any psychological density; others are exclusively addressed by the function they occupy, like "party leader", "the technician", "the patient", "the lieutenant", and so on; they are all stylized and quite often caricatural: while Dr. Benway is described as a Machiavellian and manipulator, Hassan personifies perversion and lust. All these routines and characters are encompassed by a satiric and cruel humor, almost *nonsense*, and yet for a discontinuous modulation characteristic of Modernism and which eventually became the *tour de force* of the Post-modern literature.

Diverging from the traditional notion of novel, designed as an organized storytelling, and devoid of an accessible and logic narrative linkage, Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* can be easily framed as a distinct selection of fragments, whose form and style varies considerably in each sketch. Its content is composed of atypical and obscure situations that stand individually from the rest of the chapters, although some routines contain some recurrent characters, which are not always so evident. In a letter to his editor, Burroughs adverts for the impossibility to treat the book as a romance, in the traditional sense of the term and advises that each routine could easily be read separately from the others, or in any order the reader might wish. For him, *Naked Lunch* should reflect the fragmented form of his composition process, since its episodes were individually produced, being later sequentially compiled randomly and in bricolage format.

Besides its experimental form, the essential obscene and pornographic nature of *Naked Lunch* proved also to be a scathing obstacle for any film adaptation to the codes and conventions of the *mainstream* cinema. To a certain extent, its daring content is much more appealing to underground cinema esthetics, due to its satirical and lewd approach of themes still considered inappropriate for the cinema in the decades of 1950 and 1960, like the unrestrained use of any specie of narcotic substance; drug traffic; misdemeanors; and the infinity of orgies, mainly of homosexual orientation. Therefore, it is not surprising that *Naked Lunch* has been promptly remitted, alongside with James Joyce's *Ulysses*, to that category of texts commonly known as high modernism aesthetics, whose most prominent feature is the inscription of an object sufficiently autonomous to deliberately resist to any form of reduction.

Due to the fragmented and nonsense nature of the book, all that remains from it to Cronenberg's film version is only some isolated elements: a) particular events: William Lee's (Peter Weller) escape from the United States for being persecuted by the police after killing his wife Joan Lee (Judy Davis); a suggestive mention to parties and orgies frequented by the protagonist; b) places: The United States; *Interzone* or Tangier; *Annexia*; the market; c) exotic substances: the black meat, Mugwumps' extracted juice – all of this in a narrative context considerably distinct from that of the book offers and in much more consonance with narrative devices pertaining to the mainstream cinema, specially to style and atmosphere of film genres such as *noir* and suspense. Besides that, some characters' names are kept, like Dr. Benway and *Mugwumps*, having altered, however, their characteristics and functions originally described in the book. Nevertheless, the most evident change refers to condensation of many characters and indeterminate voices of the book, within the figure of a single character, the film protagonist, William Lee (Burroughs's pseudonym).

Unlike the book's obscurity and imprecision already pointed out, there is in Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* a conspicuous preoccupation in immediately situating to the viewer elements such as time, space and action – despite the inevitable awkwardness that universe might provoke. The film first scene thus promptly indicates that the action takes place in 1953 in New York City, where

William Lee works as insect exterminator. It is also in this opening sequence that the spectator is informed that Lee is in trouble since someone has been mysteriously stealing his cockroaches' insecticide powder. It won't take long until he finds out his wife is involved into the disappearing, and that she alongside with his colleagues, has been trying it as a drug. Also, it is already in the first scenes that Cronenberg set the tone of his film in relation to Burroughs oeuvre, particularly the way the filmmaker establishes his own approach to treat Burroughs's notion of fragmentation. Namely, he composes his *Naked Lunch* in form of a bricolage of the writer's fictional universe that, in certain way, emulates his composition proceedings. However, differently from the kaleidoscopic effect produced by cut-up method, a junction of distinct narrative lines results into the totality of the film narrative, translated into a cohesive syntax, far from the rupture gesture intended by the book. Furthermore, during this section of plot and characters' exposition, the film already signals another interesting dissonance that will be enhanced even further latter on. Although there is no doubt to set in the first scenes that Lee's persona and life are unbearably ordinary and lack any disturbance or mystery fundamental in a *noir* or thriller genre, all in his surroundings suggest an atmosphere of mystery analogous to the narrative those genres. A striking hint of such dissonance between the character's ordinary life and the mysterious atmosphere of the film milieu can be observed in strange way the character dresses and behaves. Along the film Lee always wears a coat and hat that make him look like a typical investigator, so this dress code has nothing to do with his current profession; besides that, his serious features and circumspect posture are much more analogous to the detective character's style played by Humphrey Bogart in movies like *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and *The Big Sleep* (1946). The resemblance is striking and intensifies the character's aura, suggesting his potentially of being eventually involved in some plot of police investigation. Despite all these initial suggestions Lee's life, however, turns out to be the opposite of that what would be a typical film *noir* character, since he lives an uneventful life, devoid of any excitement or mystery.

His contact with the police though takes place through an opposite path. It is in fact due to his past as a drug user. It does not take much long thus until he is taken by two police officers without much explanation to a decadent interrogation room in a police station. Locked in there, he experiences the first of a series of hallucinations when he faces an iconic and giant insect, endowed with a voluminous and talking dorsal anus. The insect introduces himself as a secret agent and instructs Lee to kill his own wife, Joan, claiming she is, in fact, an undercover agent at the service of a corporation. At this point, the allusions to Kafka's literary universe, though a bit caricatural, permeate all this film sequence: the protagonist monotonous, tedious and, to a certain extend, bureaucratic lifestyle; his own wife, Joan, refers to the hallucinations caused by roaches' poison as a "Kafkaesque journey"; the abrupt and disoriented form he is taken by the police, unaware and untold of the reasons for his prison, suggests the same type of situation experienced by Joseph K.'s character in *The Process*; but the most Kafkaesque of all references is in fact, the talking insect which he bumps into several times awkward situations in the story; besides the various metamorphoses that the insect as well as other characters (Joan, Dr. Benway, Fedela, Yves Cloquet) undergo during the film.

What is curious about this scene then is that during Lee's enigmatic dialog with the insect, he discovers that the strange creature is fed just from the same powder which was supposed to exterminate it; in an explicitly sexual appealing, the insect begs to Lee to rub a little of it around its (anal) lips. Later on, aware that the talking insect is nothing but a product of his hallucination, he looks for medical help of the mysterious Dr. Benway, who prescribes to him a drug called *Black Meat*. The allusions to the dubious nature of the characters as well as Lee's viewpoint so far being shown to the audience are intensified in this scene. In a very suggestive speech that might be taken as a hint for the hallucinative nature of the story as a whole, Dr. Benway's describes the *Black Meat* as being both drug/antidote which would act imperceptibly, "as an infiltrated agent". The overtly suggestion increases more Lee's suspicion both in relation to the conspiratorial plot and his wife's real role who ends up being killed by him.

The scene of her assassination functions as watershed in the so far unsteady oscillation

protagonist's awareness of his own state of alertness and delirium. Henceforth, the film plot is converted exclusively in series of hallucination and surreal events. Soon, Lee comes across another bizarre figure, a *Mugwump*, who gives him a ticket advising that he ought to run away to a place called *Interzone* – a very peculiar version of Tangier, located in the North of Africa where Burroughs had in fact lived for a while. Before traveling, however, Lee is advised by the creature to buy a typewriter, a *Clark-Nova*, in order to write and send in "reports" on his activities in *Interzone*. Such reports would include details on Joan's murdering, since Lee's deeds automatically turned him into an agent endowed with a secret mission. In this way, all the tone of conspiracy and mystery hinted in the first part of the film finally comes into being. Nonetheless, both Lee himself as well as the audience as well has little information of the reasons other than it is in fact a hallucination.

There are some curious details in the sequence in which Lee buys the typewriter from an antique shop. First, without any money, he gets it by exchanging a gun with which he had killed his wife: a suggestive approximation between the bellicosity of weapons and writing – Lee himself, in the beginning of the film, had confessed to friends he had given up writing when he was ten years-old because he realized its potential peril. The second element, also charged with symbolic aspect, is the object with which the salesman fills in the space left out by the typewriter Lee bought: a sort of decorative object carved in wood in which in a scaffold hangs a naked man's figure and whose back lies a *Mugwump* sucking up his life. The image close-up stands as a symbolic sum-up and a visual narrative *cliché* which prognosticate the sequence of torments and uncertainties that will come along into Lee's way.

Such contrast stands as an important distinction in relation to these films formal terms. Especially in relation to the way cinematic elements such as edition, photography, and soundtrack are employed in order to signal or deceive the audience of character's delirium and vigil states. Although the film narrative structure leave little doubts that, in *Videodrome*, Max Renn (James Woods) is plunged into a hallucinatory process, especially due to the degree of mutations taken place around him (his TV set and videocassette tape turned into organic objects), and in his own body (the famous vaginal opening in his abdomen), the disposition and employment of these cinematic elements during the narrative avoids any explicit signaling that would indicate a noticeable shift between these two states. For this reason, it is difficult to precise when in the film narrative structure Max's delirium exactly starts.

Being this indetermination a characteristic procedure in Cronenberg's fictional oeuvre, be it in the realm of sexuality, corporeity, reality perception, or any other, it is conspicuous then that in *Naked Lunch* an inversion on the treatment of this matter occurs. Namely, in this film, a set of cinematic devices is employed to overtly indicate the distinctions between an external viewpoint and Lee's hallucinative perspective. Interestingly enough, the most flagrant sequences are those in which some peripheral scene's device contradicts and denies the "truth" established by the shown image.

In general, this type of self-sabotage, so to speak, occurs more often exactly when Lee takes for grant the hallucinative realm as a major principle of reality. The most easily seen effort of the film's counter-narrative in breaching such realm is to call the audience's attention to the fact that these images lack a referent. This can be observed, for instance, in the questionable existence of *Interzone* as a real place, since there is a strong possibility that in fact Lee has never left his apartment in New York. Or even impossible to anthropomorphizing of objects such as typewriters or even insects. The film's strategy in denying it increases as the film events unfold, but it can already be noticed during the protagonist's early delirium manifestations: Lee presents the syringe containing the mixture of drugs previously prepared by Dr. Benway as the ship's ticket to *Interzone*. Likewise, in some scenes in *Interzone*, it is possible to see, at the background and through the windows, sites of New York City – sometimes they appear as a diffuse landscape, but still recognizable as the Central Park at the restaurant window where Lee has a conversation with the extravagant Yves Cloquet. In another scene, inside Cloquet's car, through its window we see briefly and out of nowhere the entrance to the Eighth Avenue subway along a road and amidst the crowd of

Muslim passers-by.

However, those “intrusions” in the film’s hallucinative narrative has little effect upon it. Firstly, for being as minor details in the scenes’ tableau, and do not belong to protagonist’s contaminated perspective, they could be understood as little flaws, or rather, as minor technical errors of continuity; cracks that somewhat disrupts the verisimilitude unit. Secondly, the subtlety of these details is particularly averse to the nature of cinema itself, since, given the speed with which the succession of images is presented in front of the viewer retina, the seizure of these details requires a high degree of concentration, contrary to the fugacity both endemic to the experience of cinema *per se* and the consumption logic of any cultural product.

In a nutshell, in Cronenberg’s *Naked Lunch*, it is in the realm of hallucination that we can find the coherent film narrative syntax analogous to more conventional film standards. Although such structure stems from the protagonist’s intoxication, they point to a modulation form of perception intrinsically similar to the historical nature of cinema as a powerful means which through the employment and manipulation of sounds, shapes, colors and images is capable of changing and create a set of other channels of perceiving and understanding the world. For that reason in particular, the argument presented here differs considerably from the current trends of interpretation of Cronenberg’s films. Commonly, critics in general are always inclined to validate the argument that the binary opposition between the realms of reality and hallucination, in which the former is featured by a sense of order, coherence and logic, whilst the latter stands for all matter that is beyond the any comprehension and control. It is undeniable that the most recurrent issue of Cronenberg’s films focus on characters and plots wrapped up into an array of vicarious forms perception that can hardly be called “reality”. Also, given the way the filmmaker addresses the issue of perception throughout his career, the notion of reality as a stable and apprehensive concept is too far-fetched, and it often works as a counterpoint to evince its own precariousness. Nevertheless, another common misconception of the reading of Cronenberg’s films is to approach them as instances that escape and subvert an order and structure, as if they were locus endowed with a potent power of indeterminacy and resistance to any logics of structure, similar to Burroughs writing procedures. It is certainly intriguing the facts that viewers and critics alike, in an evident gesture of projection of their wishes, can see rupture fluidity and disorder where obviously there is not. If that was the case, Cronenberg’s *Naked Lunch* would be a movie as inapprehensible as the book, which definitely is not. Indeed, if there is any truly provocative element in the way Cronenberg constructs the film, it is far from the skillfully fashion he orchestrates Burroughs’ different (literary and biographical) sources, but the singular and imaginative way hallucinations and delusions are structured within the mainstream narrative procedures.

### 3 *Naked Lunch* and the mainstream cinema

In the case of Cronenberg’s *Naked Lunch*, the apparent contradiction that turns upside-down the conventional opposition above described can be explained by the scrutiny of the following cinematic elements:

a. character: Lee’s establishment as a character capable of identification with the viewer demands a *raison-d’être* attainable only in the hallucination realm. The slip created by the dichotomy between the domains of reality and delirium perception also produces a protagonist endowed with two distinct personalities. At the beginning of the film, Lee is a nobody: he is merely a bug exterminator has a mediocre dead-end job, and he is disrespected by his boss and colleagues alike, he is also a frustrated writer and a drug user, besides that, he clearly has little intellectual affinity with friends and undergoes a frustrated sexual life with his wife. Nonetheless, as he enters the realm of hallucination, his identity is affirmed by *telos* acquires, boosting him to the category of protagonist:

he henceforth plays the role of a secret agent; starts working for a major corporation, the Interzone Inc.; returns to writing as a central part of his activities, strives to investigate and uncover the secret connections of an obscure conspiracy plot; reveals of Dr Benway's double identity and escapes unhurt from the trap set up by the *Mugwump* agent to eliminate him. Finally, as a typical hero, after a long journey, he also rescues and safely his beloved one, reestablishing then the long lost sexual connection with her.

In a nutshell, the synthesis of the hallucination plot describes a formula of character, plot and space scheme not far from the structure of mainstream cinema with which the viewer is pretty much used to. Due to the vigor such long established storytelling formula, the viewer, plunged into such carefully well woven narrative, barely notices the details that contradicts of the shown images. This type of narrative structure also validates that principle that, for an audience seduced by the image's appeal, its content matters least. In this case, what matters most is a (never fulfilled) promise of excitement bestowed by the conspiracy game plot often attained by hectic unfolding of images – for the euphoria engendered by the denial of an unrevealed postponed mystery causes more stir than its disclosure; especially when what the mystery is nothing but frivolity and trifles.

b. music: *Naked Lunch*'s soundtrack particularly echoes the antagonism between the two realms of the film. To its composer, Howard Shore, a long time collaborator of Cronenberg's film scores, joined to the saxophonist Ornette Coleman, a Free Jazz pioneer. More conspicuous than the dissonance in cinematography hue, as we shall see, the music enters the film already in the opening credits: initially in the form of a jazz composed of two parts. The first one is a background music that follows a traditional line of orchestral jazz (a typical chord progression with exposure on the central melodic line, without much improvisation), and often used to create a mysterious atmosphere and tension akin to other postmodern film *noir*, such as *Blade Runner* (1982). The second one can be described as a strident intrusion of a saxophone that intertwines with the melody line, violently improvised, and developed in small sound chunks usually associated to Free Jazz style. The apparent discordance and insubordination of the latter in relation to central melodic line parallels the disarray of Lee's fragmented perception realm, where people, objects, situations and places are all scattered and operate out of any regulating and harmonic order.

However, insofar as the film progresses towards the predominance of hallucination narrative structure, the dissonance produced by the saxophone melody is softened by a conventional soundtrack, highlighting once again the mysterious atmosphere and akin to film genre conventions already described. This *cliché* score is the type of scenes background music that enters specific moments of the narrative to indicate certain emotions and reactions that the viewer ought to feel when watching it. In this case in particular, a feeling of excitement in identifying with Lee and his position as protagonist in charge of solving a conspiracy. Moreover, when the hallucination structure predominates, the Free Jazz line arises only to signal a new hallucinatory mystery, like Joan's conversion into Fadela's slave (Monique Mercure), or surprisingly, when the typewriter is transformed into a shape *Mugwump*'s head.

c. cinematography: the music corroborate the cinematography changing patterns, in which a subtle but recognizable contrast between darkness and lightness features the distinction between the two realms. However, the typical film color pattern, in which the realm of reality is intrinsically defined by the abundance of light, whereas any inner instance of the psyche is traditionally marked by dark images and predominance of shadows, is inverted here. The film opening scene already establishes such distinction. In it, Lee's first appearance is remarkably immaterial, composed only of his body's shadow silhouette that, together with his voice, is projected over a red door. Also, although red and black pervades the film's cinematography, a careful observation indicates that the intensity of both varies in the same proportion in which the realms of reality and hallucination take turn.

A dark hue permeates particularly the first part of *Naked Lunch*, either in the meager lighted places such as the company where Lee works, the restaurant where he meets with his friends or in

his apartment. It is especially in this last place that the tone alternation stands out, for it is there where protagonist's few "bursts of consciousness" occur. At times he admits that he has been caught in overwhelming chain of images of his own perception. The darkness of the scene in which, from his apartment and already immersed into hallucinatory world of *Interzone*, Lee writes letters asking for help to Hank and Martin contrasts to the discrepant light in perspective with another sequences in which, in the same apartment, the two friends, not contaminated by hallucinations, have of the same spot. The abrupt and contrastive changes in lighting in the same scene suggests that it is only with "altered perception" that "reality" can be attainable, for, as first part of the film depicts, the notion "reality" as a concrete thing is indeed excessively obscure, imprecise and difficult to be grasped.

d. plot and *mise en scène*: the action is heightened by a strategy of defunctionalizing of objects and places of their initial functions. Similar to what happens to Lee, the narrative structure of delirium is based on a logics in which some objects - exactly the ones pertaining to Lee's reality realm - move from their initial (passive) role to assume a active function in hallucination plot-line. In this sense, the powder/poison for cockroaches turns into a hallucinatory narcotic and a key element within the conspiracy plot, the cockroach undergoes a metamorphosis and becomes a hybrid creature, part insect and part machine that works as a agent who contacts and instructs Lee; the random writings produced by the protagonist in moments of delirium are converted into reports containing information as vital for his work as an agent and to disclosure and solve the conspiracy plot; Dr. Benway is fact Fadela, or vice versa, who ultimately reveals to be the articulator of the whole conspiracy; the exotic *Mujahaddin* typewriter boots a series of phallic symbols, turning into a device, or rather, a sort of unseen sexual artifact through which Lee reestablishes the sexual connection with his wife; while Joan's functions as channel by which she is transformed into another person, this time the writer Joan Frost; New York City appears then as a distant and exotic scenery of *Interzone*. In short, sex, intoxication and writing become highly interchangeable.

To a certain extent, this massive mobilization of people, objects and places in the realm of hallucination operates in order to render unit to that universe, unlike the randomness displayed in the first part of the film. Namely, *Naked Lunch* frustrates any expectation that the objects' defunctionalization would provoke a feeling of uneasiness and discomfort in the viewers, since they act differently from their nature. Indeed, once allocated within the hallucinative realm, each of these elements' function reasserts the unity of meaning and coherence constructed by plot. Any attempt of suspension of disbelief is quickly suppressed by an impressive sense of familiarity with style and pre-established codes of film genre, in which the hallucinative plot is built upon. When found in their initial function, though, they evince even more the impression of fragmentation and discontinuity that modulates Lee's initial principle of perception of "reality", besides conspicuously dismantling the impression of unity created by the hallucinative realm.

An instance of such operation can be observed in the scene where two distinct points of view on the same object are contrasted: from one hand, the perspective contaminated by Lee's hallucinations shows a fixed typewriter, which was previously destroyed. However, during its restoration process, it turns into the shape of a *Mugwump*'s head, it has even changed its name to *Mugwriter* (Fig. 5). Later on, another point of view shows the same machine. But this time, however, the viewpoint is not contaminated by Lee's hallucination and reveals the typewriter's actual state after the repairing (Fig. 6). Despite its seemingly simplicity, this disclosure provides evidence for an interpretative hypothesis that dismantle the suspense and mystery aura created so far created by the film plot-line. Namely, it promptly denies the any sheer of existence of fantastic, inexplicable and conspiratory devices behind the story. Instead, it is strongly suggested that Lee's life follows its normal and ordinary course. This incident can also be easily explained, for, in a moment of delirium, mistaking the machine for a covered agent he destroys it and afterwards has it repaired.

The interference of a dissonant perspective into the flow of hallucination can certainly be



interpreted as an attempt to draw the viewer's attention to Lee's unreliable perspective; at the same time, it seeks to destabilize the narrative cohesion of woven by hallucinative realm. The flaw in revealing the image's fallacy is thus impaired by the meanders in which the hallucinative narrative is articulated. If, on one hand, the elusiveness and brevity in which the typewriter is shown in the course of the scene assures that any viewer's already immersed in that fictional universe will hardly notice; on the other hand, it is precisely for, at this point of the film, being totally immersed in a net of mystery and conspiracy, that the viewer's perception has already been altered by any possibility of suspension of disbelief. Like Lee, the viewer has also witnessed Martinelli's destruction, its reconstruction and metamorphosis into a *Mugwriter*. Therefore, the fixed typewriter's appearance produces an effect of discontinuity and estrangement. A dissonant and minor technical flaw that could be ignored or taken as a hole in the film's unity plot, or rather, a goof which hardly interferes in its internal narrative flow.

## **Conclusion**

Thus the form in which the hallucinative experience converts into a hectic conspiracy plot underscores, above all, the film *modus operandi* regarding the schematic way in which the one's perception is structured. Equally noteworthy, the film's hallucinative structure evinces a striking distinction between the compositional narrative procedures of both Burroughs and Cronenberg. For Burroughs, the hallucinative experience engendered by the intoxication functioned as a means to an artistic creation free of any aesthetic convention. The very nature of *Naked Lunch* was indeed based on the intentionality of subverting pre-established narrative formula, being strangeness produced by fragmented syntax and narrative the book's most praised accomplishment. Cronenberg is also interested in the issue of perception alteration, but in different way. As the film reading demonstrates, intoxication operates as a potent mechanism to structure protagonist's perception, modulating it through standard narrative procedures and stylistic codes of mainstream cinema, and not its opposite as Burroughs wished. Surely, the film's dialect of intoxication reenacts the typical scheme of Culture Industry and, at the same time, subverts the axioms that, traditionally in the history of artistic and literary creation, conceived it as a potent means for overturn social and/or esthetics conventions, and thus break with homogenized forms of perception. For Burroughs and the *Beat* Generation, intoxication represented as a powerful device for raising the consciousness and world's perception to a higher level. Contrary to this logic, in Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch*, the rupture allowed by the experience of intoxication is lost, for it is already caught by the standardized cinematographic narrative structure in which both the protagonist's perception and his life are intertwined within a net of typical conspiracy film genre.

It must be noted that the principle of hallucinative structure forges "a sense of reality" by a coercive naturalization of images and esthetic cinematic language parallels to the procedures of homogenizing perception by the Culture Industry that, for Adorno (2008 , p.61-79), usurps the individual's autonomy to interpret reality data provided by one senses. Indeed, the equivalence between such procedures exposes a series of questions to understand the interwoven intricacies of narrative structure on which intoxication is constructed in Cronenberg's film, which immediately renders it the undeniable status of cultural product. Ironically, due to its constriction within the logics of modern social life, the real of intoxication enhances even further a configuration of existence grounded on the administered world (work, wife, etc.) of which the protagonist desperately seeks to escape.

As paradoxical as it may seem, the film's inversion of realms reinforces Cronenberg's epithet as a filmmaker whose carrier has been devoted to an unconventional film. In this case, however, it can be said that, by placing the numbing of the senses within a logics that parallels to a social construction of the subject subsumed by the capital and mass culture *modus operandi*, Cronenberg offers the viewer an unusual key reading of *Naked Lunch* in a time overwhelmed semiotic production. In addition, the conformation of Burroughs' literary discontinuity within the mainstream cinema codes suggests that the relationship between literature and cinema can go far

beyond the formulas set by the conventions of literary adaptation, often eager to “sell” a comfortable, but fallacious, idea of wholeness an adapted book has. Finally, it is certainly due to the mastery way through it Cronenberg employs a standard esthetic codes of mainstream cinema in a book that promptly refuses any form of pre-established formula that the director draws attention to how misleading are the parameters for distinguishing the cultural products from genuinely radical works of art.

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