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Mag. Patricia Moises, BA

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1. Introduction

The motivation for choosing this subject for a thesis sprang chiefly from a seminar on multiperspectivity in the winter term of 2013, as a result of which I composed a paper on the forms and functions of unreliable narration in *About Adam*. This seminar sparked an interest for narratology which has since become a fascination. Unreliable narration is particularly intriguing, however, because these texts are frequently highly complex and require a considerable level of reader activation. Reader activation becomes more of an issue, of course, if the reader in question is in fact a viewer, and is less likely to flip back to a certain “page” to check their facts. It also seems that readers of a visual text tend to be more trusting than readers of a written text – perhaps because cinematic convention dictates that the camera, as ‘the eye of the beholder’, does not lie.

Perhaps for this reason, or perhaps simply because of their complexity and unsuitability for certain genres, complex unreliable narratives are relatively rare in films. As Volker Frenz notes in his monography *Don't Believe his Lies: The Unreliable Narrator in Contemporary American Cinema*, unreliably narrated films “make up a tiny yet critically acclaimed fraction” of mainstream Hollywood cinema (Frenz 3). Information is often withheld from the viewer in genres such as horrors, thrillers and mysteries in order to maintain suspense. In these genres, however, the narrator or focaliser usually serves as the vehicle to guide the viewer through the text and knows as much as the viewer, providing zero focalisation. Once the final clue is provided, the mystery is usually solved, good frequently triumphs over evil and order is generally restored. Unreliably narrated texts, in contrast, might cause readers or viewers to question their accepted theory of knowledge as these texts fail to present one coherent, ‘true’ version of a story – and, incidentally, frequently appear to subvert conventional moral standards.

Academic interest in unreliable narration has increased dramatically since the 1990s, to the extent that many areas of analysis have been covered. Due to the relative paucity of complex unreliably narrated texts, two of the films chosen for analysis in this thesis are well-known examples of unreliable narration. For the sake of contrast, the films used for this thesis have been chosen from different genres: *The Usual Suspects* may stem from the genre of neo-noir but remains a fairly straightforward crime thriller, *Fight Club* is a mind-bending action-thriller with neo-noir influences, and the final choice represents an unusual genre in unreliable narration, namely the romantic comedy *About Adam*.

This thesis examines the ways in which unreliable complex narratives are realized on screen. Although much has been written about the form of narration in unreliable texts, little academic discussion appears to revolve around the methods which visual media utilize to conceal the ‘true’ version of events from the viewer. Instead, academic focus so far appears to lie primarily on the analysis of how unreliable narration functions in each specific text. Numerous articles have been written about the forms and functions of unreliable narration in *The Usual Suspects* and *Fight Club*, many of which overlap in content. Indeed, there seem to be few points of contention, but then most work on the subject discusses the same scenes and quotes the same lines. It is interesting to note that most of the shorter articles which are concerned with unreliably narrated texts feel the need to dedicate a not inconsiderable amount of space to explaining the plot of the text which they discuss. This is indicative of the complexity of the texts if nothing else, but the fact remains that much time is spent discussing what appeared to happen and ‘what actually happened’, even when this is not the intended focus of the article.

Fabienne Liptay and Yvonne Wolf’s collection of essays *Was stimmt den jetzt? Unzuverlässiges Erzählen in Literatur und Film* presents a useful set of articles, few of which, however, focus specifically on film. Volker Ferenz’ *Don’t Believe his Lies: The Unreliable Narrator in Contemporary American Cinema* and Jörg Helbig’s *Camera Doesn’t Lie: Spielarten Erzählerischer Unzuverlässigkeit im Film* provide far more focused and in-depth chapters on the forms and functions of unreliable narration, if not the mechanics of the deception. Eva Laass’ *Broken Taboos, Subjective Truths: Forms and Functions of Unreliable Narration in Contemporary American Cinema* discusses much of the same material as Ferenz and Helbig. However, her work is primarily concerned with constructing a taxonomy of unreliable filmic texts rather than analyzing the techniques used to disguise the fact that they are unreliable. Somewhat disappointingly, the promisingly titled *Falsche Fährten in Film und Fernsehen* merely discusses the ‘false trails’ laid in *The Usual Suspects* and *Fight Club* – essentially, what the viewer is led to believe and ‘what actually happened’ – rather than how the trails are laid and why viewers decode them in the way which the production team intends. Like other secondary sources, these articles decline to question how these false trails are made believable and how they work. The one exception is a nine-page essay by Katharina Ganser which examines how *Fight Club* is able to mislead the viewer – though even this brief article does not focus exclusively on one film (“Dramaturgie der Irreführung in *Fight Club*”). This is the secondary source which comes closest to overlapping with this thesis in terms of approach. Ganser’s article poses the same basic research question as this thesis: How is the

viewer led to believe the narrator's account? It is interesting to note that Ganser hardly refers to any secondary sources, which suggests that the question has either not been addressed so far or is simply too text-specific to be answered in any general sense. Nevertheless, this thesis will attempt to do so on a small scale.

The secondary literature therefore suggests that each unreliably narrated text is unique in narrative form and structure, as thus far no overall valid generalisations appear to have been made which apply to all complex unreliable texts. A preliminary glance at the primary texts seems to confirm the impression that complex unreliably narrated texts operate in radically different ways. On viewing the three films chosen for this thesis, it soon becomes clear that each has a distinct narrative structure and different ways of misleading the viewer. Naturally, though unreliable narration may be more common in some genres than in others, there are far too many texts to analyse in the course of this – or perhaps any – thesis, so if any general conclusions can be drawn from this investigation, they may be regarded as tendencies rather than universal rules. Therefore, this thesis cannot hope to discover any one way in which unreliably narrated films mislead the viewer, only to examine different ways in which it *can* be done. It may well be that conventions can be found within the sub-genre of complex and unreliable narrations as there are conventions in many forms of art. The slight change in formulation of the research question from 'How does it work' to 'How can it be done' should perhaps come as no surprise given that, in order to maintain both suspense and the credibility of an unreliable narrator, these texts cannot conform to one single pattern common to all unreliable narration. Deviance and individuality appears to be a recurring theme not only in the narrative structure, but is also bound to the ideologies expressed in more than one of the texts examined in this thesis. The very fact that the protagonists of the three texts discussed are variously a master criminal, a psychologically disturbed closet anarchist and a charming philanderer reveals that the protagonists operate outside the mores of society and are therefore unlikely to feature as the heroes of conventional texts.

The aim of this thesis, then, is to discover how the screenplay and the image track can create a text which at least temporarily misleads the viewer without appearing to violate the viewing contract. In order to examine methods used to do so, the three feature films will be analysed in the areas of the distribution of information to the viewer, the narrator or focaliser, the récit or voiceover and the camera work used to portray the images on screen. *Fight Club* and *The Usual Suspects* texts have already been the subject of considerable academic discussion due to their unusual narrative structures. The third text, *About Adam*, is possibly even more unusual, however, in that it makes use of complex and unreliable narration in a

highly unusual genre, namely that of the romantic comedy. It should, therefore, provide a considerable contrast to the other two better-known and more conventionally narrated texts. A further aim of this thesis will be to discover not only *how* but also *why* complex unreliable narration works in these films. To this end, the functions of unreliable narration will be discussed.

The thesis will be divided into three main sections. The first discusses the distribution of information in the text: Which information is withheld, how and how long for. Another point of interest in this section is how the plot twist which is so characteristic of unreliable narratives is engineered, in particular how the sound and image tracks are combined and whether flashbacks are used. The second section examines how perspectivity is determined in the three texts; how these complex narratives portray an unreliable narrator or focaliser, how the unreliable narrator or focaliser relates his or her histoire and how the camera represents their view of the world – or in some cases, the world as they would like it to be represented. The third section discusses the use of the camera, in particular the subjectivity of the camera in unreliable narration and its role in withholding information from the viewer.

The title chosen for this thesis may require some explanation. The term ‘unnatural’ narration was chosen because the concept of ‘unreliability’ is somewhat questionable as fictional characters can hardly be said to be reliable and the reliability of fictional events in a fictional world is very difficult to determine. The primary reason for this choice, however, is that the term ‘unreliable narration’ is dubious as an umbrella term for the three texts discussed in this thesis. As the thesis will discuss, *About Adam*’s character-narrators cannot strictly speaking be termed ‘unreliable’ as the text provides no standard by which to measure their reliability. However, unreliably narrated texts seem to tend towards fragmented narratives and achronicity, hence not the accustomed manner of straightforward narration. These three texts break the viewing pact and show the viewer characters and scenarios which never exist in the fictional world in which they are portrayed. Thus, for want of a better word, the term ‘unnatural’ narration will be used to encompass all three texts.

2. Unnatural narratives and unreliability

2.1. Definition of terms

Readers and texts

The Living Handbook of Narratology defines a reader as “a decoder, decipherer, interpreter of written (narrative) texts or, more generally, of any text in the broad sense of signifying matter” (Gerald Prince, “Reader” par 1). The decoders of films are traditionally also referred to as ‘readers’. However, much of the literature which this thesis draws upon refers specifically to prose texts. Based on this theoretical background on written texts, inferences are drawn concerning visual media. Therefore, this thesis will use the term ‘reader’ in reference to the viewers of fiction films, but must occasionally also use the term ‘viewer’ in order to differentiate between readers of prose and audiovisual media. The term ‘viewer’ is somewhat unfortunate, as it suggests a detached, passive recipient of a text rather than an active and involved decipherer. For the sake of readability, however, ‘viewer’ will be used roughly synonymously with ‘reader of an audiovisual text’.

Unnatural narration

According to *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, unnatural narration “represent[s] storytelling scenarios, narrators, characters, temporalities, or spaces that could not exist in the actual world” (Jan Alber, “Unreliable Narrative” par. 1). Alber goes on to state that these narratives combine ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ elements both on the story-level and in their narrative discourse, which suggests that narrative style is closely associated with story-level subject matter. ‘Natural’ in this case is understood as ‘obeying real-world parameters’, so unnatural narration defies both narratological convention and real-world laws. Superficially it may seem that the only text of the three to qualify as an unnatural narrative is *Fight Club*, as the narrator’s imaginary friend appears on screen as a physical being. However, *The Usual Suspects* may qualify on a more abstract level because it also shows events which patently did not occur, such as Keaton faking his own death for Kint’s benefit. These may not be events which “could not happen in the real world”, but they are later revealed *not* to have occurred in the storyworld. Although *About Adam*’s plot is perfectly plausible by real-world standards and nothing shown on screen is definitely negated, its achronicity and mutually exclusive versions

of events illustrate that all the events shown on the image track cannot possibly have taken place.

Unreliable narration

Unreliable narration is defined by the *Living Handbook* as a rhetorical device in which – according to Phelan and Martin’s taxonomy – a narrator misreports, misinterprets or misevaluates or underreports, underinterprets or underevaluates (Dan Shen par.2; Phelan & Martin *Living to Tell About It* 34-37). The term ‘unreliable narrator’ was originally coined by Wayne C. Booth in 1961, a term which he defined as a narrator who does not “speak for or act in accordance with the norms of the work” (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* 159). According to Monika Fludernik, a narrator may be unreliable due to their factual inaccuracy, their lack of objectivity or their ideological unreliability (“Defining (In)Sanity” 76-77). Essentially, whether intentionally or not, the narrator of this type of text does not deliver an accurate portrayal of fictional events. Volker Frenz adds that unreliable filmic narrators are often “overt and intrusive” homodiegetic narrators whose accounts are often full of subjective commentary, evaluations and interpretations” (*The Unreliable Narrator* 19). Most of the literature available on the subject concerns unreliable narration in written texts, whereas unreliable narration on film takes on quite a different form and requires subtly different categorisations. As Thomas Koebner points out in the preface to Liptay and Wolf’s *Unzuverlässiges Erzählen*,

[a]ls entscheidende Differenz zwischen literarischer und filmischer Erzählung erweist sich hier: Der literarische Erzähler kann Informationen vorenthalten, auf später verschieben oder sogar fälschen [...]. Der filmische Erzähler [...] ist jedoch in mindestens zwei Positionen aufgespalten: in die der erzählenden Figur, ob sie nun im Bild erscheint oder nicht, und in die der Kamera (9).

As Koebner’s succinct observation suggests, while literary texts may enjoy more freedom in their method and extent of withholding and dispensing information, filmic texts are far more complex as far as the range of decisions to be made about the form of unreliability is concerned. Eva Laass even rejects Phelan & Martin’s taxonomy of unreliability as insufficient for the category of filmic narration. She claims that “the potential co-presence of different narrators, as opposed to the narrative communication at work in narrative literature, would inevitably inflate the number of categories” and refers instead to only to ‘normative’ and ‘factual’ unreliability (31). Thus, Laass essentially reduces filmic unreliability to mis- or

underreporting, brushing aside mis-or underinterpreting or –evaluating. Laass’ conclusion echoes a similar argument put forward in the article “Unreliability vs. Discordance: Kritische Betrachtungen zum literaturwissenschaftlichen Konzept der erzählerischen Unzuverlässigkeit”, in which Fludernik argues that Phelan & Martin’s three axes are a useful tool for analysis, but that unreliable narrators tend to embody all three types of unreliability in any case (52).

While not qualifying as typically unnaturally narrated texts, I would argue that the unreliably narrated films discussed in this thesis follow a form of unnatural narration. Unreliable narration might in some respects be considered a subset of unnatural narration, as the texts at least temporarily represent a diegesis which does not comply with real-world parameters. Not only do the narrators do not conform to rules and norms which apply in the actual world, but the texts partly show mutually exclusive scenarios.

Implied reader and implied author

According to Gerald Prince’s *Dictionary of Narratology*, the implied author is the “author’s second self, mask or persona as reconstructed from the text; the implicit image of an author in the text, taken to be standing behind the scenes and to be responsible for its design, and for the values and cultural norms it adheres to” (Prince 42). Wolf Schmid’s definition of the implied author as “the author-image evoked by a work and constituted by the stylistic, ideological, and aesthetic properties for which indexical signs can be found in the text” largely overlaps with Prince’s, but adds nuances which are particularly relevant to audiovisual media (Schmid “Implied Author” par 1). If the visual style of a film is regarded as being indicative of the implied author’s character, the salient role of the unreliable narrator takes on a new significance.

The implied reader, as defined by Gerald Prince, is “the audience presupposed by a text” or “the audience of the implied author” as opposed to the audience of the narrator, which would be the narratee (42). These concepts may be of debatable significance in the general field of unreliability as they are elusive and, strictly speaking, individual to each historical reader and author. In this thesis, however, a degree of elucidation is necessary because the relationship between author and reader is examined in some detail. The implied reader in the case of filmic unreliable narration represents the target audience of viewers which will recognise conventional cinematic cues and decode them as they are usually intended to be read. If two characters, one of whom is unidentifiable, are shown reacting to the same events in different locations, for example, this average viewer will assume that the figures represent

two distinct characters. Thus, the texts are essentially scripted for the implied reader. However, it is the implied author who is of primary interest in this case. Unreliable narrators often appear to assume control over the text in which they appear, which has a twofold result. First of all, they appear to be solely responsible for misleading the audience, so that the cinematic author and production team appear to be absolved of all responsibility. Secondly, their apparent control of the text prevents any secondary consciousness or contradicting elements to permeate the text. As long as they dominate the text, no sign need be given that their version of events is not complete and accurate.

Homodiegetic narrators, character-narrators and pseudo-diegetic narrators

Authorities on the subject of unreliable narration use a range of terms to refer to the unreliable narrator, who is, in most cases, a homodiegetic narrator. In cases in which the narrator is a character in his or her own story, they might be referred to as a ‘character-narrator’ or ‘character-as-narrator’. A ‘pseudo-diegetic narrator’ is one who seeks to control the text and essentially to act as the implied author of the text. In fact, it appears that they have superseded the cinematic narrator in manipulating the visual text to show the version that they want. In this thesis, distinctions will be drawn between the terms. Strictly speaking, the protagonists of *About Adam* might be termed ‘character-narrators’, although the fact that they do not act as overt narrators renders even this terminology questionable. These characters are perhaps better referred to as ‘focalisers’, since their main function is to filter the text rather than consciously providing their own rendition. Verbal Kint fits the category of character-narrator best, as he is an overt narrator of a story in which he is involved. That said, a distinction should be made between the narrator Verbal/Keyser and the character of Verbal in the past, who is essentially a fictional persona. *Fight Club*’s narrator, in contrast, is an extremely overt and intrusive narrator who assumes control over the text, making him a pseudo-diegetic narrator. He takes on the role of the implied author, at least until the illusion is dispelled and he becomes reliable. In this thesis, the character in the flashbacks will be referred to as the character-narrator, while the character providing the voiceover will be referred to as the narrator.

Rhetorical and constructivist approaches

When approaching a text one might view it from the author’s point of view, and thus examine the ciphering of the text, or from the reader’s point of view, in which case the primary focus is the decoding of the text. The rhetorical approach “treats unreliability as a textual property

encoded by the implied author for the implied reader to decode” (Shen “Unreliability” par. 8). Constructivism is the approach favoured when examining how the text is read and processed by viewers. It appears that most scholars writing on the subject of unreliability tend to combine the two methods of analysis – Shen points out that even confirmed constructivists like Yacobi resort to rhetorical methods at some point (Shen par.29). Shen also adds that “[i]n terms of critical coverage, there is no conflict [between the approaches], but rather complementarity” (Shen par.27). It would be inadvisable, after all, to ignore the fact that unreliability is encoded into a text in order to be decoded by the viewer, so that a separation of the approaches is really little more than a matter of focus on the production or reception of a text. Since this thesis is concerned with the way in which unreliability can be encoded into a text without being immediately recognised as such, a combination of both approaches will be necessary.

2.2. Features of unreliability

The roles of reporting, interpreting and evaluating

In each of the three texts discussed in this thesis, the narrators chiefly misreport and underreport, depriving the reader of information vital to the construction of an accurate storyline. They are, essentially, constructing a fictional world within the fictional world, yet the reader is only made aware of the fact that they are being misdirected after the narrator has misled them – intentionally or not – for some time. Misreporting and underreporting are the most misleading type of unreliable narration in film, especially if the image track conforms to the voiceover narration to form a coherent – though entirely misrepresented – whole. Because the information provided verbally and visually represents a distorted or incomplete version of events, unless heavy hints are given to the readers of unreliably narrated visual texts the reader is unlikely to doubt the version which is provided. Mis- or underinterpreting or mis- or underevaluation are less likely to mislead a viewer to the same extent as unreliable reporting, as the viewer is likely to follow conventional scripts and form their own opinion of the events portrayed in a film. For example, if a child narrator witnesses character A giving character B an injection and character B dies soon after, the viewer may reach their own conclusions regarding interpretation and evaluation. The viewer is likely to construct their own theory concerning ‘what actually happened’ regardless of whether the child infers that character A is a doctor trying to save B’s life or that A is a murderer.

Narrative distance and dramatic irony

This type of discrepancy between what the narrator and the reader perceives to be true emphasises the narrative distance between the implied author of the text and the reader. Often it is not only factual mistakes, but discordance between the reader and implied author's norms and values and the narrator's norms and values, which appear to be measured by different yardsticks. A sense of dramatic irony is created as amusement at the narrator's lack of understanding passes as an encoded joke between the implied author and the reader. As Wayne C. Booth defines dramatic irony:

Whenever the author conveys to his reader an unspoken point, he creates a sense of collusion against all those [...] who do not get that point. [...] [T]he speaker is himself [sic] the butt of the ironic point. The author and reader are secretly in collusion, behind the speaker's back, agreeing upon the standard by which he is found wanting (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* 304).

This type of unreliable narrator is likely to be exposed as inaccurate early in the text in order to exploit the possibilities of dramatic irony, as an undetected unreliable narrator does not provide for secret communication between implied author and reader, except perhaps on re-viewing the text.

Fallibility vs. unreliability

Unreliable narrators may be subdivided into fallible and untrustworthy narrators according to the extent of and reason for their unreliability or inaccuracy. A fallible narrator is not deliberately deceptive, merely mistaken. In her article "Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators", Greta Olson states that a fallible narrator misperceives, misjudges or is biased (101). She also names likely candidates for this type of unreliable narration: "Fallible narrators' perception can be impaired because they are children with limited education or experience [...] or their reports can seem insufficient because their sources of information are biased and incomplete" (101). Because this kind of unreliability is caused by the narrator's circumstances rather than their character, intelligence or disposition, Olson argues that the unreliability of fallible narrators might be considered 'situationally motivated' as it is caused by external factors. Narrators who are inherently untrustworthy she calls 'dispositionally unreliable', as their character determines the unreliability of their narration (Olson 102).

A shift in focus: Bonding vs. deceptive unreliable narratives

In “Estranging Unreliability, Bonding Unreliability and the Ethics of *Lolita*”, James Phelan discusses the narrator’s estrangement from and bonding with the audience (Phelan 222-238). This thesis discusses levels of narrative discourse beyond the narrator, however. Adopting a constructivist approach to fallible and untrustworthy narrators requires a slight shift in focus from the discourse of the narrator to the intentions of the implied author – as far as these can be determined – which as far as misleading the viewer is concerned overlap with the intentions of the historical author. This proposed distinction goes beyond fallibility and untrustworthiness in that it regards the structure of the text and the distribution of information throughout the text rather than the nature of the narrator.

However, whether the narrator is fallible or untrustworthy is certainly a key issue. It is difficult to withhold information from a viewer without causing the narrator to mis- or underreport quite heavily, unless the narrator supposedly does not know that a scene which they witness is important, and therefore does not include it in their version of events because they do not consider it significant. Skilful screenwriting would be required to show an accurate version of events on the image track and still persuade the viewer to accept the narrator’s unreliable interpretation and evaluation as ‘the truth’. Therefore, fallibility and untrustworthiness certainly play a part in this grouping, but the distribution of information is more foregrounded than the extent of the narrator’s trustworthiness. The narrative structure of the text is also bound to the type of unreliable narrator involved, as an untrustworthy narrator could theoretically be exposed early in the text, but usually provides a more satisfying plot twist if they are only exposed towards the end of the text.

One type of unreliably narrated texts appears to operate primarily through dramatic irony, where the narrator is soon revealed to be unreliable. Here, the main function appears to be to focus on the character and mental processes of the narrator. The image track is likely to report events accurately, but the narrator will not interpret or evaluate them correctly or to the full extent. This type of narrator is very probably fallible rather than untrustworthy, as dramatic irony usually involves implied slowness or lack of development in a narrator character which the narrator, especially in pseudo-diegetic texts, is unlikely to wish to suggest if only out of sheer vanity. The other type of unreliably narrated text does not overtly show that the narrator is untrustworthy, instead reporting events – even on the image track – as the narrator perceives them. If the viewer is not given any reason to doubt this account or shown a contradictory version, they are likely to accept the narrator’s report along with the narrator’s

interpretation and evaluation of the situation or events. This narrator is likely to only be exposed as untrustworthy towards the end of the text, in the plot twist. Only after the twist, or on re-viewing the text, can the viewer appreciate the dramatic irony which is likely to be encoded in the text and perceptible when a reader is armed with full knowledge of the narrator's disposition or mental facilities.

For the purposes of this thesis these two types will be called 'estranging' and 'deceptive' narratives, as the first repeatedly emphasises the unreliability or fallibility of the narrator while the second misleads the reader regarding the narrator's reliability. This differentiation may be considered apart from the distinction between fallibility and untrustworthiness because it concerns the intentions of the implied author rather than those of the narrator and includes the distribution of information and plot structure. In estranging unreliable narratives, the implied author distances him- or herself from the narrator and bonds with the reader by sharing jokes against the narrator, whereas in deceptive unreliable narratives the implied author aids the narrator in withholding information and so essentially shares a joke with the narrator against the reader.

About Adam is an estranging unreliably narrated text as the implied author satirizes the narrators from the first plot twist onwards. The text reveals early on that its narrators are not in possession of all the facts and sometimes fail to evaluate and interpret a situation accurately or completely. Lucy is as blissfully unaware of Adam's affair with Laura as Laura is of his entanglements with David, Karen and Alice. Regarding evaluation and interpretation, Laura appears to believe that Adam is deeply in love with her at the beginning of their relationship, while Alice's version suggests that he is rather nonchalant in all his undertakings. The narrators in this text are certainly fallible, however, as they are covert narrators who appear to be unaware of their audience both visually and verbally. They do not address the audience and their voiceovers appear to be more an internal monologue than a consciously crafted account of events. There is no attempt on their part to intentionally mislead the viewer.

Fight Club, in contrast, is entirely deceptive. In this pseudo-diegetic text, the narrator assumes the role of the implied author and takes control of the text. The text supports the impression that the narrator's account is completely accurate up until the plot twist. Interestingly, it does not question the events that he recounts after the plot twist either, apart from the few scenes he shares with Tyler in which, the reader now knows, he is hallucinating. The implied author's support is perceptible in this text in the carefully crafted screenplay which manages not to expose Tyler as a fiction or even name the narrator. In this text, the

implied author supports the narrator's deliberate 'dishonesty' in supplying an untrustworthy version of events, which is only shown to have been inaccurate in the plot twist. Only then can the dramatic irony which is ubiquitous in the text be fully appreciated.

The Usual Suspects, though it is the oldest of the three texts and frequently cited as a trendsetter for unreliable narration in the nineties, employs a curious and ultimately successful mixture of both estranging and deceptive narrative. Clearly, Kint is an untrustworthy narrator on all levels. David Kujan believes that Kint is untrustworthy, and the character's actual personage of Keyser Söze is equally untrustworthy as the film's narrator. On the other hand, Kujan, acting in part as the questioning voice of the viewer, implies that Kint is actually fallible rather than untrustworthy, providing a story which Kint gladly and histrionically accepts. In the same way, the text estranges the narrator from the viewer by having the detective consistently question his account, while at the same time deceiving the viewer by supporting Kint's double bluff as he tells Kujan exactly what the detective wants to hear. Using this combination of strategies results in rather little dramatic irony and few shared jokes, but does succeed in misleading – or at least severely disorienting – the viewer.

Sleight of pen: Other misdirection techniques

One might consider a category beyond unreliable narrators who are either fallible or untrustworthy. A third variation would be a text in which a reader supposes a narrator to be endearingly fallible but later discovers that the narrator is fostering this impression in order to conceal their untrustworthiness. This type of narrator might be called 'mock-fallible untrustworthy narrator', allowing for a double-twist narrative. Readers are likely to be lulled into a false sense of security in their secret communication with the implied author which, it turns out, is not secret after all. Essentially, this type of text is a covert pseudo-diegetic narrative, as the unreliable narrator intentionally leads the reader to believe that they may trust the implied author.

In a fourth type of unreliable text, a narrator might be supposed to be unreliable but, in the twist, be shown to have provided an accurate portrayal of events. This might be termed a 'mock-unreliable narrator', also allowing for a double-twist narrative as the reader first decodes signs of unreliability and is then cued to revise the narrative. The apparent transition of the narrator from one type of unreliability to another rather contradicts Booth's assertion that unreliable narrators are dependable in that once they are revealed to be unreliable, that is how they remain throughout the text (*The Rhetoric of Fiction* 300). Olson concedes that

narrators might progress from fallibility to untrustworthiness in a narration, but predicts that readers will “prefer to make more straightforward attributions of fallibility or untrustworthiness” (104). These types of text are particularly effective in misleading the reader, then, as they defy narratological convention and predominant reader preference.

The Usual Suspects could be claimed for the suggested category of mock-fallible unreliable narrator. David Kujan, and possibly the viewer, suspects that Kint’s meekness and friendship with Keaton may have caused Kint to wrongly or insufficiently interpret certain situations. The first (mock) plot twist suggests that Kint’s blind faith and stupidity caused him to trust Keaton when Keaton was in fact Keyser Söze. The first twist confirms the impression that Kint has been a fallible narrator. Only in the real twist is Kint revealed to have been mis- but chiefly underreporting; more importantly, he is exposed as an untrustworthy narrator masquerading as a fallible one. This third variation of unreliable text type could be more fully exploited if the mock dramatic irony were present from the beginning of the text, if, for instance, Kint provided a voiceover which contradicted the image track.

The category of mock-unreliable narrative appears to be rather unusual. The concept is certainly suggested in Tim Burton’s 2003 film *Big Fish*, although the fact that this text concerns a fictional world within a fictional world clouds the issue of ‘what actually happened’. In this text, a dying father, Edward, tells his skeptical son Will the story of his life in a series of fantastical and highly unlikely episodes involving witches, giants, werewolves, utopian villages and enormous coincidences. Will is weary of these familiar stories – which he considers to be pathological lies – and dismisses his father’s account out of hand. As Edward’s condition deteriorates and he can no longer tell a whole story, he asks Will to tell him one. A compassionate Will fabricates a fantasy in which he and his father escape from hospital and Will releases Edward into a stream to escape his mortal shackles in a ceremony attended by all the magical characters from Edward’s stories. Edwards then dies and Will is astounded when people strongly resembling these characters attend the funeral. In retrospect, it is impossible to determine how much of Edward’s account is fact and how much is fiction, but he appears only to have embellished the story of his – nonetheless remarkable – life. Will is forced to accept that he has been far too disbelieving of his father. In this type of narrative, the reader is cued to believe that the narrator is unreliable; whether or not they follow the cognitive path prepared by the implied author depends on the disposition of the individual reader. However, mock-unreliable narratives may appear rather unsettling as they require an otherwise critical reader to suspend their disbelief of the unlikely events which are narrated. It

should perhaps come as no surprise that *Big Fish* falls into the category of fantasy, although only the flashback scenes qualify for the genre.

In summary, only the first category, the estranging unreliable narrative, does not mislead the reader but instead shares communication with them. Three out of four of the proposed categories involve misdirecting the reader by leading them to believe that the narrator is either a) perceptive and trustworthy when in fact they are untrustworthy, b) fallible but trustworthy when they are in fact untrustworthy, or c) fallible or untrustworthy when they are actually perceptive and trustworthy. Perhaps the fourth category is so rare because it involves the implied author, and in the case of pseudo-diegetic narration the narrator, constructing a story to be told against themselves, which is not only unlikely in the fictional world but impractically complex on the level of non-fictional communication.

Indicators of unreliability

Ansgar Nünning's monograph *Unreliable Narration* provides an extensive list of textual indications of unreliability. The main unreliability markers as identified by Nünning are presented here:

- 1) Discrepancies in the narrative discourse or conflict between the narrator's presentation of the diegesis and the accounts of other characters
- 2) Discrepancies in characterisation between the narrator and other characters
- 3) Apparent failure by the narrator to correctly interpret and evaluate events
- 4) Corrections made by other characters
- 5) Multiperspectivity and contrast between accounts
- 6) Markers of egocentricity and subjectivity, often including direct addresses to the reader and frequently with attempts to garner sympathy
- 7) Overt metanarrative discussions about the narrator's credibility
- 8) Confessed amnesia, prejudices or limitations of his or her cognitive processes
- 9) Indicators outside the main diegesis such as titles, subtitles and prefaces (Nünning 27-28)

Lists of unreliability markers compiled by other authorities on unreliable narration such as Dan Shen largely cover the same points in more or less detail (Shen par.17). Compilations of indicators such as these illustrate that several techniques might be used to show the reader that a text is not entirely reliable – though of course a text filled with unreliability markers that is revealed to be reliably narrated would provide no less of a surprise than some of the plot twists discussed in this thesis. Readers usually identify unreliability markers and decode the narrated account with an according degree of scepticism.

However, certain filmic techniques may cause indicators of unreliability to be disregarded by the reader. Tamar Yacobi first outlined the main ways in which a reader excuses inconsistencies or ‘mistakes’ in the text, only one of which involves the unreliability of the narrator or focaliser (Yacobi “Fictional Unreliability” 113-126). These ‘integration mechanisms’ allow readers to process a text which includes apparent “mistakes” or inconsistencies. Yacobi maintains that the genetic principle allows readers to attribute inconsistencies or skewed world-views to the historical author, while the generic principle requires texts to conform to a certain pattern prescribed by their genre (114-116). The existential principle extends special allowances to the fictitious world in which the story takes place, where different parameters might operate and the laws of probability may not apply (116-117). The “aesthetic, thematic and persuasive goals” of the text might also give rise to peculiarities within a text which a reader might explain as being a creative necessity required by the functional principle, not dissimilar to the generic principle (117-118). Finally, the perspectival principle allows for “the peculiarities and circumstances of the observer through whom the [fictional] world is taken to be refracted” (118-119).

Naturally, these are exactly the integration techniques which a filmmaker would wish for a reader to apply in order to disguise the fact that the text which they are viewing is unreliably narrated. Alternatively, a director might decline to show any indicators of unreliability whatsoever. To find out whether such a text has been produced would be beyond the scope of this thesis, but were such a text hypothetically shown to audiences, one might suppose that they would consider themselves “cheated” by the text which offered no clues to the narrator’s unreliability. It seems instead to be a feature of this type of text to tease viewers by offering hints concerning the narrator’s unreliability and then directing attention away from these inconsistencies. In this fashion, while the plot twist may come as a surprise, readers will have the satisfaction of seeing that the textual inconsistencies make sense in the light of the final revelation, whatever that may be.

Offering no indicators of unreliability, then, is clearly not the way to mislead viewers. Jörg Helbig’s article “Follow the White Rabbit” offers an alternative way of viewing indicators of unreliability. Helbig points out that some unreliably narrated texts include unreliability markers but offer no clue as to what is unreliable about the narration. In his example, *Fight Club*, plenty of indicators of unreliability are given: The camera is subjective, the voiceover is deeply subjective and intrusive while the narrator admits to insomnia, a perceived loss of reality and memory lapses (139). However, the film gives no indication concerning which sequences or elements might be unreliably represented. What is more, after

the initial slew of unreliability markers, few signals suggest that anything is amiss with the narrative. Few readers would guess that both the narrator and the narrative instance are unreliable, “dass es sich bei der in *Fight Club* scheinbar vorherrschenden unpersönlichen Fokalisierung in Wahrheit um eine persönliche mentale Fokalisierung handelt” (Helbig 139). Following this analysis, Helbig states that „[d]as Kriterium der Explizitheit von Unzuverlässigkeitssignalen ist also nicht deren Auffälligkeit, sondern deren Mangel an Ambivalenz“ (142). According to Helbig, then, even identifying unreliability markers is insufficient to allow a reader to permeate the narrator’s unreliability.

Further indications of unreliability may be found directly within the narrator’s character or even character type. William Riggan has identified several character types which are likely unreliable narrators in his monograph *Pícaros, Madmen, Naïfs and Clowns: The Unreliable First-Person Narrator*. His list includes braggarts, madmen, naïfs, jesters and liars. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, meanwhile, succinctly summarises the main causes of unreliability as “the narrator’s limited knowledge, his personal involvement and his problematic value-scheme” (*Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* 100). Several character types or character traits in a narrator are likely to cause a reader to question the reliability of the storyteller, three of which are discussed in more detail here.

Child narrators are particularly likely to misinterpret, misevaluate, underinterpret and underevaluate and as a result, misreport. Here, the child narrator is not deceiving the viewer deliberately and is therefore more fallible than untrustworthy. On the other hand they may also report accurately but fail to interpret and evaluate to the same extent. In this case, however, the mature reader is unlikely to be misled by the child’s report but will instead become aware of the narrative distance between the implied author and the child and appreciate the dramatic irony created by situations which the child misunderstands. Mentally unstable narrators are equally likely to narrate unreliably. Like child narrators, these storytellers may indeed represent the fictional world as they see it, but their perception of the world is unlikely to compare to a sane character’s perception of the same situations and events. Unlike child narrators, they may see and read *more* into a scene than is ‘actually’ there because they suffer from delusions or paranoia. A third classic type of unreliable narrator is the criminal, which may or may not overlap with the former category of madman. It appears that these two groups frequently overlap, as an edge of mania adds to the psychotic criminal’s account. In this case, however, the narrator often deliberately misleads the viewer or has somehow managed to convince themselves that they are not to blame at all. In these cases it may be difficult to determine whether the narrator is truly untrustworthy or merely fallible,

depending on the extent of their mental instability. Here, it is chiefly the narrator's norms and values which do not comply with conventionally accepted standards.

Credibility and the viewing contract

Clearly, trust in the narrator, if not the implied author, is a central issue in unnatural narration and unreliable narration in particular. Robert Stam and Robert Burgoyne use the term "automatic authentication authority" to indicate the trustworthiness that an impersonal extradiegetic narrator enjoys – essentially, a pact which agrees that text which appears to be impersonally and objectively narrated is reliable (*New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics* 101). Homodiegetic narrators, on the other hand, are less likely to inspire trust, as Stam & Burgoyne state, "what they say must be tested, compared to other versions of events, and judged according to the general characteristics of the milieu in which they reside" (101).

However, readers clearly can be induced to believe the accounts of homodiegetic narrators. A possible reason why readers are likely to trust character-narrators is that these characters in some way invoke the autobiographical pact – even if they are not in fact entitled to it. The term 'autobiographical pact' was coined by Philippe Lejeune as an expression of the bond of trust between publisher, author and reader in autobiographical texts. Lejeune's definition of an autobiography is "[r]etrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his [sic] own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (*On Autobiography* 4). Granted, unreliably narrated fiction films are neither prose nor narrated by a real person. However, because a narrating character tells at least part of the story of his or her individual life and speaks as if the account were autobiographical of the character, viewers are likely to at least initially believe that they are hearing a confessional-type monologue. The atmosphere of confession is of course enhanced by the voiceover which is frequently present in these texts. Voiceovers tend to appear quite candid and confidential, especially if the narrator does not acknowledge the existence of the viewer and so remains covert. This is because an overt narrator who is aware of their audience may appear more likely to present a modified version of the story, or at least not to be quite as frank and honest as a covert narrator. In theatre, soliloquies are traditionally regarded as representing the true thoughts and feelings of characters and to be inherently truthful. If a voiceover is the filmic equivalent of a soliloquy, one might reasonably suppose that, by extension, a voiceover is necessarily honest. Unreliably narrated texts, however, exploit the

trust which readers place in visual texts, trust which is bolstered by experience of many honest and accurate pseudo-diegetic narrators.

The trust which readers place in audiovisual texts appears to be grounded in more than mere personal experience, however. These texts rely on viewers to ‘fill in the gaps’ as otherwise isolated shots are linked to make a coherent scene. More modern camera techniques also use fewer wide shots and less static cameras, so that the viewer often has to infer the relationship between different shots in a scene. As David Bordwell points out, cinema requires the viewer to interpret “a stroboscopic display of fixed frames [as] [...] continuous light and movement” and observes that “[a]s a medium of illusion, cinema counts on us making the ‘wrong’ inferences” (*Narration in the Fiction Film* 32). According to Julika Griem, another factor which enhances credibility is the seemingly collective authorship of an audiovisual text which is brought about by the size of the production team and the mechanisation of the text’s production and presentation (Griem “Aspekte filmischer Multiperspektivität” 307). This collective authorship allows the text to appear more objective.

The illusion of objectivity is central to the issue of credibility in unreliably narrated texts, whereby the camera plays a central part. Cinematic convention suggests that the camera acts as the impartial reporter of events rather than the subjective agent of the homodiegetic narrator. Julika Griem remarks on the fact that the camera cannot pose as a physical subject or represent its own identity, but can only record events. Because of this perceived lack of subjectivity, the camera appears to relate events from a position slightly outside the diegesis. Thus, the camera does not appear to be constructing a fictitious world but simply recording what is already there (“Mit den Augen der Kamera?” 307-309). As Volker Ferenz states in *The Unreliable Narrator*, “[e]ver since the classical Hollywood era, the belief that the camera can only be objective has been inextricably connected with the dominance of the viewing contract which says that no matter whether a shot is linked to a specific character or not, it cannot overly distort the facts of the fictional world” (12).

The concept that a shot is considered reliably mediated even if it is directly attributed to a specific character and therefore inescapably subjective may seem implausible. However, this view is also expressed by other theorists, none perhaps less forcibly than Thomas Koebner in his preface to *Unzuverlässiges Erzählen*. Koebner speaks of “die scheinbare Unwiderleglichkeit des Sichtbaren im Film” and states that “[d]as Bildvertrauen der Zuschauer gilt als beinahe unbegrenzt und nur schwer zu erschüttern” (10). He asserts that even once the viewer has been made aware of the fact that the account which they are viewing is not reliably narrated, “[scheint es] unmöglich zu sein [...], dauerhaft zu signalisieren, dass

der Vertrag zwischen Erzähler und Leser/Zuschauer unzuverlässig sei [...] Der Modus der zuverlässigen Erzählung scheint sich mit aller Kraft wieder nach den Störungen durchzusetzen [...]” (10). It seems inarguable, then, that an unspoken ‘viewing contract’ exists between the production team and the viewer of a film. However, the trust which the reader places in these texts is not based on the form of the text so much as the fact that they appear to believe the evidence of their own eyes beyond all reason. The viewer does not trust a film because it is a film – which in any case they know to be an artificially constructed fiction – but because they see “what happens” for themselves. In this, the image track clearly trumps the audio track, which includes the *récit* and dialogue, in terms of credibility. This way, the camera will always be seen as more credible and objective than the script – somewhat paradoxically, since the former is frequently included in the latter. Jörg Helbig confirms the concept that viewers believe the image track above all else when he states that “[...] jede noch so plausible und geschickte Argumentation [büßt] ihre Glaubwürdigkeit [ein], sobald sie in Widerspruch zu dem tritt, was man mit eigenen Augen sieht. Dies gilt auch für das Kinopublikum: Den Wahrheitsgehalt der filmischen Bilder hinterfragt das Publikum normalerweise nicht” (“Follow the White Rabbit” 133).

It follows that if the image track offers no suggestion of inconsistency or unreliability, only heavy hints on the part of the narrator are likely to cause the reader of a visual text to distrust the account with which they are presented. The text might provide several clues which indicate the narrator’s unreliability or the implausibility of events; conversely, the viewer might be allowed to continue in their belief that the narrator is perfectly reliable. In unnatural narration, one might argue that readers will recognise the impossibility of the story being told and enter a state of suspended disbelief in order to cooperate in constructing a coherent narrative. Thus, the reader places trust in the implied author and the narrator in accepting the account of events as it is presented, at face value.

In unreliable narration, much the opposite takes place. The reader might be supposed to trust the narrator initially. Several factors may cause the reader to question the reliability of the account presented. According to Nünning and Shen, the main indicators of unreliability are a discrepancy between the narrator’s view and actual real-world fact, a discrepancy between what is reported and what ‘actually’ happened, a discrepancy between the narrator’s views and the views expressed by other characters and discrepancies within the narrator’s own mind or report (Nünning 27-28, Shen par.17). Further indications that an account is not entirely reliable are the character of the narrator and the content of the plot. Character types which are likely to raise suspicion are discussed in a previous section; however, even the most

honest narrator might suffer from amnesia or consume mind-altering drugs, to name just two possibilities. A narrator who undergoes a traumatic or disturbing experience might also be supposed to be rather unreliable. If the reader subsequently decides, based on this type of intratextual clue or inconsistency, that the narrator's account may not be entirely trustworthy, he or she is likely to read the text more critically rather than glossing over real-world impossibilities. However, the text may not give any indication that the narrator is not to be trusted until the point of the plot twist. In this case, the author has chosen to forgo all dramatic irony and narrative distance between implied author and narrator in favour of intentionally misleading the reader until the point at which the entire narrative has to be revised in light of the final revelation.

3. Why viewers are misled

At this point it seems wise to evaluate what is known – or at least, what has been written – about why it is possible to mislead viewers of audiovisual texts. Some scholars, such as Henrike Hölzer, suggest that these texts work like a joke, in that the person being told the joke knows that you are going to make one and is given all the information; the final piece of the puzzle resembles the punch-line after all the rest has been constructed (Hölzer 74; Koebner 22). In a similar way, the narratee knows that the text is fictional and may recognise markers of unreliability, but no matter how many clues are provided some information will be withheld which later re-perspectivises the rest of the text.

Alternatively, it might be argued that the whole point of watching a film is to be temporarily misled. In his article “‘Hast du mich vergessen?’ Falsche Fährten als Spiel mit dem Zuschauer”, Hans J. Wulff proposes that viewers know that they are going to be misled by a text – similarly to the joke analogy posited above – but enjoy the experience: “Ich, der Zuschauer, gehe ins Kino und lasse mich auf die falschen Fährten locken, weil die Prüfung der Indizen, die Implausibilisierung dessen, was ich geglaubt habe, und der plötzliche Übergang auf eine neue Hypothese über den Zusammenhang des Geschehens das eigentliche Vergnügen der Geschichte ausmachen” (153). In Wulff's view, then, the viewer really has little motive to uncover an unreliable narration as such, as it is far more pleasurable to be proven wrong. Wulff's observation certainly helps to explain why viewers are willing to be misled, though he declines to dwell on the technical aspects of filmmaking that allow their temporary deception.

Other scholars have put forward ideas on this subject, however. In her article “Narration als Falsche Fährte”, Eva Warth suggests that unreliably narrated texts make use of existing elements (such as a gaze directed off camera) but imbue them with different, more highly textured meanings than they are usually accorded (335-336). This position would support the view that readers are required to be more active when decoding these complex texts and to interpret filmic techniques independently rather than accepting their conventional uses and meanings. Ascribing different interpretations to conventional filmic techniques has the advantage of being less likely to arouse suspicion in viewers than unusual methods of mediating texts. It also negates any feeling in the viewer that the cinematic author has violated the viewing contract, as texts unreliably narrated in this fashion do not provide a ‘falsified’ image track. When the viewer is later confronted with the fact that they misread the textual clues, they are likely to question both cinematic convention and their orthodox – and at times lazy – way of reading texts. As Koebner concludes in a somewhat breathless passage: “Dieses Bildvertrauen, das im Grunde ein Vertrauen darauf ist, dass die Fotografie, wie der Film, eine Art passives Medium ist, das von sich aus die Widergabe der Wirklichkeit nicht trügerisch verfälschen könnte, wirkt sich selbst in Manipulationen aus, die unzweideutig unsere Empirie erweitern wollen [...]” (“Was stimmt den jetzt?” 30).

It certainly seems that unreliably narrated texts shrink away from violating the viewing contract and prefer instead to ‘set traps’ for the reader to walk into instead, in such a way that the reader is allowed to mislead themselves rather than feeling that the text has deceived them by “cheating” and using a deceptive image track. Indeed, few of the images shown on the image track in *The Usual Suspects* or *About Adam* can be proven to be falsified. Ferenz posits that “the comprehension of narrative films is essentially a matter of inference, driven by the viewer’s primarily psychological drive for coherence and meaningfulness [...]”. He argues that “[i]t is not that a particular unreliable character-narrator or a film as a whole fools us; we sometimes fool ourselves because we fill in gaps all too readily [...]” (*The Unreliable Narrator* 6). Poppe represents a similar view in her simple statement: “Der Mensch hat ein Bedürfnis nach Zuverlässigkeit” (81). This strategy of laying false trails circumvents the viewing contract issues while allowing the cinematic author to enjoy a joke against the reader – which of course is doubly ironic if they are simultaneously employing narrative distance to ostensibly share a joke against the narrator.

Authors of cinematic texts appear to provide most of the information necessary to permeating the mask of reliability surrounding a text, but emphasising the information which will cause a viewer to form the wrong impression. In *Fight Club*, for example, the narrator

freely admits to experiencing insomnia and impaired perception, but the mystery of the explosion in his apartment and Tyler's odd existence soon eclipse this vital information. Ferenz also argues that the film's inconsistency in foregrounding the narrator's issues may prevent the viewer from reading the text with scepticism:

Although the film as a whole displays an abundance of signs hinting at the character-narrator's unreliability at this early stage, viewers are nevertheless likely to smooth over these kinds of textual difficulties. They do so because, after the segment just touched upon, the film in its entirety reduces potential unreliability markers, and we consequently take Tyler's existence for granted, for the reason that, according to the principle of relevance, this would appear to be the most feasible option (113).

Alternatively, key information may be disguised by flooding the viewer with other superfluous details, which will be further discussed in chapter 6. Concerning *Fight Club* and *The Usual Suspects*, creative writer Ira Nayman points out that "[...] information which is necessary to the secondary reading of the story is given to the audience, but they do not recognise it as such" ("The Man Who Wasn't There" 59). In *The Usual Suspects*, for example, Kint makes several statements whose irony only becomes apparent in light of his true identity, such as "It didn't make sense that I'd be there. I mean, these guys were hard-core hijackers. But, there I was" (08:05-08:12).

This technique of providing most of the necessary information to the viewer while minimising its importance is subverted in *About Adam*, particularly regarding the greatest mystery of the film, Adam's character and identity. Eva Laass suggests that unreliable narration often employs misconstrued characterisation to disguise an unreliable narrator as the viewer draws the wrong conclusions based on textual clues. As Laass writes, "the features and traits of a character may either be stated outright, or her traits and behaviour may be presented in a way which allows the viewer to draw his own conclusions" (Laass 50). In *About Adam*, Adam is directly characterised in a few chance remarks which mostly contradict one another, such as "Is he that shy, I wonder?" and "Lucy said he was *shy* – doesn't look shy to me" (3:23, 20:40). The indirect characterisation is equally contradictory, to the point that the viewer is left with a mass of conflicting impressions, none of which seem to encapsulate Adam's true character. The viewer is flooded with information and left with nothing concrete, which appears to be a key component to deception in unreliable texts. Inundating the viewer with information, both necessary and trivial, may simply be a commonly used technique to unbalance them and force them to place their trust in the character-narrator's account of events.

On a practical level, it has to be said that a viewer can only process so much information at once, so that providing a great deal of input at once in a ‘mixed bag’ – preferably in conjunction with a fast-paced plot – is likely to confound most viewers. Ferenz suggests that unreliable narration draws the reader in on so many levels of narrative communication that the pseudo-diegetic narrator appears fully in charge of the text and the reader has no option but to believe what this character-narrator tells them (69-70).

Concerning cinematic methods and techniques to mislead the viewer, scholars appear to dedicate very brief – albeit dense – passages to the subject. Ferenz concentrates primarily on the appeal of the character-narrator when he discusses the effectiveness of the unreliable narration in *The Usual Suspects*:

Several reasons make the viewer trust the criminal’s version of events [...]: first, they appear to be in accordance with the seemingly impersonal sequence in which Keaton is shown to be shot by a shadowy figure; second, Kint’s story is presented in nine long flashbacks which all seem coherent and trustworthy, as only a few markers, like the introductory voice-over, render them as subjective accounts of what happened; third, Kujan’s alternative version is shown in only one fast-paced sequence dominated by his aggressive voice-over; fourth, the mild-mannered and boyish character qualities of Kint attract more sympathy than the hard-boiled and cynical customs detective, Kujan. Hence, the audience has good grounds for putting its trust in the criminal” (208).

Laass also points out that Kujan is shown to bully Kint, so that Kint appears victimised, which should gain sympathy from the audience. She too regards fellow feeling as a key component of trust, as she states that “the question of a character’s reliability also depends on the degree of sympathy the viewer has for him” (139).

Julika Griem adopts a rather more analytical approach. She suggests that Kint’s version of events seems more trustworthy than Kujan’s because a lot of time and space in the text is dedicated to Kint’s flashbacks. Also, Kint appears in the shots because the flashbacks are externally focalized, which suggests that the camera is impartial and objective (313).

Katharina Ganser’s short analysis of deceptive camera work in *Fight Club* is possibly the most technical assessment of how unreliable texts work. First, she points out that the viewer should be unaware of how subjective the camera is (111). She also emphasizes the importance of “außen stehende Figuren”, so third parties or outsiders, as witnesses who represent an objective view of the situation (112). These characters are assumed to react to situations in accordance with accepted norms and conventions, so they are taken to be indicators of reliability. One shot used to naturalise Tyler is any sequence in which both men

are shown together with any third person or even a group of witnesses. As Ganser points out, none of the extras display surprise at the interaction between the narrator and Tyler, so nothing appears to be amiss. In this they confirm Tyler's existence (114-116). One or two scenes even have people apparently interacting with one or the other when the two men are together. In one scene Marla asks "Who are you talking to?" and Tyler snaps "Shut up" and closes the door (52:33). Once Tyler speaks for the narrator at A&E and the narrator parrots him (44:46). The doctor doesn't react to either of them. Again, if the viewer accepts that the narrator is real, there is no reason to suppose that Tyler is not. Where third parties are present, they seem to confirm Tyler's existence, as in the scene where two men find the narrator outside Lou's Bar (33:55). Their surprise is not at seeing a fight but at seeing a man attacking himself (118-119). Careful scripting is required here in order to ensure that witnesses are only present where they can react appropriately and not arouse the reader's suspicion. It is most intriguing that extras are used to indicate the measure of a text's reliability; one cannot help wondering how audiences would react to a text which ignored this function and had the witnesses ignore inconsistencies.

Ganser also points out one very simple technique used to visually affirm Tyler's existence, namely shots which show both men in medium long shot. They are shown as two separate physical entities; the viewer has no reason to question the narrator's existence, so why should they question the existence of the man next to him? Although this technique is probably most effective when providing the evidence of a non-existent character, the distance of the shot from the character certainly suggests greater objectivity than a close-up would.

Ganser also mentions the importance of reaction shots in *Fight Club*. Two presences are suggested by the incorporation of reaction shots, when the two men apparently look at the same thing (117). The provision of a second audio track also completely baffles the viewer; as Ganser observes that the narrator hears Tyler and Marla having sex while he is engaged in other activities (51:33-52:18, 53:25-53:38). They even shake dust from the ceiling onto him while he does sit-ups below (118). While viewers may rely primarily on the image track for reliable images, it must be said that the second audio track combined with visual effects to support it suggests an unseen image upstairs which viewers are unlikely to question since the narrator cannot be in two places at once. Somewhat paradoxically, though, it could be argued that these scenes are not so much unreliable as non-sequential, as the audio-track from one scene and the image-track of another are simply superimposed.

So far, therefore, it seems that the following points have been suggested as reasons for the viewer to be misled:

- 1) The viewer knows that they are going to be misled and appreciate being deceived – essentially, the viewer is willing to be taken in (Hölzer, Koebner, Wulff).
- 2) Conventional cinematic techniques are used to signify different things in unreliably narrated texts. The viewer does not become immediately suspicious but later questions the conventional reading of texts (Warth, Koebner).
- 3) Cinematic authors exploit viewers' need for coherence by providing a plausible – but false – interpretation of events (Ferenz, Poppe, Laass).
- 4) Indicators of unreliability are swiftly eclipsed by some other event or shift of focus (Ferenz).
- 5) Vital information may be given or hinted at as long as the viewer does not recognize its importance (Nayman)
- 6) The viewer may be given a great deal of information at once and become quite confused, causing them to abandon hope of unraveling the plot and placing their trust in the narrator instead (Ferenz). This point will be taken up in chapter 6, where it will be discussed in greater detail.
- 7) Subjective accounts appear to tally with seemingly impersonally focalized sequences (Ferenz)
- 8) Unreliable accounts are accorded a lot of screen time, which causes the viewer to empathise more with the narrator (Ferenz, Griem).
- 9) The narrator is more appealing than any other figure offering their account of events (Ferenz)
- 10) External focalization – especially in wider shots – suggests objectivity, particularly in flashbacks which might otherwise be suspiciously subjective (Griem, Ganser).
- 11) Outside characters function as impartial witnesses of events – if they do not suggest that anything is amiss, the viewer has no reason to suspect that the narrative is unreliable (Ganser).
- 12) A separate audio track suggests another presence, as the narrator cannot be in two places at once (Ganser).

While points 11 and 12 might be too text-specific to allow generalization beyond films not involving an imaginary character, the first ten points may be generally applicable. The first point cannot be tested by analysis of texts at all, but strays rather into behavioural science. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to test the remaining points, but some may be incorporated into an investigation into cinematic techniques which allow viewers to be misled.

4. Analytical method

A range of methods will be used in order to determine how unreliably narrated texts are able to mislead the viewer. As the previous chapter shows, many attributes have been suggested which make the deception of the viewer possible. In order to analyse the three texts in a manageable space, however, the thesis will investigate cinematic techniques used in the texts in different areas of interest. Essentially, it will attempt to determine what the viewer is told and how the information is mediated or disguised.

First of all, and apparently in somewhat pioneering fashion, this thesis will attempt to determine how information is distributed throughout each text, mainly concentrating on when and how information is imparted. Due to the fact that so many authorities have emphasized the trust which audiences place in the image track, the separation of visual and audio track will also be discussed. Secondly, the issue of perspectivity will be addressed, as it has been suggested that viewers are frequently unable to distinguish between objectively and subjectively narrated or focalized events. This section on perspectivity will include a discussion of the narrators of the three texts, the voiceovers that accompany them, and the focalization which allows the events to be recounted. Thirdly, the importance accorded to the image track illustrates the relevance of the camera in unreliably narrated texts. According to the viewing contract, the camera is not supposed to be factually unreliable; this implicit contract suggests that visual texts should be ultimately reliable, as the viewer is supplied with the facts and allowed to make their own judgements based on the events portrayed by the camera. As the use of the word 'portrayed' suggests, and as any viewer knows, the process of mediating a narrative is neither as simple nor as objective as the premise above suggests. Camera angles, lighting, width and depth of shot, camera movement and the rapidity and sequence of cuts are just the main ways in which a scene might be altered visually to give a subtly – or radically – different impression of exactly the same events. Once these sequences are completed with sound and music they might cause a viewer to interpret the sequence quite differently depending on which cut is shown. The most salient points of camera work will therefore be discussed where relevant for this thesis.

There can be no doubt that the deconstruction and analysis of this type of narrative is extremely complex. What is more, the complexity of the narration is so firmly bound to the structure and, in part, content of the text that a deconstruction may seem either impossible or fruitless. However, the purpose of this thesis is to discover the different ways in which unreliably narrated texts can deceive or mislead the viewer in an attempt to discover whether

any techniques or elements are applied in several texts. In order to detect hidden commonalities in the structure and content of the texts' narratology, a combination of approaches will be required. Essentially the thesis adopts a rhetorical approach towards the texts. The rhetorical approach sees unreliable narration from the author's point of view, examining the process of encoding or 'hiding clues' and the creation of narrative distance by covert communication with the reader without the narrator's knowledge. However, the constructivist or reader's approach is crucial in order to examine how these texts might be decoded by potential readers. Indeed, the two approaches are inextricably linked by the fact that an author is highly unlikely to successfully encode unreliabilities without considering his or her target audience. On the other hand, this rather cognitive approach carries with it the implicit understanding that each reader decodes texts in a highly individual manner and that no two readers are likely to read and interpret a text in the same way. Finally, the nature of the research focus makes this thesis primarily formalistic, as it hopes to either reduce these texts to a limited set of techniques used to mislead the viewer or to determine the different ways in which they achieve roughly the same effect.

5. Distribution of information

In an unreliable text, the distribution of information significant to the plot – that is, almost any information, as one seemingly small detail may betray a great deal – is vital. Naturally, one could argue that information pertinent to the plot is crucial in any text. Like thrillers, unnaturally or unreliably narrated texts rely on the fact that the viewer is not always in possession of one 'true' version of the narrative. As Maurice Lahde points out, however, unreliably narrated texts surpass thrillers in that they do more than provide an unexpected plot twist; Instead, they must often be (re-)viewed differently in the light of the plot twist, as what has gone before is revealed to have been a distortion or even a "lie" ("Der Leibhaftige Erzählt: Täuschungsmanöver in *The Usual Suspects*" 149).

As previously discussed, the viewer may be given much of the information necessary to reading the film "correctly" in the knowledge that the narrator is unreliable, but they are unlikely to assimilate and process all the clues quickly and correctly, so that the text resembles a jumbled puzzle made up of scraps of information. Despite the theoretically convincing argument that the viewer can be presented with all the information pertinent to a text without recognising it as such, scenes shown in the text must be carefully selected in

order to support the account of events which the viewer is supposed to construct, rather than betraying ‘what actually happened’. Seymour Chatman states that “[t]he omission of crucial data in unraveling a story is not a matter of unreliability but of that special form of analepsis [...]” which circumscribes an event (*The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* 225). Gérard Genette identifies this phenomenon as ‘paralipsis’, the exclusion of an episode “against the norm of a particular focalization”, though the transgression may be difficult to identify as the norms mentioned cannot be predefined (Burkhard Niederhoff, “Focalization” par. 9). In *Fight Club*, the narrator’s interaction with Tyler must be foregrounded while scenes showing his organisation of Project Mayhem must be omitted. In *The Usual Suspects*, Kint’s interaction with the gang is emphasised while his communications with “Kobayashi” are suppressed. A deconstruction of *About Adam*, meanwhile, shows that the viewer can only be extensively misled because most focalisers omit to include certain scenes in their own account, scenes which are subsequently shown to be of significance in a different version of events. An example of this type of omission can be seen when Lucy’s account fails to include finding Adam deep in conversation with Laura when he first meets her sister, as well as her long wait in the car while Adam enjoys a passionate embrace with Lucy outside (22:14, 17:19).

If all the information were made available, sequentially, from the beginning of the text, suspense would be reduced and the plot twist made redundant, thus robbing these unorthodox types of narrative of much of their charm. It is crucial, therefore, that these texts withhold or disguise a certain amount of information from the viewer, be it a major event or a small detail which is later shown to be relevant.

This section will examine the separate sets of information given visually and verbally, as well as which type of information is withheld and how and when – if at all – it is finally disclosed. In this section the gap between the image track and the audio track will be increasingly apparent. It requires particular focus to appreciate the tracks separately in thrillers, where a tense atmosphere and fast pace are unlikely to allow viewers to consider which track is more trustworthy. As previously discussed, viewers appear to trust the camera implicitly. Michael Scheffel asserts that the image track is generally accorded more weight than the spoken word: “Anders als im Fall des Dramas [...] ist im Fall des Films eben nicht der Ton, [...] sondern das qua Bewegung per definitionem irgendeine Art von Geschehen darstellende Bild als Ursprung und Leitmedium anzusehen” (“Was heißt (Film)Erzählen?” 19).

An interesting topic for discussion at this point of the thesis is what exactly constitutes information in the narrative – facts necessary to understanding the plot or subtle nuances which enhance the reading experience or add depth to the narrative? On the superficial level of reading for plot, the facts are clearly of primary interest – if one may call the actions and premises of a fictional world ‘facts’. Essentially, these are what most first-time readers of any unreliable text will search for as they engage in the ‘detective work’ of decoding an unnatural or unreliable text, following the seemingly irresistible urge to piece together ‘what really happened’ in the course of fictional events. Therefore the hard ‘facts’ will be foregrounded in this section of discussion, as viewers are only truly misled upon first viewing the text. There is no denying, however, that one of the main aims of unreliable narration appears to be to question accepted norms and conventions – of society if not of cinema – by casting easy judgements and conclusions into doubt. Moreover, the subtler ways in which narrators’ accounts are called into question through contradiction with their own image track or alternative accounts must be borne in mind when discussing ‘information’ in unreliable texts.

5.1. The separation of visual and verbal information

Again, almost all films provide both visual and verbal information. In conventional narratives, most verbal information is provided by dialogue between characters alone. A more omniscient version of the narrative is suggested when a narrator provides information relating to the plot. As Laass observes, this level of communication between an explicit narrator and an explicit audience is entirely optional (44-45). Omniscient, impartial narrators may at times be frankly superfluous, as the information which they provide could easily be shown on the image track or in the form of sub- or intertitles. A character-as-narrator voiceover, however, makes it clear that one of the characters is providing partial narration, which robs the narrating voice of its impartiality and therefore of its trustworthiness. Using the device of a voiceover, therefore, creates some tension between the information which is imparted on screen and what the voiceover discloses.

A further dimension of estrangement is added by the fact that unnaturally and unreliably narrated texts frequently make extensive use of pro- and analepsis, particularly the latter. Not only are the events more obviously distant from the viewer in these sequences, but a voiceover usually accompanies these scenes which has the advantage of hindsight, already knowing the outcome of events. Furthermore, this narrating voice appears to be quite conscious of the visual text which it accompanies, suggesting an awareness of a fictional text which is not altogether compatible with the character as a work of fiction itself. This type of

narration is known as pseudo-diegetic, as the narrator attempts to assume the role of creator of the text. Thus, a verbal narration accompanying a visual text appears unnervingly omniscient in a manner which is likely to inspire mistrust.

The three texts discussed in this thesis all utilise analepsis to some extent, from *Fight Club* which is told almost exclusively in flashback to *About Adam* which narrates the same events up to four times. Equally, each one of them uses voiceover to some degree, which can of course support or contradict the visual information provided on screen. This section will briefly discuss which information, and how much of it, is imparted through which track, especially in cases where one or the other is deceptive.

In *The Usual Suspects*, most of the information which Kint gives the police is, rather aptly, verbal. While approximately a three-quarters of the film's running time consists of flashbacks, Kint's answers in the interview and his voiceover which accompanies sections of flashback exceed this time. The verbal provision of information without on-screen support precludes breaking the viewing contract if the information supplied is incorrect. An example of this would be the scene in which Kint tells Kujan that he did not intervene between Söze and Keaton because he was afraid. In light of Kint's identity this is patently untrue, but Spacey delivers his lines with a pathos which belies the more pragmatic Kint as he is portrayed in the flashbacks. Verbal misinformation is easily scripted, as an actor need only deliver the lines convincingly and form part of a coherent narrative. Most of the information in films is clearly imparted in visual form, however. Withholding visual information is rather more difficult, as the camera may not betray vital details. Disguising a character's identity requires a particularly artificial composition, as a later section on camera work will show. A sterling example of the camera withholding information is illustrated by the first plot twist of *The Usual Suspects* (01:39:30-01:41:32)). Although the echoing, overlapping snatches of relevant statements are illuminating and illustrate how neatly Kint evades Kujan, the revealing scene would impart the same relevant information without any verbal input. The Quartet sign, the Redfoot alias, the Guatemalan coffee poster and the Kobayashi cup provide all the evidence that is needed to show how much of Kint's narrative is fabricated. These have been in the office throughout the interview, technically in plain sight, but the camera has avoided focusing or zooming in on the relevant areas of the office.

Fight Club involves rather less separation of verbal and visual information. The almost ubiquitous voiceover describes the mindset of the narrator and imparts rather more information about the plot progression than the dialogue and visual support alone could provide. On the other hand, viewing the text without the dialogue or voiceover might allow a

viewer to guess that Tyler is entirely fictitious. Some scenes which involve little or no verbal input serve to support the idea that Tyler really exists, such as the scene in which they first brawl in the car park, which is captured in wide shot, a setting which suggests distance and impartiality (33:30-34:20). Other scenes with equally little verbal input cast the narrator's sanity in doubt, notably the scene in which he assaults himself in his superior's office (01:13:50-01:15:25). This scene is of particular interest because it closely mirrors the brawl in the car park, but clearly shows that the narrator is perfectly capable of conducting a fight – rather convincingly – by himself. It seems, therefore, that the camera adopts alternate positions in this text, often showing the narrator's subjective view but interspersing these sequences with more objectively focalised shots. This change of perspective is neatly encapsulated in the scene in which Marla and Tyler alternately join the narrator in the Paper Street kitchen (56:40-57:27). Although there is no change in narrative scheme, technically it appears that the account rendered is reliable one moment and unreliable the next. Scenes such as these also require careful scripting of dialogue, however, if the viewer is not to realise that Tyler and Marla do not share any sort of relationship, and that she is entirely unaware of any third presence in the house. The text's great achievement in this regard lies in giving no indication to suggest which perspective is the trustworthy version. The voiceover is largely separate from the visual information given in the sense that it is rarely bound to what is shown on the image track. When the narrator describes the rise of the fight clubs, for example, the image track could be showing anything at all vaguely related to the narrator, or even stock footage of city life. While the image track adds depth to the voiceover and adds to the sense of his obsession, therefore, the information conveyed in this type of scene is primarily verbal. The dialogue between the narrator and Marla is often awkward and highly artificial in order to avoid mentioning Tyler, schizophrenia or the narrator's name.

About Adam offers even less separation of visual and verbal information, as it includes far more infrequent and brief voiceovers than the other texts. Most of the information, therefore, is conveyed in dialogue at the level of action. On the rare occasions on which dialogue is altered according to a different focaliser, such as the scene outside Adam's flat, the changes are barely perceptible and do not alter the meaning of the statement out of context (46:33, 01:13:51). Even the proposal scene, which is perceived as being most radically different by each focaliser, remains fiercely loyal to the spoken word as Adam is always heard to say "I'd love to" (20:04, 42:27, 48:54, 01:11:35). In this text, the voiceovers do not provide information vital to the understanding of the plot, instead providing insight into the focaliser's mind and thought process. Most of the text – except perhaps David's account, which is more

challenging to portray on the image track – could be understood without the voiceover. The voiceovers add to dramatic irony when scenes overlap, however, such as the sequences in which Lucy and Laura pity each other in the bookshop (09:17, 26:42). All in all, however, this text is undeniably verbose, to the point that few scenes are without dialogue, voiceover, Lucy's singing or all three. Verbal and visual information can hardly be withheld separately, therefore, so that entire scenes must be omitted in order to keep secrets from the viewer.

In summary, therefore, the unreliable account in *The Usual Suspects* is primarily provided verbally, as Kint lies to Kujan in the office but most of his flashbacks cannot be proven to be inaccurate on many counts. Although *Fight Club* has an almost constant voiceover by the narrator, a lot of the inaccurate information supplied is visual. The fact that Tyler is shown on screen, interacting with other characters, makes it unlikely that any viewer would question his existence in the fictional world; the voiceover alone, however, does sound rather implausible. Finally, unreliable information in *About Adam* is almost exclusively shown on the image track, as the audio track remains fairly similar in each account with the exception of paralipsis by certain character-narrators.

5.2. Withholding of significant information

The Usual Suspects' main plot twist is Kint's true identity, which is disguised with some effort throughout the film. This is done visually by avoiding showing his face on the boat, but other omissions are required in order to prevent Kint becoming the prime suspect in the eyes of the viewer. First, the initial scene on the boat focuses specifically on Söze's gold watch and golden lighter (3:27, 04:04). In a film convention which has become known as Chekhov's gun, the lingering shot of these two objects signals that they will resurface as identifiers later in the text (TV Tropes: "Chekhov's Gun"). When Kint appears in the flashback sequences, however, the watch and lighter are never seen. When he lights a cigarette in the present-day, it is with a borrowed lighter (24:05). Only when Kint collects his belongings shortly before the plot twist is the officer in charge heard to list "One watch, gold; one lighter, gold" which may alert the attentive viewer to the clue dispensed some hour and a half earlier (01:38:11). A second, less obvious omission is the description given by the Polish burn victim. Although the description is given in Polish, it is presumably relayed to the police artist in English (41:18). This verbal description would quickly have eliminated Keaton as a suspect, since even his colouring is completely different to Kint's.

A further point which removes suspicion from Kint is his supposed disability. One of the main reasons he cannot be considered a main suspect is that he appears to be physically impaired from running or aiming accurately with his right hand, let alone descending ladders and taking on the Hungarian mob. Naturally, the camera must never show Kint as anything other than meek and defenceless; he is even shown limping along the pier when he could reasonably assume that he will be unobserved – and that whoever saw him running lithely would be dead within minutes in any case (01:27:18).

Concealing the narrator's other identity is also the main issue in *Fight Club*. In this case, the script is constructed in such a way that the narrator never has to speak to Tyler when another character is present. No obstructive camera angles are needed to film the criminal's identity because he is, supposedly, an independent character. The main information which is withheld is simply that the narrator's insomnia has, over the course of a year, reached the point where he begins to hallucinate an alter ego. Great care has been taken with the script to avoid the narrator ever having to state his name. In a text in which a constant flow of verbal information tells the viewer what the narrator is thinking at almost every given moment, most of the clues indicating that Tyler is imaginary are visual. Not only is he spliced into the text several times before he is introduced, he also appears in unexpected places (03:57, 06:03). He appears at Marla's apartment much faster than he should have and seems to move through the house very quickly, as he suddenly appears in the cellar in time to stop the narrator mentioning Tyler to Marla (48:30-48:48, 01:23:02). His sudden disappearance is also rather suspicious, as the house seems as though he had never existed – apart from the plans and the bathtubs in the cellar. None of these clues require verbal input, because the words which accompany the scenes often provide a seemingly rational explanation of the visual anomaly, which prevents the viewer from questioning or dwelling on the issue.

On the other hand, Marla too possesses an unearthly quality. She invades the narrator's imaginary space and defies death by walking through busy traffic (17:48-18:02). She appears determined to kill herself with cigarettes, drink and drugs if not in traffic, and, like Tyler, commits small crimes with routine and absent-mindedness which set her apart from conventional characters like the narrator (17:12). If visual clues suggested to a perceptive viewer that Tyler might be imaginary, that viewer would have to consider that Marla might be a hallucination as well, as she seems equally removed from the physical world as well as the mores of polite society. The impossibility of discounting any of these possibilities is likely to prevent any viewer from guessing the "true" version of events as the narrator later reveals them to have occurred.

Once again, *About Adam* is quite different to the other two texts. By providing a little new information with each version, the text implies that there is far more to know than is shown on screen, but does not imply what that might be. The main mystery of the text is Adam's true identity and background, which of course are never satisfactorily explained. The text may be *about* Adam, but it is round about Adam in a series of Chinese whispers, none of which agree. Each account the viewer receives of his background and acquisition of the Jaguar varies at least slightly (13:18, 24:50, 51:53, 01:00:58). Instead of withholding information, therefore, this text instead provides several different versions or possible truths so that the viewer cannot know which – if any – is the 'true' version.

Visual clues to Adam's identity function in much the same way. To avoid giving him identity through his style of dress, his costume would have to be anonymous without being too staid and dull. Instead, each account provides a slightly different view of Adam. In the scenes shared by multiple focalisers, he does indeed wear very orthodox clothing such as white or dark blue long-sleeved shirts and nondescript dark trousers. In scenes focalised by one character only, however, his costume varies dramatically. Lucy sees him in the rather conventional clothes that a young man might wear, while Alice sees him in a more sophisticated, older version of orthodox clothes: black T-shirts, suits and so on (01:00:28, 01:07:00, 01:09:36). The fact that he wears so much black in Alice's version suggests not only maturity and sophistication but also a devilish appearance. Laura's perception of Adam's costumes differ the most radically from other versions. To her, Adam appears either in a billowing white dress shirt reminiscent of period dramas or a beige corduroy suit twinned with horn-rimmed glasses and a cigarette (23:03, 28:58). Incidentally, Adam only smokes in Laura's version. David sees Adam mostly dressed in blue or black ultra-conventional clothing (49:13, 51:40, 52:48). It is impossible to say whether these changes in costume are a matter of the character's perception of Adam or whether the Adam actually dresses that way in order to appeal to the character he aims to seduce. Therefore, even the matter of what is reliable remains in question and 'the truth' is never revealed.

It seems, after an analysis of these vastly different texts, that the most important information to be withheld concerns the identity of a protagonist of an unreliably narrated text. One narrator is a crime lord, another mentally unstable, and the third appears to have no pressing reason to remain unidentified, yet all three texts avoid identifying the protagonist until the last possible moment – if at all. This peculiar characteristic will be further discussed in chapter 6 of this thesis.

5.3. Method of dispensing significant information

Significant information may be distributed throughout a text in the form of clues, but these scraps are only revealed to be clues once the plot twist reveals their significance. These are the disguised snippets of information to which Nayman refers and which are represented in point 5 of the list of techniques (“The Man Who Wasn’t There” 59).

Primarily, however, the dispensation of significant information is of particular interest when it concerns the greatest revelation in the text, in the plot twist. Thomas Koebner makes an excellent point when he observes how quickly liars prove themselves to be untruthful in unreliably narrated texts, in what is truly a short-lived deception (“Was stimmt den jetzt?” 21). It comes as no surprise that the plot twist frequently forms a central part of discussions about unreliably narrated texts, as they often include the most important piece of information and, consequently, require a re-evaluation of the entire plot. In some cases plot twists clear up the nebulous and incoherent plot, in other cases the plot twist only gives rise to more questions. Liptay & Wolf name *The Usual Suspects* and *Fight Club* as examples of texts in which the plot twist provides the final piece of the puzzle provided by clues hidden within the text, the solution of which allows a completely different reading than is possible upon the first viewing (“Einleitung” 15). *About Adam* does not include a classic plot twist as such, but certainly each twist renders the text more complex and raises more questions than it answers. For some scholars, however, plot twists are more a device to entertain the viewer than a solution to a puzzle. Following his analogy of unreliably narrated texts to a joke, Hölzer emphasises the importance of the plot twist in unreliable narration:

Eine besondere Gewichtung des Endes ist typisch oder sogar kennzeichnend für die narrative Gattung des Witzes, der ohne Pointe bzw. Verblüffung der Zuhörer am Ende des Erzählens nicht auskommen kann [...] Der Genuss des Witzerzählers und seines Zuhörers liegt [...] im Verstehen [...], in der stillschweigenden Übereinkunft der beiden Anwesenden über eine dritte Abwesende (“Falsche Fährte, fette Beute?” 74).

As Hölzer points out, however, *The Usual Suspects* does not exploit the opportunity to share a joke, as the punch-line is delivered at the very end of the text (74-75). With regard to texts which do not include the typical punchline or plot twist, Hölzer refers to Freud’s “Aufsitzer”, which provoke the listener to expect a joke and then only confuse and irritate them. The listener supposedly derives pleasure from the nonsense and can soothe their irritation by becoming the narrator of the nonsense story themselves (75). One might argue that *The Usual*

Suspects works this way, as there is no way of determining one ‘true’ version of the story based on the ‘nonsense’ that Kint apparently delivers.

Hölzer also repeatedly emphasizes the pleasure which viewers derive from watching sequences again, repeating the scenes in a different way and appreciating the stills (75-78). This pleasure in rectifying unreliable narration or dwelling on the confusing and nonsensical takes on new dimensions in texts such as *About Adam*, where scenes can be re-played up to three times from different angles, while no definitive version is provided. While this text repeats some scenes again and again, the other two decline to provide the viewer with a ‘corrected’ version of the text, requiring them to reconstruct it independently instead. In this way, the viewer cannot gain closure by the end of the text but instead takes the puzzle home with them, as they use the information given in the plot twist to decode the story shown previously.

The Usual Suspects certainly leaves the viewer hurriedly re-evaluating everything they have seen so far. In this text, the main plot twist is deferred by Kujan’s dramatic account of how Keaton could have engineered the assassination and faked his own death, coupled with Kint’s apparent breakdown. Kint’s confession is an interesting point in the narrative, as it lulls the viewer into a false sense of security and foreshadows the main plot twist. Kint effectively admits that the events for which he provided the voiceover – and which were shown on screen – actually happened quite differently. This is the first time that the events portrayed on screen are shown to have been fabricated. After this, Kujan’s later realisation of the extent of the fabrication is easier for the audience to comprehend, as the image of the objective camera has already been shattered. The solution is then effectively given by the duty officer listing Kint’s possessions before Kujan sits down to observe the pinboard behind the desk. A shot of his face, looking thunderstruck, cuts to a shot zooming in on the Quartet logo (01:39:29). He then looks up to scan the rest of the board, where shots roaming over the papers there are accompanied by scraps of verbal information from Kint’s interview, a few of which are clearly taken from the board. Only few, however, as a perusal of the papers shown in the close-up shots reveals that no details were taken from these which are not emphasised by the camera pausing and focusing on only one word. The slow-motion shot of Kujan’s cup falling and smashing, as well as the lack of sound, emphasise how momentous his realisation is (01:39:32). The film later resumes normal speed and Kujan rushes downstairs (01:40:44). Outside, the camera focuses on Kint’s limping feet in the same way it follows Söze’s in the opening sequence. They gradually take on a healthier stride and Kint stretches his previously cramped hand to light a cigarette before stepping out to the Jaguar in which ‘Kobayashi’ picks

him up (01:41:30-01:42:00). These last scenes contain no dialogue, but instead are accompanied by Kint's remarks to Kujan, which in hindsight are taunts: "The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing people he didn't exist" and "And like that – he's gone" (01:42:21-01:42:32). These are the last lines of the film, which leaves the viewer to consider how much of Kint's story they believe and just how he managed to conceal his identity.

In *Fight Club*, the twist is rather more protracted and is delivered quite some time before the end of the text. After Tyler's disappearance, the narrator attempts to trace Tyler's steps and discovers fight clubs in very varied locations. In one, he asks a member of Project Mayhem who he thinks the narrator is. After some hesitation, the man answers: "You're Mr. Durden. You're the one who gave me this [he holds up his acid burn scar]" (01:46:36). The momentousness of this statement, were it not surprising enough, is marked by a characteristic comment of the voiceover: "Please return your seatbacks to their full, upright and locked position", suggesting that he is about to touch down, metaphorically, to get his feet back on the ground (01:46:40). The next step in the twist is that the narrator returns to his hotel to call Marla to ask whether they have ever had sex. Angry, she confirms that they have, and for the first time, she uses his name – Tyler. To mark this step, the voiceover states "We have just lost cabin pressure" (01:47:30). Finally, the twist reaches a climax when Tyler suddenly appears in the room, berating the narrator for breaking his promise (01:47:43). The narrator is forced to say why people might believe that he is Tyler after images flash through his mind of scenes in which he plays the part which Tyler occupied previously (01:48:16-01:48:32). Tyler then explains that he is the narrator's ideal self. For the first time in the film's running time, the narrator is shown listening avidly to thin air in a wide shot of the room, though Tyler's disembodied voice continues over this shot and into a voiceover accompanying scenes in which the narrator beats himself up in the car park (01:49:09-01:49:16). Shots are then divided between close-ups of Tyler explaining while a horrified narrator listens open-mouthed and short sequences of flashback where the narrator speaks the lines which had been so characteristic of Tyler (01:49:22). The narrator then takes on the voice of reason – and presumably the voice of most viewers – arguing that Tyler has a house, jobs and a girlfriend. Tyler counters that the narrator has done all these things himself. When the narrator resists, they argue and the narrator appears to fall unconscious. Sound briefly echoes, then disappears and the voiceover comments: "It's called a changeover. The movie goes on, and nobody in the audience has any idea" (01:50:13). This is a quote from a previous scene in which the narrator comments on Tyler's job as a projectionist, but it also signals that something is happening behind the scenes that the viewer is completely unaware of. This clue is confirmed when the

narrator tries to check out and discovers how many phone calls he has made as Tyler (01:50:36). As of this point it is difficult to speak of plot twists as such, since the following twenty minutes of running time essentially consist of the narrator realising just how deeply he has infiltrated the system when men from waiters to police officers address him as “sir” and are adamant that they will carry out his plan. Each main twist, however, focuses on the narrator’s shell-shocked expression accompanied either by a comment in voiceover or the beginning of a piece of music.

Despite not withholding vital information, *About Adam* does provide a series of plot twists. The first is Adam’s affair with Laura, in a narrative which also provides the first scenes shown through multiple focalisers. The first of these scenes, when Adam and Laura first meet, is clearly truncated in Lucy’s version because she is not in the room when Adam and Lucy converse (21:03). The second bi-focalised scene is in the bookshop, where camera angles and the change of voiceover allow the focus of the scene as well as the flow of information to be altered (08:43-09:32, 26:23-27:44). A third type of bi-focalised scene shows that Lucy’s version also omits scenes which she accords little importance, such as the scene in which Lucy is blindfolded in the car while Adam and Lucy share a passionate embrace a few feet away (40:53). By withholding information in this rather subtle way, plot twists can also include David apparently being a closet homosexual, Adam apparently seducing Karen and Alice’s continued flirtation. David’s narrative shares few scenes with the other focalisers, but Alice’s in particular reveals plot twists such as Adam deliberately offering to babysit on a night he knows Lucy will be busy, in scenes which appear perfectly innocent the first time they are shown (14:48, 01:07:58). Another example is the fact that she receives Adam’s admiring phone call while she is shopping with Laura in a scene which they both focalise (31:40-33:49, 01:02:07-01:04:10). Revealing plot twists in bi- or multifocalised scenes increases the element of surprise for the viewer, since in conventional texts a scene is only shown once and contains all the information which it is meant to convey. Furthermore, the fact that instead of one main plot twist there are numerous smaller revelations suggests great duplicity on Adam’s part as well as hinting at the fact that, in the film and quite possibly in real life, there is always more to a scene than meets the eye.

This analysis has shown that the viewer may be misled until the very end of the film, and even persuaded to accept an alternative plot twist. Equally, as in *Fight Club*, they may be misled until a certain point in the film and then allowed to share in the dramatic irony of the narrator’s attempts to reconcile with Marla and rid himself of Tyler as he tries to reconstruct how the situation came about. Alternatively, a number of plot twists might be included in the

text, each of which cause the reader to re-evaluate the plot and the character of the protagonists. The three texts discussed here are certainly radically different in this respect, but it will be interesting to determine whether these use different techniques to mislead the viewer even though the distribution of information within the texts is so radically different.

6. Perspectivity

6.1. Narrator

When discussing the reliability of a text the narrator clearly represents a crucial element. This section will first focus on the character of the narrator, which will provide information concerning the techniques which might be used to mislead the viewer as discussed in chapter 3, in this case the appeal of the narrator. Secondly, the issue of identity will be addressed, as none of the protagonists appear to have any concrete identity. Finally, the subject of names and naming in the texts will be discussed, as names appear to be salient in unreliably narrated texts and are inextricably bound to identity.

Each narrator in these texts tells their story in a vastly different setting. *The Usual Suspects* uses an interrogation format to frame the events which occur in the narrative, lending a film noir-style voiceover as an introduction to each flashback sequence. The only voice which has any bearing on the events which unfold, therefore, is Verbal Kint's, an aspect which grants this narrator a great deal of influence – though not necessarily believability – over the narrative. Essentially *Fight Club* operates on the same principle of having the perpetrator of crimes as the narrator. In this case, however, the unnamed narrator has no acknowledged audience within the narrative and therefore apparently does not set out to mislead. The narration is only overt in the sense that the voiceover makes dry comments such as “I think this is about where we came in” and Tyler responds to the character's next comment with “Oh. Flashback humour”, which suggests that they are both aware of both the viewer's attention and the structure of the story in which they appear (02:04:27-02:04:41). In this film, the narrator seems to attempt to recreate events as he perceived them at the time. It might be argued, therefore, that it is a truly honest reconstruction of events, albeit from an extremely unbalanced point of view.

While the narration in *The Usual Suspects* eases the transition between present-day and flashback sequences, the film could function without Kint as the narrator. If the events were portrayed from a third-person omniscient point of view, credibility would be enhanced

and it is unlikely that Kint's account would be questioned as severely. Naturally, the text would lose much of its character if less attention were given to the taunting crime lord as the principal channel of information and the twist would have to be more contrived, but the plot is straightforward enough to be easily understood. *Fight Club*, however, could barely form a coherent text without constant input from the narrator. Indeed, the narrator is not only the main protagonist of the film, he is very nearly the only protagonist, as Marla, Bob and Jack's boss are the only other characters which play a significant role. The fact that he plays the roles of both the character-narrator and Tyler means that the narrator dominates the text utterly.

A subtle but significant point must be made here in order to retain clarity. As Anthrin Steinke quite rightly points out in her article "Filmische Irrwege und Unwahrheiten in David Fincher's *Fight Club*", the character commonly known as Jack who experiences the events of the film should properly be kept distinct from the character narrator who tells the story with hindsight (149). However, the narrator does share scenes with Tyler and no clear differentiation is made between this person and the figure of the character-narrator. The scene in the projection room is a case in point (31:06-32:46). While it is advisable to keep 'Jack' and the narrator separate, therefore, one must acknowledge the fact that this text blurs the borders of reality to the point of testing the narratological terms used to define its form and structure. What is more, and to test the extent to which Steinke's separation of the two figures holds, there is no concrete distinction between voiceover and narration, so that the narrator's and the character-narrator's voices are distinguishable only by context and the tenses they use.

About Adam differs considerably from the other two texts in that the narrator appears to be operating covertly. The natural-sounding, seemingly unmodified voiceover sounds like a spontaneous train of thought rather than a carefully crafted account like *Fight Club*'s narrator's. What is more, these four separate narrator-protagonists do not mislead the viewer, instead presenting a frank account of each situation as they perceived it. The only character who deliberately dissembles in this text is Adam. Following the pattern set by *The Usual Suspects* and *Fight Club*, the 'criminal' or divergent element – in this case Adam – should be the narrator in order to deflect suspicion from themselves and provide a plot twist at the end of the text. By using separate, 'innocent' (and reasonably reliable) narrators, Adam is very soon exposed as a cad and a liar, but this format allows for three distinct plot twists and a complex web of deceptions which is no less impressive for being demonstratively woven before the viewer's eyes. In a way this text is more an unravelling of a story in the sense that each layer is appreciated for itself, in stark contrast to Verbal Kint's desperate additions of personal anecdotes and sidelines to the main story. While Kint's prevarications are a tenuous

tissue of lies, the storylines revealed in *About Adam* are slowly uncovered and suggest that there is more to the text than even the four versions of events which are provided can show.

6.1.1. Character

The character of unreliable narrators appears to fascinate scholars of this text type, if the volume of secondary literature is any indication of interest. Although in the texts discussed here, the narrator appears to be responsible for the distortion of the narrative, Laass observes that “[...] as A. Nünning points out, the exclusive attribution of narrative unreliability to narrators liable to epistemological, physical and logical limitations is merely a literary convention, not a necessity” (27). Other scholars have also addressed this point; in „Die Unzuverlässigkeit der Unzuverlässigkeit: Zuverlässigkeit als Erzählziel” Andreas Solbach questions whether Verbal Kint is an unreliable narrator or whether in fact only the cinematic narrator/director is unreliable:

Es gibt, so scheint es, nichts Unzuverlässigeres als die Unzuverlässigkeit, denn dürfen wir einen Erzähler, der bewusst lügt, unzuverlässig nennen? Er ist im Fall der spezifischen Lüge ein Lügner, sein sonstiges Erzählverhalten kann dagegen von größter Zuverlässigkeit geprägt sein. Ist ein wahnsinniger Erzähler unzuverlässig? Wohl kaum, sein Wahnsinn hat Methode, er ist immer wahnsinnig [...] (70).

If one follows Solbach’s suggestion that characters can lie in their narration but still be considered reliable, then only fallibility could really be regarded as unreliability and deceptive unreliability would be disregarded. It must be said, however, that if someone consistently lies, they might be said to be completely reliable.

Nevertheless, it appears that the reason for a text’s unreliability frequently is the disposition of the narrator. As Chatman argues,

[the discrepancy between the narrator’s account and the implied meaning of the narrative on the whole] would seem to depend pretty much on personality: there has to be some reason for us to distrust the narrator’s account, and the only possible reason would be his character. Where there is no character – and hence no motive for giving a questionable account of the story – how can we even recognize that the account is unreliable?” (134-135).

The point is that we cannot, which suggests a compelling reason why narrators with little character and personality – or indeed identity – seem more trustworthy. It is interesting to

note that those character-narrators with a lot of character are soon shown not to be reliable in *About Adam*, which rather supports this point.

Gender also appears to play a great role in determining reader trust in the narrator. It is striking that in the three texts relevant to this thesis, two involve male narrators deliberately deceiving their perceived audiences while the third involves three women and a man displaying fallibility. Felicitas Meinhard states that characters who display rather feminine traits are often considered to be more fallible (*Conflicting Reports* 56). It follows that male narrators, as long as they inspire trust, are unlikely to be suspected of unreliability. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that the two texts which mislead the viewer the longest are the two narrated by men.

Bearing these theoretical positions in mind, this section will analyse the character of the narrators of the three texts. Points such as disposition, mental faculties, behaviour and, where relevant, appearance will be discussed. Particular emphasis will be laid on the appeal of the character, as this appears to influence the extent to which the reader trusts the narrator.

Verbal Kint is the character adopted by Keyser Söze in order to rally the gang of five criminals to allow him to assassinate the only man able to identify him. It is unclear whether this character is an alias and identity which Söze had been working under for some time or whether he borrowed another man's name and disability, but as Keaton acknowledges having worked with him before it seems that Kint is one of Söze's many disguises. Kint's main characteristic is that he talks too much, although he also appears to be adept at planning and keen to avoid physical confrontation. Keyser Söze, from the little which is known about him, appears to be the exact opposite of Verbal Kint; he is shown to have a waist-length mane in contrast to Kint's shorn hair and receding hairline, he is perfectly capable physically while Kint has been handicapped from birth, and Söze is pathologically bloodthirsty where Kint shies away from confrontation. No hint of the ruthlessness and violence of Keyser Söze is apparent in this meek, weak-bodied small-time con man. He does seem particularly averse to telling the truth from the very beginning of the text, however, which casts his account into some doubt. Kint's credibility as a reliable source is constantly questioned, most directly by Kujan who accuses him of lying and withholding the truth. However, Kint's reliability as a witness is more subtly cast into doubt by his evasive demeanour and decidedly weak appearance not only in body, but also in character. He is also found to be withholding important information half-way through the film when Baer informs Kujan about Keyser Söze's involvement in the boat raid (51:45). Thus, Kint is in no way presented as a reliable witness or narrator.

However, this is acceptable to viewers in the light of Kujan's explanation of events which places Keaton in the role of Söze. If Kint has been misled by Keaton and so told a skewed version of the story, then he was simply reporting events as he perceived them – thus Kint has been fooled but the viewer has not. The character of Kujan, who briefly adopts the role of narrator, serves to offset Kint's shifty evasions and to guide the audience through the criminal underworld. He has some knowledge of criminal procedure and is disinclined to believe Kint's statements, being more familiar with the system and thus functioning as the rather knowledgeable mouthpiece of the audience. Kujan's unravelling of the plot shows scenes from Kint's story to support Kujan's version, which both reinforces the idea that Kint's story is the true version of events and suggests that the narrator himself, Kint, has been duped (01:33:00-01:34:50). When Kujan realises that Kint has fooled him, however, the viewer must realize that they too have been fooled by Kint's partially fabricated version of events. Therefore neither the sometime narrator Kint nor the audience's skeptical guide Kujan is completely reliable, though the latter is merely fallible, not unreliable.

The employment of Verbal Kint as narrator of *The Usual Suspects* is the very crux of the film. Had any other character told the story, or had it not been narrated, it would be far simpler and free of details, since the real events of the film – at least all that is revealed to have happened – are the hijacking, the lineup, the Finest New York Taxi Company job, Kobayashi's engagement and the raid of the boat. Furthermore, any other character is unlikely to have withheld much information, so the story would be more straightforward. Most importantly, however, there would be no plot twist at the end of the film because it is the very fact that Söze mocks the police personally which is so surprising and shocking. The narration of crime stories by a narrator who is later revealed to be the criminal mastermind is not unusual. Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* has Dr. Sheppard meticulously reporting on his assistance in the case while omitting to mention his involvement concerning criminal matters.

Fight Club's narrator is equally unimposing physically and also appears to be very civilized, eschewing violence wherever possible. He too engages in small, mostly verbal acts of rebellion against his boss, as Kint does towards Kujan. The unnamed narrator is a risk analyst for a major car firm and spends his time alternately travelling around the U.S. suffering from jet lag and in his cubicle at the office. His spare time is devoted to building up the perfect wardrobe of branded clothes and buying furniture which is supposed to reflect his lifestyle choices. However, his life is entirely shallow, materialistic and utterly anonymous. In contrast, Tyler Durden's name is constantly repeated throughout the film until it is attached to

the narrator himself. Tyler refuses to acknowledge brands but dresses loudly and conspicuously at all times. He has outspoken political views and is far more physical than the narrator, initiating the fight outside Lou's Bar. One of his first actions on screen is to steal a sports car at the airport. He rejects material possessions, choosing to live in a dilapidated house on an abandoned block. All in all, he is the exact opposite of the narrator.

An aspect which facilitates the plot twist in *Fight Club* is the fact that the narrator appears to be completely sane. His voiceover details his thought processes which, while somewhat peculiar, are by no means the ramblings of a paranoid schizophrenic. Helbig lists the main points which show just how untrustworthy and unbalanced the narrator actually is: 1) he suffers from insomnia and suggests himself that he is not reliable 2) his participation in self-help groups shows that he is deceitful and immoral, and 3) his job suggests a "manipulative and cynical approach to the truth" ("Follow the White Rabbit" 137). I contest the validity of this final point as a deciding factor against his reliability, as his occupation requires an analytical detachment which might be said to allow him greater objectivity.

A great feat which this text achieves is to provide the reader with this information but to disguise it by having the narrator apparently reveal his innermost thoughts on the voiceover. Ironically, a great many clues reveal, on closer viewing, just how unbalanced the narrator has been throughout. His description of insomnia at the beginning of the film reveals to the viewer that he is never really awake and that "nothing is real" at about the same time as Tyler is momentarily spliced into the frame (03:45-04:02). Tyler's eccentricities such as his odd dress sense or his voluble practice with a samurai sword, not to mention his loud coupling with Marla, are in stark contrast to the narrator's restraint and sense of order. This contrast is visually enhanced by the camera focusing on his occupation in mundane tasks such as eating or brushing his teeth while Tyler is making an exhibition of himself (45:23-45:59, 53:29). He also shows 'normal' reactions to the threat of pain when Tyler starts to give him an acid burn and is horrified by the actions of Project Mayhem (01:00:06, 01:41:30). Only his acceptance of the pain inflicted by *Fight Club* and the social stigma attached to his injuries suggest that he has a world view different from the norm.

Despite these small anomalies, the narrator seems to view the world quite analytically. When he describes his addiction to Ikea catalogues, each item of furniture is labeled meticulously on screen, which suggests an almost pathological neatness and obsession with detail (04:53). His work as an analyst also suggests a calculating mind and a certain detachment from human affairs. Although the narrator appears to loathe the unscrupulous side of his occupation, namely the glossing over of serious mechanical flaws with fatal results, his

alter ego is later to show no scruples concerning human suffering or torture. The narrator's earlier distance is a clue to his later inhuman detachment as Tyler; he may be disturbed by certain elements of his work, but he does nothing to protest. The analytical, drily humorous narrator also recognizes and describes himself and his acquaintances as 'single-serving' people, who live their lives through neatly portion-packed goods (19:20). All in all, the narrator's sleeping disorder does not at first seem to cause him to view the world any differently to the next person. If anything, his serenity and detachment allow him to rise above mundane matters and so he seems unemotional and eminently sensible.

The narrator also appears to be scrupulously honest. His honesty seems to be driven by fearlessness rather than the suggested clandestine nature of his confession. He is clearly conscious of having an audience, as shown in his awareness of cuts to and from a flashback. He is obviously narrating the course of events in hindsight, but some scenes include comments which appear unmeditated, such as "It must have been Tuesday. He's wearing his cornflower-blue tie" (04:18). This frankness and openness suggests credibility. There are, however, some aspects of the narrator's consciousness which remain unnarrated, possibly because he was unaware of them at the time – which begs the question why they were not included in this narration-with-hindsight. Possibly the narrator is lying to himself. The most salient of these self-deceptions is his attraction to Marla. The narrator only ever admits to feeling irritated by her and seems to feel no concern for her when she claims to be committing suicide (46:16-46:38). His strong reaction to her presence at his therapy groups and his bitterness when he believes that she and Tyler are having an affair suggest that he is initially attracted to her physically and later develops affection for her. Despite his desperate attempts to reconcile with her after he discovers his schizophrenia, he never confesses to feeling anything for her.

This omission, however, is the only proof that the narrator does not honestly relate what he was thinking and feeling at the time. Occasionally the very slew of details with which he bombards the viewer, such as the names of his furniture or the composition of nitroglycerine suggests that everything that passes through his mind is related to the viewer. For someone who appears to have little identity, he also relates his feelings on certain subjects in great detail. Finally, up to the point of the plot twist the narrator also appears to be scrupulously honest concerning the law. It seems unlikely that it would have occurred to him to throw a punch at Tyler, let alone squat in a disused house or steal fat from a liposuction clinic. The only point at which he seems to embrace this life of crime is when Tyler is selling the finished product and the narrator remarks "It was beautiful. We were selling rich

American women their own fat asses back to them” (01:02:01). When he sees Project Mayhem’s handiwork, however, and realises his part in the operation, he does everything in his power to turn himself in. The honesty of this protagonist and narrator serves the double function of making the character appealing and easy to identify with as well as allowing him to display a common world view and therefore gain credibility, which in turn enhances the plot twist. It also makes it seem unlikely that he has anything at all in common with Tyler, least of all a body and psyche.

One advantage, if it may be identified as such, that *Fight Club* enjoys over the other two texts discussed here is the fact that the narrator practically dominates the text. The viewer is unaware of the fact that Tyler and the narrator are the same person, so Tyler’s version of events would not differ greatly, but Tyler’s point of view is hardly ever adopted anyway. Because the narrator is so dominant and other characters are not permitted to contradict his version of events, the narrative remains apparently trustworthy. Points 7 to 9 on the list of reasons to trust a text are fulfilled simply by dedicating screen time almost exclusively to the protagonist of the text:

- 7) Subjective accounts appear to tally with seemingly impersonally focalized sequences (Ferenz)
- 8) Unreliable accounts are accorded a lot of screen time, which causes the viewer to empathise more with the narrator (Ferenz, Griem).
- 9) The narrator is more appealing than any other figure offering their account of events (Ferenz)

By not including any other accounts and accompanying the narrator in his quotidian life, the text allows the viewer to form a bond of trust with the narrator simply by not giving them a chance to bond with any other character. Tyler is consistently seen from without and can hardly be described as an appealing character. Above all, the narrator exudes normality, especially in the face of Tyler and Marla’s eccentricities.

About Adam has a vastly different plot structure to the other texts and so allows for a distinct style of narration. The text is split into four sections, each narrated by member of the Owens family. Each narrator tells roughly the same sequence of events from their point of view and with themselves as the protagonist. The character of each narrator is of vital importance in *About Adam*. It is their character traits, along with their aims and ambitions, which Adam exploits in order to charm them. From a narratological point of view, however, these traits and biases also explain many of the contradictions in their perception of certain situations and of Adam himself. Concerning the appeal of the text to a wider audience, the

differences between narrating characters is also vital in order to retain the audience's attention, as none of the accounts presented should be too similar. The first character-narrator is Lucy, a twenty-something waitress and aspiring singer, who meets a friendly but seemingly shy Adam and exchanges numbers with him. Lucy, the youngest daughter, is open, bubbly and confident but seemingly quite self-centred. The second character-narrator is Laura, the middle sister, a bookish, intense student of literature. Her narrative begins when she meets Adam at the Owens' family home when he picks Lucy up (20:26). Laura's ambition in life is to experience mad, unbridled passion with a romantic hero like the protagonists of classic literature. Her narrative leads over to David's. David is the youngest child and the only boy, and therefore yearns for some masculine companionship and guidance after a lifetime surrounded by women. His main ambition is to attain some of Adam's confidence and poise, but above all to convince his girlfriend to sleep with him. His narrative is the shortest, beginning shortly before the proposal and ending with the cementing of his relationship with girlfriend Karen (47:00-59:10). He, like Lucy, is remarkably self-centred and unobservant. The last character-narrator is eldest daughter, Alice, who has an infant daughter from an apparently failing marriage. Her unhappiness appears to have made her somewhat bitter, but she is astute enough to guess at the situation between Adam and Laura, which others fail to see. Her main interest seems at first to be to bolster her confidence, then to start an affair in order to gain revenge on her dull husband. Unlike her siblings' narratives, her account does not appear to be significantly biased by these aims, however; hers is the shrewdest, most comprehensive and, perhaps more importantly, the most realistic view of events.

It seems, therefore, that in unnaturally or unreliably narrated texts a crucial balance must be found when portraying the character of the narrator. On the one hand some indication of character traits which are connected with unreliability must be given to justify the unreliable narration of at least certain parts of the text. These explain to some extent why the narrator is influenced or motivated to conceal the truth. On the other hand, in order to provide an effective plot twist the narrator-protagonist should be able to present a coherent and plausible narrative. In the two more conventional texts discussed in this thesis, the reasons for the narrator's unreliability are given from the beginning of the text, but the full extent of these potentially skewing characteristics are downplayed dramatically. In *The Usual Suspects*, Kint lies because he is a criminal, but while the dialogue shows that he is known as a conman and a fraud, the reason that he lies to such a dramatic extent – and so effectively – is that he is actually a famous crime lord. In *Fight Club*, the narrator admits from the beginning that he suffers from insomnia and feels dazed, as though he were never fully conscious. The true

extent of his disorder is not revealed until the end of the text, and the honesty and sensible attitude of the focalized side of his character presents a fairly lucid account which viewers are inclined to trust. In these texts, therefore, both narrators are known to exhibit traits which are likely to cause them to mis- or underreport, -interpret and evaluate, but the real extent of these traits is not revealed to the viewer until the main plot twist is effected.

It is also noteworthy that both these characters display characteristics which are likely to dissociate them from their alter egos, notably humility, physical weakness and openness. *About Adam*, in contrast, appears keen to point out the character traits in narrators which are likely to impair their judgement. While it is true that these narrator-protagonists are not knowingly deceiving an audience, unlike the narrators in the other two texts, they are still the focalised characters which relay the narrative to the viewer and are therefore the vehicle of information. In this text, focalisers such as Laura appear to be something of a joke, as her over-dramatic perception and interpretation of events exploits the narrative distance to the reader and exposes her romantic notions to ridicule. An explanation of this direct targeting of the main information carriers may be that the aim of the film is partly to draw viewers' attention to the various ways of interpreting the same event depending on the character and disposition of the focaliser/narrator. In many ways, *About Adam* seems to be a sophisticated demonstration of applied narratology, with its timeline-defying multi-singulative and repetitive episodes of polyperspectively focalised intrigues. The implication that none of the narrator-protagonists is truly reliable in all the details and that the viewer will never know how Adam really got his Jaguar is barely surprising after the complex multiple storylines have been mastered.

6.1.2. Identity

As has been mentioned several times, identity appears to be a key issue in unreliable narratives. In *Wer bin ich? Personale Identität im Film. Eine philosophische Betrachtung von Face/Off, Memento und Fight Club*, Alina Singer is able to dedicate twenty pages of earnest discussion to the issue of *Fight Club*'s narrator's fragmented identity, essentially in attempt to determine who the narrator and Tyler are and *when* the narrator adopts which personality (Singer *Wer bin ich?*). It appears that a lack of definite identity is one of the main characteristics of an unreliable narrator. If keeping the viewer largely in the dark concerning the veracity of the events portrayed in the text is the main goal of sustaining belief in false trails, then it certainly makes sense to begin by providing very little information about the

protagonist. The less information is available, the harder it will be to disprove the account which the narration provides. This tendency has not gone unremarked in research on unreliable narration. Sandra Poppe observes that protagonists of this type of narrative “haben meist eine massive Persönlichkeitsstörung, die vor allem ihre Selbst- und damit auch ihre Fremdwahrnehmung verzerrt” (74). Poppe thus suggests that the narrator’s lack of a stable personality causes them to misperceive events, not necessarily to misreport them; were this the case, a personality disorder would only allow for fallibility, not unreliability.

Eva Laass focuses more on the theme of unbalanced personalities and the form of unreliably narrated texts. She briefly alludes to an “identity crisis” of the protagonists of unreliable narratives, which is a most suitable term considering that many of these texts pose epistemological questions. Laass also points out that the protagonists of unreliable narratives often suffer from identity loss or dissociative identity disorder, suggesting that “the staging of the protagonist’s fragmented identity and the phenomenon of factually unreliable narration are closely intertwined” (50). It is certainly true that the fragmented, confused personalities of the protagonists often appear to be reflected in the anachronistic, often apparently chaotic form of the narrative. However, I posit that the lack of a concrete identity in the protagonists of unreliable narratives owes more to practicality than genuine confusion of personality.

Verbal Kint is shown as a fairly nondescript, mild-mannered man whose chief identifier is his physical disability. Little is known about Kint except that he has been convicted of confidence trickery and that he has worked with Keaton in the past (14:30-14:55). *The Usual Suspects*’ plot twist reveals that he is in fact Keyser Söze, but before the reveal Kint’s character appears to be perfectly well rounded. In fact, his nervous prattling appears to cause him to reveal minute details and recollections from his past, such as his part in a quartet or bean-picking in Guatemala. Ironically, it is later revealed that Söze was supplying these details to round the character out and make him appear more credible in the same way as a screenwriter would. Therefore this aspect of Kint’s ‘character’ serves almost as an ironic comment on the nature of screenwriting – or indeed, the construction of fictional characters altogether.

This view becomes particularly pertinent when one considers that the character of Söze himself was inspired by a true story and that the title of the film was taken from a newspaper column (IMDB trivia, *The Usual Suspects*, entry 17). Fact and fiction merge happily in this text to the extent that the boundaries between the two become blurred. The identity of Verbal Kint – while the façade which Söze maintains towards the police is amusing – is almost a moot point, as he only exists in the frailest terms. Equally, little is

known about Söze except that he is shrouded in mystery and appears to have agents everywhere, so that he becomes omnipresent and elusive at the same time. His air of omnipresence is enhanced by the fact that he is later revealed to have been playing the part of the sole informant Kint *and* the criminal against whom he is supposed to be testifying, to the extent that he dominates the text in much the same way that *Fight Club*'s narrator does.

Although *Fight Club*'s narrator is likeable due to his apparent perceptiveness, caustic humour and curious vulnerability, his lack of character or identity forms a crucial part of the narrative construct. The narrator is the ultimate working Joe. His features are nondescript and unmemorable. He never reveals his name. He wears an unremarkable suit which only identifies him as one of the faceless thousands of white-collar workers. He appears to have no identity to speak of and struggles to form an identity through material goods. The wry comment "I'd flip through catalogues and wonder what kind of dining set defines me as a person" speaks volumes (05:04). This lack of identity serves a triple function in this text: First, it serves as a textbook example of Tyler's criticism of brand-obsessed materialists. 'Tyler' as he first appears in Lou's bar, is clearly a manifestation of the narrator's growing awareness of the fatuousness of his obsession with branded goods. Secondly, the narrator's lack of identity provides the perfect blank slate for a stronger character to be superimposed upon. Towards the end of the film, Tyler threatens to take over the narrator's life. This is only possible because the narrator has no close friends or ties to the outside world. The few tenuous identity markers which he had have been erased – he has stopped working, Bob is dead and Marla, who was never supposed to become aware of Tyler, refuses to acknowledge his existence. Finally, the narrator cannot be pinned down as a rounded character with a full set of defining characteristics.

He is, however, truly omnipresent in the sense that there are very few scenes in which he is not involved; most scenes involving dialogue are filtered through his perception and his narration is so constant that he becomes the voice in the head of the viewer. This omnipresence is amplified if the text is viewed in the knowledge that the narrator embodies both of the central characters. The fact that the narrator is omnipresent does not necessarily make him appear more credible, but it does allow him to dominate the text fully and in a range of different characters. This may lead viewers to question the nature of the text and storytelling in general. This text is finally revealed to have been the workings of a seriously unbalanced mind, as perceived by one single person. Other texts, however, are often similarly the product of one mind – that of the author – and equally rely on subjective perception. Therefore, the seemingly average narrator of this text may be seen as a comment on the

uncritical and indiscriminate acceptance of one version of events from the point of view of a ‘normal’ narrator.

Again, *About Adam* is vastly different to the other texts. These narrators have a definite, fixed identity. It is particularly interesting to note the setting of the film, especially in the contrast to the other texts discussed in this thesis. *About Adam* is very obviously set in Dublin, which is a conscious accession of identity. This may seem a minor detail concerning identity, but the other two texts are far more anonymous. Part of Verbal Kint’s identification is a big city, as he is referred to as “the cripple from New York” – though ironically he is neither a cripple nor from New York. The events of *The Usual Suspects* take place in New York, Los Angeles and San Pedro, but the restriction to anonymous spaces such as police stations, offices and parking garages in these big cities renders the identification value quite low. *Fight Club* never clarifies where it is set, though in online forums fans speculate that it may be Wilmington in Delaware, while to an outsider the street layout and the sheer size of some buildings suggest a larger city like New York. Either way, some care seems to have been taken not to give the city either a name or any identifying features, to the extent that fans are forced to freeze-frame shots in order to speculate on the significance of fictional zip codes (*Chuckpalahniuk.net*, “So I live where *Fight Club* is set?”).

In *About Adam* it is almost immediately clear that the setting is Dublin, as Laura refers to Temple Bar in the opening scene (01:22). Many of the events in the film take place in the snug, untidy family home in the suburbs. In contrast, *The Usual Suspects* only shows the Suspects in their natural setting once, when they are first arrested. The only ‘home’ scene for them is the discussion of the New York Finest Taxi Service job, which takes place in Hockney’s garage. The other scenes are on the streets or docks, in L.A. or in foreign offices, prisons and garages. *Fight Club* presents a far more complex relationship between setting and identity. The narrator’s apartment represents his idealized identity, as it has been carefully selected to make a statement about his consumerist and lifestyle choices. It is also neat, practical and orderly, but completely anonymous. The derelict house into which he subsequently moves is no better, as it has retained shreds of another person’s identity and he fails to stamp his own personality – such as it is – on the house apart from moving in equipment, materials and a working television. He even goes so far as to absorb some of the previous inhabitant’s character or mentality, as he takes to referring to himself as “Jack’s cold sweat” and “Jack’s smirking revenge” after reading some essays he finds stacked in the house. His adoption of the identity of another person’s physiognomic reactions to a situation illustrates the narrator’s effacement of his own identity.

About Adam's narrators have identity beyond a definite geographical setting, however. First and foremost, they have full names. Secondly, not only do they know each other, they are siblings. They also have a mother, boyfriends, girlfriends and other friends, so their identity is established and confirmed beyond doubt – they are definitely who they say they are and therefore more likely to be trustworthy narrators. Again, is it the deviant element in the film, Adam, about whom little or nothing is known. His accent suggests that he is from the same area and he is shown to have a job in the city centre. Suspiciously, however, he appears to have no friends or acquaintances, as none are seen or mentioned and he asks David to be his best man. He tells a number of stories concerning his family. In one version his father left home and has been missing ever since, in another his entire family was killed in a car crash. In short, he is unwilling or unable to provide relatives as proof of identity. Incidentally, his flat is as modern, bland and anonymous as *Fight Club's* narrator's, but without even distinctive modern furniture to lend character. Frankly, very little can be said definitely about Adam except that he is a smart, confident people-pleaser and a consummate actor. His main identifier is his blue Jaguar; apart from that he seems to have no identity at all.

It seems, therefore, that these three texts rely on a lack of identity in the protagonist in order to allow for unreliability. All three texts allow the unidentifiable protagonist great presence in the story, however, whether he is simultaneously playing a pawn and pulling strings, playing the two main protagonists at once or representing himself differently to different characters. Although many texts may echo the uncertain personality of the protagonist in providing an unreliable account, these texts simply refuse to provide their protagonists with identities even if the unreliable narrator is completely lucid. This rejection of identity even extends to the setting of the texts. The unreliable character is unwilling to commit himself to a particular geographical region, as if unreliable narration took place in some sort of literary twilight zone.

6.1.3. Naming

Names and identity are of course closely related, but such is the salience of names and naming in these texts that the subject deserves its own subchapter. Certainly nomenclature seems to occupy a special place in unreliable and unnatural narration, if only because the protection of identity is essential in keeping secrets from the viewer. Each of the texts discussed in this thesis protects its divergent elements from being too closely identified, but the desire for secrecy appears to extend beyond these subjects to other characters and even places. This

elusiveness and lack of identification suggests that the events portrayed in these texts occur in a world apart from reality rather than any definite society or geographical location.

In *The Usual Suspects*, Söze taunts the police with his unnoticed presence in their offices. In a similar fashion, the director teases the viewer by placing his name in a prominent position for much of the film. ‘Verbal Kint’ is repeated several times throughout the film, seldom with his given name, Roger, before it. Kint’s explanation of his nickname is that “people say I talk too much” (14:42). Apparently “söze” is Turkish for “loquacious”, while “Kint”, with a certain stretch of the imagination, sounds like “king” and therefore can be associated with “Caesar/Keyser”. While it is not the most glaringly obvious of pseudonyms, the screenwriter, Christopher McQuarrie clearly gave the name some thought. As Söze conceals himself from the law, so the real crime lord hides from the viewer – in plain sight. Other names in this film sound equally fabricated and fantastical. New York’s Finest Taxi Service is an elaborate and complex name for a criminal organization that would not sound out of place in a Batman comic.

The names of the criminals themselves seem equally contrived. “Keaton” seems a particularly uninspired name for the only Irishman in the film, while naming a character “Fenster” may cause viewers to wonder whether the screenwriter sought inspiration while looking around his office. In fact it appears that he did, since the criminals are apparently named for McQuarrie’s former coworkers (IMDB trivia, *The Usual Suspects*, entry 18). Nevertheless, the allocation of names is nothing short of stereotypical as the truly psychotic and short-tempered character is given the Scottish-sounding name of McManus. These choices make Kint’s choice of “Redfoot” as a fence sound less ridiculous than it might otherwise have done. It is interesting to note that of the discernable details in the office which Kujan later scans, only a few words seem to have inspired any part of the story and two of these, Redfoot and Kobayashi, are names. The only other three discernable details are the quartet in Oklahoma, the fat lady and the poster advertising Guatemalan coffee beans. It seems, therefore, that while names are considered very important – especially for the police – the criminals in this text take them very lightly indeed and shed them when necessary.

Fight Club has a similarly ambiguous approach to names and naming. The text is crammed with names from the beginning. The narrator insists on naming the model of each item of furniture he discusses with its full and official label (05:04). Brands are highlighted particularly in this film, as apart from the narrator’s Ikea fixation Tyler talks about Armani suits and they later ridicule a Gucci poster (43:20). The narrator names all the places and airports at which he wakes up but declines to say where he lives (18:32). He discusses brands

but refuses to reveal the name of the company for which he works. He dwells on the names of Marla Singer and Tyler Durden and often refers to them by their full names but avoids the issue of his own name. Even the police officer who discusses the destruction of his apartment has a name, but the protagonist is never granted one. The name with which he is most commonly associated, Jack, is of course a very common name and a nickname for the even more ubiquitous John. Interestingly, the narrator adopts many names through his therapy groups, mostly rather unusual ones such as Cornelius and Rupert, again suggesting that names are regarded as a joke, an identity to be assumed and cast off as required. In contrast, open, emotional Bob's name is repeated often in the short scenes in which he appears, such as in the opening therapy scene: "Bob. Bob had bitch-tits"(03:03). This is the first sentence of the flashback, incidentally, straight after "And suddenly I realized that all this, the gun, the bombs, the revolution – has got something to do with a girl named Marla Singer" (02:56). The narrator's different choice of name for each group appears especially odd in view of the fact that Marla, who is equally unentitled to be there, always uses her real name.

Names are of course given particular prominence in these therapy groups, as each participant wears a cheery sticker saying "Hello, I'm [insert given name]" and the group leaders try to use these names as often as possible. Therefore, the refusal to use names may be an attempt to retain a certain distance to the narrator and not to ascribe an identity to him based solely on his name. The aspect of distance is certainly a striking one, as the detachment of the nameless narrator contrasts neatly with the sobbing, earnest emotion of other named participants. It is worth noting that the names of participants in the therapy groups are very conventional – Thomas, John, Bob and so on. Marla is certainly the most unusual name given. Names take on a particular significance later in the film as the thugs of Project Mayhem protest that no names are allowed, until the narrator insists that at least a dead man's name may – or even must – be spoken (01:42:55). His reason for doing so is clearly to confirm that Bob was not merely a faceless anarchist but that he had a life and an identity. After this scene the chant "his name was Robert Paulson" spreads to all the other fight clubs and becomes like a death knell for the narrator. In this text, therefore, it seems that names are linked to death and despair, as a Project Mayhem member is only granted this level of identity after death.

The other full name which is often repeated is Tyler Durden. Although the narrator often refers to him simply as Tyler, his surname is repeated often enough to spring readily to mind, especially as the narrator paves the way early on by stating "People are always asking me if I know Tyler Durden" (01:59). The choice of name is an interesting one; Tyler is presumably chosen to grace the narrator's ideal self because it was – and perhaps still is –

considered a fashionable name (presumably it was less common in the late nineties). It is certainly an unusual enough name to contrast considerably with the old-fashioned middle-class choices of the narrator's such as Cornelius and Rupert. Durden, meanwhile, is a very unusual surname – not to say unlikely, as it tends to devolve into an incoherent jumble of consonants when said repeatedly. Though not a particularly fashionable, striking or even appealing surname, it is unusual enough to be memorable. While the narrator has no name at all, his alter ego has one to make him fashionable and one to make him memorable.

However, the strange distribution of names in *Fight Club* is not restricted to the characters. As previously stated, the narrator is happy to relate the destinations of his travels but never specifies which city hosts the events of the text. The one clue to the city lies in his new address, the fictitious Paper Street. Like Fenster, Paper Street sounds like an unlikely and hastily fabricated name with no substance to it, especially in view of the fact that streets in America are frequently named after prominent people. The choice of name may be interpreted in several ways. It could be a genuine name if the factories surrounding the house once produced paper. It could be a name substituted by the narrator as a joke to signify that this street is only his address “on paper”, as it would be for tax purposes. It could simply be a pun suggesting that the street is made of paper, as the story which he is telling resembles a house of cards. Whichever it is, this bland naming raises suspicion about the veracity of his account, even bearing in mind his joke about Project Mayhem as the Paper Street Sub-company (01:41:16). Even the title of the film itself is provocative, however; if the first two rules of *Fight Club* are that you don't talk about it, naming the film ‘*Fight Club*’ is clearly an act of rebellion very much in keeping with the spirit of the text.

Names in *About Adam* seem to be of rather less significance but underscore the link between names and identity. The names of the sisters, Lucy, Laura and Alice are common enough and similar enough to be easily mixed up, but this appears to have little bearing as their characters are radically different. What is more, it is not unusual for parents to give their children similar names. The names of the other characters, David, Peggy, Karen and Simon, are equally common and unremarkable. Once again, it is Adam who stands out. When Lucy asks him his name outside the restaurant, he stares at her blankly, mouthing, until she prompts him further and he blurts out “It's Adam” (05:18). Not only does he take some time to remember his name, he also seems almost unwilling to identify himself with it as he states that “it's Adam” instead of the more natural “I'm Adam”. His hesitation might lead one to conclude that he chooses this name for himself on the spur of the moment, taking the name of not just any man, but literally the first man that springs to mind. This choice of name, though

slightly unusual and therefore in danger of lending him some identity of his own, is oddly suited to this character and his actions. Under the name of the first man, Adam represents four completely different men to four different people, so that he is at the same time the one and the many. Of course, no mention is ever made of a surname to accompany his given name.

It seems, therefore, that the names of characters, especially those of protagonists, are particular targets in texts which employ unreliable narration. In cases where the narrator misleads the viewer, this may be to protect the identity of the narrator until the time of the plot twist. In *About Adam*, Adam's name appears to be both symbolic and a clandestine joke at the same time. Certainly, names are closely bound to identity and since identity is often a key issue in unreliably narrated texts, names will always be adapted and adopted according to the extent to which the character is to be identified. A common strategy when concealing a character's identity, as in *The Usual Suspects* and *Fight Club*, seems to be to bombard the viewer with as many complicated names and insignificant details as possible in order to prevent them from questioning the fact that are laid before them – which incidentally is the same method Kint uses to distract Kujan.

The technique of overloading the viewer with information may not be particular to unreliable or complex narrations, but it does appear to feature in these texts to some extent. Steinke observes the anachronism and frequent changes in temporality in *Fight Club*, then discusses the sequence in which Tyler burns Jack's hand. She points out that no fewer than nine brief sequences or impressions are shown on screen to illustrate Jack's agitation, including burning vegetation, dictionary definitions and the ice cave (151). This text's frequent analepses and apparently imagined sequences, claims Steinke, contribute to the film's "Unübersichtlichkeit", its confusion or lack of clarity. Although Steinke emphasises that this *Unübersichtlichkeit* is not to be confused with unreliability, she does also suggest that the two are related to some extent, presumably in that a confused mind is unlikely to provide a reliable account (Steinke 151). Steinke goes on to explain that further confusion is caused by the character narrator acting as pseudo-diegetic narrator and sharing a voice-over with the character Jack, combined with Jack's mental imbalance and the speed of events (152). This observation suggests that it is not only the amount of information, both visual and verbal, which may cause confusion in the narrative, but also the fact that information is supplied by various sources, some of which may be supposed to be more reliable than others.

6.2. Voiceover

Regarding the soundtrack, it is interesting to note that all three films do employ a voiceover, which is, after all, not such a common filmic device. Its employment suggests, therefore, that voiceovers are in some way conducive to presenting an unreliably narrated text. In *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-over narration in American Fiction Film*, Sarah Kozloff observes that “[voiceover narration] can greatly affect the viewer’s experience of the text by ‘naturalizing’ the source of the narrative, by increasing identification with the characters, by prompting nostalgia, and by stressing the individuality and subjectivity of perception and storytelling” (41). It appears that the voiceover plays a large part in drawing viewers in to the narrator’s point of view and therefore presumably preventing them from questioning his or her reliability. On the other hand, the voiceover itself suggests subjectivity and therefore unreliability by its very nature. The balance may be found in the way that voiceover is employed in each text, both in its frequency and its nature. Laass includes a short chapter on voiceover in her classification of unreliably narrated films, in which she comments that

[s]ince in filmic narratives, the bulk of information on the fictional facts is provided on the level of implicit narrative communication, [she] would argue that explicit voice-over narrators fulfil primarily rhetorical functions. Purely narrative voice-over commentary would be perceived as redundant after its introductory function has been completed, and it therefore normally falls silent shortly after the implicit narration process has taken over” (53).

This is certainly true of *The Usual Suspects*, where the voiceover serves as a subjective introduction to the flashbacks before fading away until the action returns to the police station. I contend that *Fight Club* requires its ubiquitous voiceover in order to make the plot comprehensible, not least because there is comparatively little dialogue in the film. *About Adam*’s intermittent voiceovers are purely rhetorical; the plot would be quite complete without them, as they merely add dramatic irony when the character-narrators contradict one another. It seems, therefore, that the voiceovers in these films fulfil different functions, though each voiceover contributes to the presentation of the unreliably narrated text in a different way. This chapter will discuss the extent to which a voiceover is included, as well as the nature of the voiceover and its reliability as opposed to its apparent trustworthiness.

In *The Usual Suspects*, Kint’s voiceover only begins when he is compelled to recount past events. Intriguingly, his voiceover is merely a continuation of his interview with Kujan. A lot of the information he reveals is in fact shown as part of the interview. It is only when he

is allowed to relate an episode of his story that the screen shows the events as he narrates them. Although the voiceover which at first accompanies these scenes is ostensibly part of his interview, interruptions and interjections which one might reasonably assume Kujan to make are not included. Dieterle points out the importance of the distinction between voiceover and voice off, as they are located on different levels of narrative mediation and the voiceover is clearly focalized (160). Films such as *The Usual Suspects* and *Fight Club* fail to distinguish clearly between the two, which contributes to the general confusion of an already complex plot. Poppe observes that viewers are often misled by unreliably narrated texts because they are presented with what they believe to be an objective account, which is later revealed to have been deeply subjective (70-71). Failing to distinguish between action-level and the level of fictional mediation is certainly conducive to misleading viewers.

Kint's voiceover is necessarily self-conscious because it is so frequently interrupted as the scene is shifted back to the present and Kint has to speak for himself. This constant shift to and fro allows ambiguity in distinguishing between voice off and voiceover, however, which perhaps compensates for its self-awareness. Perhaps this self-consciousness is the reason for its listless tone, not unknown from film noir in which the hero narrates his story with hindsight. Ferenz notes that unreliable pseudo-diegetic narrators were and are particularly popular in film noir, as is the cynical voiceover (Ferenz 67). Singer may have had Spacey consciously adopt this tone in order to emulate film noir and thus emphasise the fictitiousness of the story being told. However, unlike film noir, Kint's voiceover lasts only as long as the framing device of the interview. Once he leaves the office the voiceover too ends (01:37:41). Although the voiceover of the now-triumphant Keyser Söze might explain his motivation for wasting his time in a police station, it certainly emphasises the impression of anonymity and ineffable inscrutability to have him escape smoothly and silently.

Fight Club's voiceover accompanies the text from the very beginning to the final scene of confrontation between Tyler and Jack. It begins with the sentence "When you've got a gun between your teeth, you can only speak in vowels", giving the narrator a voice when he is unable to speak. Throughout the film it comments on what he is thinking and feeling with dry humour, avoiding the sepulchral tones of film noir. It is seldom absent for long enough to surprise the viewer by its reappearance. In fact, it aids the viewer's understanding of the text considerably by asking rhetorical questions such as "Have I been going to bed earlier every night? Have I been sleeping later? Have I been Tyler longer and longer?" The voiceover is so consistently present that when it abruptly ceases the silence it leaves is astonishing, especially in the scene in which Jack shoots himself. Ironically, the voiceover – the voice in the

madman's head – is perfectly lucid and coherent even when the narrator's actions are not easily explicable. This is easily explained by the fact that the narration takes place retrospectively, after Tyler has been exorcised, but the sudden absence of the voice in the narrator's head accompanying his awareness of Tyler as his other self is most effective in causing the viewer to empathise with the narrator as a tortured soul.

In *About Adam* the voiceovers are also consistently, though intermittently, present. Lucy's voiceover begins even before she has finished speaking – or rather singing (02:32). The other two texts' voiceovers do not speak over another character except in the case of Jack's boss, whom he tunes out dazedly. Lucy, in contrast, begins to speculate on prospective boyfriend material while she sings in the first focalized scene of the text. Similarly, Alice's last voiceover ends before the last focalized scene of the text. These voiceovers, however, are far more spontaneous and sporadic than the other two texts, which after all partly narrate or comment on flashbacks. *About Adam* does this only once, in a scene where Lucy tells her hairdresser about her weekend away (17:17-18:20). Like Kint's voiceover, this is an extension of an interview with the interruptions removed. For the most part, however, the voiceovers in *About Adam* add information about the character's thoughts without containing information vital to the understanding of the film or the characters' actions.

6.2.1. Nature of the voiceover

Kint's voiceover is clearly overt, as he is aware of his audience and is tailoring his account to suit his listeners. Despite this awareness, he does not address remarks directly to his listeners. This lack of connection to the audience gives the impression that he is soliloquising and therefore more likely to tell the truth. However, every word he says is clearly still heard and recorded by the police and he remains steadfastly in character. His story is told resolutely from the limited point of view of Verbal Kint, the cripple from New York, and so he frequently claims not to know certain facts or omit to mention important details. Armed with the knowledge of his true identity, it is understandable to the viewer that he would be unwilling to mention that Keyser Söze was in any way involved. On the other hand, it seems likely that his sole motivation for remaining in the station at all is to expand on his legend as a crime lord, even at the expense of ruining a perfectly good false identity. Regardless of his true identity, the voiceover concentrates on relating as little of true events as possible in the meek and rather petulant tones of Verbal Kint. Frankly, the voiceover in this text is distinctly lacking in character compared to the other two texts discussed here. Regarding temporality,

Kint's voiceover recounts past events, though he clearly does so with the benefit of hindsight. However, the voiceover is reserved only for telling stories to the police and is not used to reveal Kint's thoughts and feelings to the audience.

Fight Club's voiceover is equally overt. Despite not having an audience within the text, it asserts itself as a confident narration fully aware of its unspecified audience and its place on screen. Not only does it acknowledge the cuts between past and present, it even comments on the sometimes misleading nature of cutting and splicing scenes. Late in the film when the narrator has realised that his personality is split, the screen fades to black and the voiceover echoes a previous statement: "It's called a changeover. The movie goes on, and no one in the audience has any idea" (01:50:13). This is the repetition of an earlier scene in which the narrator, in his role as voiceover, looks into the camera and directly addresses the audience as he explains Tyler's jobs (31:07-32:46). This is one of the few sequences in which Tyler can clearly hear the narrating voice and respond to it. In this scene, Tyler is even aware of the nature of the text itself as he reaches up to cue the yellow spot in the top right of the screen. He then states that the industry calls them cigarette burns, though it is unclear whether he is addressing the narrator or the audience (31:28). The latter seems more likely since this scene appears to be the exception in which the characters may directly address the audience in their campaign to raise awareness of film cutting techniques. This impression is reinforced by the next exchange when Tyler asks "Why would anyone want this shit job?" and the narrator responds "Because it affords him other interesting opportunities" (31:38-31:44). Tyler's question is a rhetorical one, as he obviously knows the attraction of his job. The narrator's answer, which places Tyler in the third person, implies that Tyler cannot hear what is being said, although he must be able to or else he could not respond to the narrator's remarks. On the other hand, Tyler does not look straight into the camera, let alone gaze into it steadily as the narrator does. Instead he appears to address his remarks to the narrator as though he were an intermediary between Tyler and the audience. At the same time, one might assume that the narrator is speaking in his capacity as a character in his flashback rather than as the pseudo-diegetic narrator, but the distinction is not clear. This ambiguity is intriguing because it blurs the boundaries between the levels of mediation. The ambiguities and mismatched techniques in this scene alone serve to highlight the confusion between realities and temporalities. Not only does Tyler's penchant for splicing porn frames into family films pass comment on the easily manipulation of film itself, it also foreshadows the untrustworthiness of the text. In its very content, therefore, the film dwells on the potential to trick audiences into believing that they have (or have not) seen something on screen.

Like Kint, *Fight Club*'s narrator has the benefit of hindsight while re-telling his story, but he only seldom draws attention to the fact that he knows the outcome. Most importantly for this text, the narrator limits his account to include only the information and emotions that he was aware of during these events. If the voiceover explained that Tyler was a figment of the narrator's imagination from the beginning, the film would lose suspense and probably barely make sense at times. Instead, the voiceover contents itself with making the occasional remark which hints at a broader understanding of the situation but mostly remains anchored in the scene which it is narrating. Examples of this type of statements are found in lines such as "[s]ometimes Tyler spoke for me", which may be taken metaphorically at the first viewing and later become examples of dramatic irony (44:46). The tone of the voiceover is very much in keeping with the character of the narrator; it is caustically humorous and matter-of-fact without being condescending towards the viewer.

The aspect of the temporality of this voiceover is a complex one. It appears to switch more or less randomly between relating past events, educating the audience about nitroglycerine and cutting techniques and voicing the narrator's thoughts at the time. At times it seems to be viewing the scenes from a fairly detached point of view, as in one of the early scenes: "It must have been Tuesday. He was wearing his cornflower-blue tie" (04:18). In others, it appears to be completely caught up in the moment, as when the narrator is distracted by Marla and the voiceover growls "If I did have a tumour, I'd name it Marla" (13:45). In short, this voiceover seems determined to perform all these functions to prove that it is in control of the text, though ironically Tyler appears to have got the last word since a frame of porn is spliced in just before the closing credits (02:10:41). Although the voiceover is not trustworthy in that it fails to give the viewer all the facts, it does reveal the truth at the moment the narrator himself realises it.

About Adam's voiceovers appear to be completely covert. The narrators never address the camera directly and show no signs of being aware of the camera or the nature of the text in which they appear. Instead, the voiceover seems to be an incomplete stream of consciousness which surfaces when they are thinking but refusing to voice a thought. The comments which the voiceovers make range from the speculative, as in Alice's "Oh now, I think our Laura's up to something" to Lucy's frustrated "Can't he see he only has to ask?" (01:04:07, 04:53). In this text, the voiceover is bound directly to the character's actions at the time and is thus limited to the character's own understanding of each scene. Certainly it is never used to narrate past events except in the scene where Lucy tells her hairdresser about her weekend away. Each narrator has their own voiceover which shows no awareness of the narrations of

the others. Apart from having their own distinct voices, the tone of the voiceovers does not differ dramatically from one character to the next. Regarding the temporal location of the voiceovers, they all appear to be unmediated and spontaneous. They display no awareness of future events, nor do they digress from the matter in hand as *Fight Club*'s voiceover does.

It appears, therefore, that the nature of the voiceover used in unreliably narrated texts varies considerably. This analysis suggests that unreliable pseudo-diegetic narrators are likely to employ overt narration, which appears rather contradictory as one might reasonably suppose that covert narration would appear to be more trustworthy. Each of these three texts' voiceovers differ in the frequency with which they are used as well as the temporality to which they are bound.

6.2.2. Reliability of voiceover

Interestingly, none of the texts discussed here involve fallible homodiegetic voiceover narration, a voiceover which describes a situation as discrepant to what is shown on screen. This type of narration allows for instant dramatic irony on the first viewing but does, of course, immediately show the viewer that the narrator is unreliable. This popular use of voiceover illustrates the skewed perception of the narrating character by having them state something which is clearly not true. In this case, the camera is seen to be showing the 'true' version of events while the narrator is the fallible element. In each of these three unreliably narrated texts, however, what is narrated by the voiceover is shown faithfully on screen. In Kint's case the agreement between voiceover and events shown on screen is more or less given, since the events shown on screen are presumably what the police visualise when listening to his account. In *Fight Club* the voiceover is aware of the artificial nature of the constructed text but seems content merely to accompany it and comment on what is happening on screen without obviously manipulating how events are portrayed. In *About Adam*, voiceovers are rather more unobtrusive and seem to be the voice of the character's un- or subconscious. In each of these texts, attention is not drawn visually to the narrator's faults and so discrepancies between what is said and 'what actually happened' are not clearly visible. But how does the narrator, most particularly through their voiceover, mislead the audience?

Kint's voiceover shows that he is pretending to be viewing the entire situation more or less through the eyes of an outsider in as far as he is supposed to be a small-time con man. He does not lie directly through the voiceover, he simply omits to mention all his actions as Keyser Söze such as arranging the meeting in which 'Kobayashi' assigns the five men their

mission. The voiceover, albeit the voice of a reluctant criminal, is a useful device in misleading the audience here as a first-person account seems likely to include details about the ingenuity of the speaker. Kint even displays traces of this pride when he relates that he planned a less violent version of the New York Finest Taxi Service job (30:30). It may seem unlikely to listeners, therefore, that a talkative man with a willing audience would omit to mention any clever decisions on his part. Most of Kint's deception consists of similar omissions. He denies having much knowledge of Keyser Söze, while his sobbed confession to Kujan at the end of the text is pure fiction. This confession is another taunt to the police, as Kint has previously said that "To a cop, the explanation is never that complicated [...] If you've got a dead body and you think his brother did it, you're going to find out you're right" (01:07:20). Kujan is convinced that Keaton is responsible in each case, and Kint simply allows him to continue in this belief. This recurring theme of allowing people to believe what they want to believe could be seen as a comment on the text itself, as the viewer is unlikely to cast the meek, nervous and debilitated Kint as a likely candidate for the position of the psychotic Hungarian crime lord. McManus seems more likely because of his temperament, Hockney for his belligerence and Keaton for his calculation and control.

Concerning the deception of the audience, Kint's voiceover fades out as his deception appears to increase. During the massacre on board the boat, as a prime example, the scenes in which he claims to be waiting on the pier but is in fact stalking the boat are not narrated in voiceover (01:24:05-01:30:05). Kujan interrupts this sequence to ask why Kint did not interfere and Kint explains that he was too scared (01:30:40). The sequence is then continued without a voiceover again (01:31:20). The absence of the voiceover in these crucial scenes is remarkable because elsewhere in the text Kint shows no compunction about misleading Kujan. Possibly it may have been seen as too great a breach of the viewing contract to verbally narrate a sequence and later to show the sequence differently. Alternatively, the production team may have felt that a voiceover would rob the scene of tension. Either way, it is significant that the voiceover is absent during the scenes which are later shown to have been visually deceptive or ambiguous.

Fight Club's narrator also pretends that the criminal is an entirely separate person. In this case, however, the deception of the viewer is necessary in order to represent events in the way the narrator first perceived them. The text is almost a psychological exploration of how a schizophrenic views the world. The voiceover is crucial to the experience, primarily because the narrator has relatively few spoken lines due to the amount of time the character spends alone and so his lines give little insight into how he experiences each new episode. A

secondary function of the voiceover is that it appears to be quite frank and honest about what the narrator is thinking and feeling, so that the viewer is unlikely to suspect that it omits to mention the narrator's agency as Tyler. The voiceover, like the screen, treats Tyler as a completely separate person. Again, however, the voiceover is oddly absent during crucial moments of deception, such as the scene in which the narrator meets Tyler on the plane (21:05-23:34). It does provide a vital clue several scenes before their meeting by asking "If you wake up at a different time, in a different place than when you went to sleep, could you wake up as a different person?" while the camera focuses on Tyler in the background as he passes the narrator (18:55). Apart from this implication, however, the voiceover largely ceases during scenes which include both Tyler and the narrator. As in *The Usual Suspects*, the absence of the voiceover suggests an unwillingness to lie directly to the viewer. The reluctance to lie verbally seems rather odd given that the screen consistently shows a figment of the narrator's imagination as a real and physical being.

Once again, *About Adam* contrasts considerably with the other two texts. Here, the voiceovers serve to verbalise the thoughts and feelings of the narrator-protagonists, not to narrate the events they experience. Furthermore, the narrator-protagonists are the deceived, not the deceivers, so that the voiceovers have nothing to hide. In this film, the viewer is deceived along with the narrator-protagonists in more subtle terms than the other two texts, which misrelate entire episodes. *About Adam* operates by omitting different scenes in each account and by presenting Adam in a different light in each account. Thus, the voiceovers may give the viewer insight into how a narrator-protagonist views Adam – which may not be a 'true' impression but is certainly not a deliberately constructed deception on the part of the narrator-protagonist. An example would be Lucy's "Is he that shy, I wonder?" and Laura's contrasting "I though Lucy said he was shy" (3:23, 20:40).

It seems, therefore, that the two texts whose voiceovers deliberately deceive the viewer allow the voiceovers to accompany and corroborate the storyline which the narrator chooses to describe but shy away from including a voiceover in scenes which are later shown in complete contradiction to the way they are first related. This refusal to lie directly may be an attempt not to disorientate the viewer completely. On the other hand, having the voiceover remain reticent during key scenes, especially if they are shot in such a way as to be ambiguous, enhances the impression that the viewer has not been deceived as such, they have simply been allowed to believe what they wanted to believe. If the voiceover's absence is interpreted in this way, it can be seen as a further tool to increase an audience's awareness of the potential for deception in the creation of visual texts.

6.3. Focalisation

Focalisation, or reflection, is when a character experiences something through sight or sound, not by verbally or visually communicating the event to the narratee or implied reader. Focalisation can also involve abstract actions such as “thinking, remembering, interpreting, wondering, fearing, believing, desiring, understanding [and] feeling guilt” (Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension and Film* 101).

Although focalisation is emphatically not to be confused with point of view, it must be said that point-of-view shots frequently highlight focalisation in cinematic narration. These shots are perceived by the audience as being personal and subjective. Poppe and Helbig agree that it is often a lack of marked focalization which misleads the viewer into believing that they are presented with a factual, objective account when it is in fact deeply subjective and personal (“Follow the white rabbit” 134, Poppe 70-71).

The interspersal of POV-shots with a more apparently objective camera gives rise to the opportunity for viewers to be misled into thinking that external focalisation indicates an objective camera while internal focalisation, represented by a POV-shot, is subjective. Again, these shots allow cinematographers to obfuscate the boundaries between the objective and subjective, while the audience is likely to interpret according to convention.

The device of focalisation provides a fascinating study for this thesis. *The Usual Suspects* and *Fight Club* both have narrators telling a story about actions purportedly undertaken by another person and refusing to acknowledge the true extent of their own participation in events. Thus, focalisation plays a great part in convincing the viewer that the one person is in fact two distinct characters, acting independently. *About Adam* is rather less complex in that each character is distinct; Adam is one character pretending to have a different set of characteristics to suit each of them, but even he admits to being only one physical being. On the other hand, *About Adam* is the only text to include extensive shifts in focalisation, each of which is clearly marked. Focalisation is not realised in the same way in any of the three texts, however, even the first two which, after all, share the objective of shielding the narrator from suspicion.

The Usual Suspects is focalised primarily through Verbal Kint. Some distinction could be made between present-day-Verbal and past-Verbal. Not only does past-Verbal only exist in the eyes of the mind, as he is Söze playing a part, he behaves differently to the apparently nervous present-day-Verbal and he is shot differently. Particular emphasis is laid on past-Verbal’s physical disability and he is often shown in a wide enough shot to show him walking

awkwardly and clasping one arm (08:30, 27:10, 29:50). Present-day-Verbal is shot in close-up and slightly from above, so from Kujan's perspective (22:37). This allows present-day-Verbal to appear meek and gaze up appealingly, while the proximity of the shot suggests intimacy and confidentiality. However, there are more distinctive changes in focalisation. The film begins with the scene in which Söze shoots Keaton, which features Keaton as the main focaliser (02:26-04:24). Although not all the shots in this scene could possibly be from Keaton's point of view, the tantalising, shadowy glimpses of Keyser Söze clearly are. Although this focalisation is brief and not otherwise relevant, after Söze leaves the burning boat the camera zooms in on a mass of knotted line which supposedly conceals a later focaliser, past-Verbal, in a shot which is repeated later in the text (04:54,01:32:06). After the line-up Jack Baer is adopted as a focaliser in order to show his side of the investigation at the crime scene (16:56-18:00, 20:21-21:55). Kujan, Rabin and Baer focalise alternately with Kint, which allows the viewer to see the circumstances in which the interview takes place and that it is being recorded (21:57, 38:04, 39:38, 50:56). Later, this focalisation also allows the viewer to watch Kujan's realisation that he has been duped (01:39:12).

There are quite a few focalisers in this film, therefore, but one is quite unlike the others: Keyser Söze himself. In a scene shot in a distinctive style, Kint's voiceover tells the legend about the crime lord's origins while the scene is shown from Söze's point of view (01:00:04-01:01:25). In this scene, Söze is not only the focaliser: the events are shown in blurry, over-exposed over-the-shoulder shots, so the scene is literally shown from his point of view. Interestingly, the film quality and style in this sequence marks it out as dubious and half-imagined. Thus, it is shown in stark contrast to Kint's narration, which despite Kujan's doubts about its veracity is shown in the same quality and style as the rest of the film. Even when the shadowy trench-coated figure acknowledged to be Keyser Söze approaches his terrified victims, he is shown from the front and below, not in an over-the-shoulder shot. Julika Griem argues that the POV-shots might have been employed as a hint to the viewer, as they suggest a connection to Kint through the subjectivity of the shots (314-15). Laass agrees with this interpretation, claiming that it is impossible to define whether this sequence is to be considered a fictional embedded narrative or one of Kint's flashbacks; she argues that the "deviant narrative techniques" of this sequence serve primarily to underline the horror and violence of Kint's (or Söze's) story (140, 145).

Poppe discusses this type of shot as an indicator of unreliability, as it betrays the extreme subjectivity of the focalisation. She mentions a number of filmic techniques which she claims betray a text's unreliability: "interne Fokalisierung sowie [...] sublimale Bilder,

Zeitraffer, Zeitlupe, unwirkliche, verzerrte Bilder [...]” (74). I contend that these techniques are also employed in films which are not unreliably narrated although they are deeply subjective and use all these techniques. *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, for example, uses extreme slow-motion combined with a voiceover simple to introduce two protagonists (02:21-02:43). The same film opens scenes in which the camera is apparently inside a microwave or at the bottom of a saucepan (05:10-05:20, 05:20-05:23). After the main character, Ed, loses spectacularly at a poker game, his shell-shocked exit is filmed in a deeply subjective style. The image is drained of colour and seems over-exposed; it becomes jerky and doubles or even triples frequently. The camera appears to be fixed firmly about two feet from his head so that it is correspondingly unsteady (29:06-30:08). Further ‘unreliability markers’ are provided when the voiceover accompanies the following scene in which Ed breaks the bad news to his friends. While the image track has degenerated into a series of stills, the voiceover runs: “If he had said he wanted to settle the debt on his own, it would have been a lie”, just before the image track unfreezes to allow Ed to say “I wish to Christ he’s have let me settle it on my own” (31:14-31:46). It appears virtually impossible, therefore, for a viewer to easily identify an unreliable narrative simply by recognizing the selective subjectivity of the camera. It bears mentioning at this point that there is no way of determining whether the sequence about Keyser Söze’s past is reliably narrated or not despite the recognition of its subjectivity.

Fight Club, in contrast, is focalised almost exclusively by the narrator. Such is the text’s limitation to his perception of the world that no extraneous details are included and few shots do not include him or what he sees. No wide shot allows even the identification of the city in which the text is set or the layout of his office except a presentation room, the cubicle he occupies and one staircase he descends. Even when he explains Tyler’s many jobs he is in the frame with Tyler most of the time. The only sequence in which Tyler takes over as focaliser is the scene in which he rescues Marla from her suicide mission and brings her back to the house (48:12-50:09).

Unfocalised scenes are difficult to identify concretely, but the scene of the plot twist features one brief shot of the narrator talking to thin air (01:49:09). The security cameras in the garage at the end of the text also show him being dragged by his imaginary enemy (02:03:50, 02:04:01). Other than these short sequences, one might assume that the entire text is focalised by the narrator. The fact that he is in most of the shots simply suggests a more objective camera. Laass discusses scenes which are clearly subjective and focalised, such as the camera moving through his nervous system during the credits, his description of his nest-

building instinct, his reconstruction of the explosion at the condo, the ice-cave, his intercourse with Marla and the plane crash (158-159). Ferenz suggests that *Fight Club* uses POV-shots primarily to emphasise how the narrator focuses on certain details to the exclusion of everything else, such as the cornflower-blue tie (109-110). The shots also show that the character-narrator is the origin of the images shown on screen, as they illustrate his state of high tension as well as his fragmented state of mind (110). These scholars appear to suggest, therefore, that the subjectivity of the shots should alert the viewer to the fact that the narrator is both unreliable and disturbed. However, the fact that one can distinguish clearly between subjective and apparently objective shots illustrates that the viewer is likely to believe that they have identified parts of the text which are not reliable and discounted these. Therefore they are more likely to believe that the remaining text is objective and reliable.

About Adam is focalised from four different points of view as the character-narrators take turns to present their version of events. Focalisation is of particular relevance in this text as several scenes are shown more than once, but focalised by a different character each time. Because the scenes shown more than once they invariably betray certain discrepancies – at least in small details – between versions, the viewer becomes aware of the vastly different interpretations by different focalisers. In some cases these discrepancies are a matter of perception alone, such as the different reactions Adam seems to show to Lucy's proposal (20:04, 42:27, 48:54, 01:11:35). In other cases the versions are mutually exclusive, such as the question of whether Adam or his father purchased the Jaguar. Some focalised scenes appear to be shot perfectly reliably, however, with no discrepancies, and still deceive the viewer to some extent by simply limiting what is shown to one character's point of view. When Laura emerges from Adam's flat and walks to the Jaguar in the rain, Adam is shown exiting the flat and looking laughingly to his right. When Laura asks him what is the matter, he replies smilingly "Oh nothing. It's just: Life is exhilarating all the same, isn't it?" and walks to join her (46:37). In Alice's version half an hour later in the running time, the same scene is shown again from Alice's point of view. Alice is revealed to be hiding behind the car to Adam's right, and it is her presence which makes him laugh (01:13:55). The camera shows Adam performing the same actions in both scenes, merely from different angles, and the women hear him deliver almost exactly the same lines.

Unlike the other two texts, the style of filming changes to some extent to reflect a switch in focalisation in *About Adam*. Lucy's account is focalised in that it focuses on her actions and is limited to her perception of events, but it is shot relatively impersonally in that she is filmed conventionally, with no emphasis given to her particular point of view. This

style of filming is largely continued in Laura's narrative, though the fact that several scenes are simply shot from a different camera angle already lends a different air to each scene. This first becomes clear in the scene where Laura is introduced to Adam as "poor Laura". Where in Lucy's account Adam had been shown from the front in close-up, Laura first sees him from the back and from a distance (20:44). Thus, simply the initial distance between characters – soon followed by their almost unnatural closeness after they 'discover' a common love of poetry – creates a completely different impression of the same character than that given by Lucy's portrayal of Adam so far.

However, it is David's narrative which truly stands out in terms of style. From the very beginning of this section, the camera angles are skewed and shot largely from below, in great contrast to the largely conventional shots used for his sisters. The skewed or Dutch angle is often used to suggest an unbalanced mind. In David's case the angles adopted reflect his all-consuming obsession with Karen. His precarious mental state is further portrayed by two extremes of camera scope. In most scenes, David is shot in close-up, but in the scene in which he first discusses Karen with Adam, the scene cuts rapidly between his face in close-up and extreme close-up from different angles, even in mid-word, which is unsettling for the viewer and serves as an effective visual device to emphasise David's mental imbalance (50:43-50:50). In another scene, he visits Adam at the gallery and the scene is shot in an extremely wide angle, still skewed but with the camera apparently at floor level (52:11). This choice of shot puts a great distance between David and the viewer, and increases the impression that he does not fit in with the others characters as Adam does, but is increasingly awkward, as his behaviour in this scene implies. When David's narrative ends, so too do the unsettling angles and awkward close-ups. Alice's account is, if anything, more conventional than the others because it involves fairly few overlaps but introduces a considerable amount of new material and moves the plotline on towards to the wedding.

Focalisation in *About Adam* does not end with content and camera work, however; the musical score of the film does a great deal to influence the mood of each account despite the fact that the content of each narrative is necessarily similar. Lucy's account, as the first narrative, takes over from the unfocalised opening scene at the Temple Bar café (02:11). This first narrative is less intensely focalised than later accounts, a fact which is reflected in the score for this section. The music in the first quarter of the film supports the impression that the film is an easy-going romantic comedy with a fairly bland boy-meets-girl storyline, and as such consists of the film's cheery, showtune-style theme combined with the classic love songs which Lucy performs. The music in Laura's narrative contrasts neatly with Lucy's bold score.

For the second section, dramatic violin and string music strike a slightly old-fashioned chord for the student who longs for a passionate, reckless romance. Again, David's narrative is slightly out of touch with those of his sisters. Throughout his section, mind-numbingly monotonous lounge music enhances the general impression of boredom and obsession which mark this character. Alice's narrative shows in extreme contrast to David's once more, as her section features brass band music in an almost burlesque style. Although this choice of musical score for Alice may be considered a rather heavy hint at the raunchy possibilities for a mature, bored housewife, many – if not most – viewers are unlikely to consciously note the score, instead simply accepting the musical accompaniment as part of each character's perception of the world.

It seems excessive to include an entire chapter on multiperspectivity when only one of the texts is truly multiperspectival, but a discussion of the narrative technique is certainly not misplaced here. Multiperspectivity is commonly linked to unreliability; naturally, if there are two sides to every story one is bound to contradict the other on some points. It is interesting to note that although *The Usual Suspects* employs different focalisers such as Baer and Kujan, their sections of the narrative do not overlap with Kint's. Therefore it is not truly multiperspectival. Because this text resists the temptation to replay unreliably narrated scenes in order to illustrate how the viewer was tricked, even the sequences after the plot twists are not multiperspectival. It is most ironic that *Fight Club* is equally monoperspectival, despite the fact that the narrator is living two very different lives. A few scenes are revisited from a more objective and reliable point of view after the plot twist, such as the narrator assaulting himself in the car park, but as these are not focalised by another character they hardly qualify (01:49:12). In fact, only *About Adam* is truly multiperspectival, and it is also the only text which does not deliberately mislead the viewer throughout most of the running time. Multiperspectivity, then, while fascinating, does not appear to be conducive to misleading the viewer.

It seems, therefore, that focalisation is approached quite differently according to the purpose of the text. Although each of the three texts discussed here are similarly subjective, *The Usual Suspects* and *Fight Club* alternate between scenes which are clearly subjective, such as dream sequences or flashbacks, and apparently objective scenes in a bid to encourage viewers to rely on the more apparently objective narrative. They fail to mark changes between subjective and objective scenes (if there are any), instead requiring the viewer to identify them. *About Adam*, which does little to disguise the unreliability of its narrators, clearly marks each switch of focaliser and imbues each of their narratives with its own distinctive style,

whether through camera work or the score. It appears, then, that not marking focalised scenes – as Poppe suggests – may be essential to misleading the viewer into believing what they are shown. As the least misleading text is the only one to employ multiperspectivity while the other two are strictly monoperspectival, it seems that a narrow, limited focalisation by one character is best suited to misleading the viewer. Using one character as a filter requires the viewer to rely heavily on the information which the character provides and does not allow for contradiction by other characters.

7. Camera work

The most salient of the technical processes that allow the illusion of objectivity and subjectivity in cinema is undoubtedly the camera. As the previous section has shown, it is almost impossible to discuss focalisation without going into some detail concerning camera shots and cutting. However, so great is the significance of camera work not only in determining focalisation but also limiting or revealing the fictional world to the viewer that it most definitely requires its own chapter. After all, in visual texts, the camera is the eye of the viewer and determines what is seen and what is not, not only in each individual shot where different angles show different perspectives, but in the whole text where the omission of a scene or even a line can change the nature of the text completely. As previously discussed, the camera is traditionally seen as the ‘impersonal narrative voice’ and neutral to the subject. In *Hollywood Cinema*, Richard Maltby justifies the trust which viewers place in the camera: “The audience trusts in the images it sees, because the camera cannot show something that it not, in some sense, there. A movie’s images cannot be unreliable in the ways that a verbal narrator can” (330). While a narrator can lie verbally, it seems far more of a cognitive leap to visualize those lies. For example, when *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*’s Dr. Sheppard writes “I did what little had to be done”, one assumes that he is preparing a body for inspection, not that he is hiding the equipment which he used to murder the victim (Christie 43). A filmed version of events, however, is compelled to show *something* while he speaks those words, even if only a shot of him writing in his diary. Perhaps it is this characteristic of the camera which inspires trust; it cannot be idle while the viewer relies on verbal assurances from the narrator.

The least intrusive and most conventional camera uses external focalization to show the subject in each scene, seldom employing POV-shots. However, the switch to a subjective camera or a change in point of view or temporality is usually signalled by blending, zooming,

introductory voiceovers, changes in colour, camera tilts, changes in focus and sound quality (Liptay & Wolf “Einleitung” 13). If no markers are provided to signal a switch between objective and subjective camera, the viewer will struggle to determine which scenes are reliably narrated, if any.

At the risk of appearing cavalier, lighting and cutting are included as part of ‘camera work’ in this thesis, as the composition of the shot and, crucially, its juxtaposition with other scenes suggest links between shots which would otherwise be an incoherent jumble. An excellent example of deceptive cutting can be seen during the opening credits of the romantic comedy *Friends With Benefits*. In this scene, a dialogue appears to take place between the female lead Jamie and male lead Dylan as consecutive shots show them both on mobile phones and conducting a perfectly coherent conversation (0:50-01:40). Only after fifty seconds of this form of interaction are they revealed to be having identical conversations with their boyfriend and girlfriend respectively, and not in fact to know each other at all. The fact that the text in question had no further interest in or inclination towards unreliable or unnatural narration serves as some indication of both the conventionality of most romantic comedies and the ease with which the average viewer can be deceived by some deft but simple cutting.

7.1. The eye of the beholder

This chapter aims to investigate how the camera is used to deceive the viewer – or at least to limit their perception of the fictional world – in these three texts. Because most of the information in a film is received visually instead of verbally, what is shown on screen is of paramount importance to the viewer’s perception of the text. In a book, for example, a narrator can simply record that “X was shot in the back while fishing” and use the passive construction to avoid mentioning that he or she had shot X. In a film, some care must be taken to construct the scene without giving away the identity of the killer. A by now rather conventional ploy might include a wide-angle shot in which an unidentifiable figure in black, possibly silhouetted, shoots X, or simply a close-up of the gun from behind shooting X. A more complex scene could have the narrator shown engaged in some innocent activity nearby, the sound of a shot against a neutral landscape and then the narrator rushing to X’s body, which admits the narrator’s proximity but also provides him or her with an implied visual alibi.

In *The Usual Suspects*, several key scenes involve Keyser Söze, but naturally his identity must be protected throughout the film. In the opening scene, Söze is shown only from the chest down and partly only from the knees down (02:54-04:40). This choice of shot, which shows his entire physique apart from the main identifying feature, his face, forces the viewer to focus on other details. His dark, anonymous clothing is unenlightening; instead details such as his golden lighter and substantial gold watch are foregrounded. These, of course, are vital identifiers which are to resurface again later when Kint collects them at the station. Söze's voice must sound radically different to Kint's nasal whinge, so on the boat he is forced to answer Keaton in a less-than-menacing rasp. When Söze leaves the burning deck he is shown descending the ladder in silhouette. Kint omits to mention to the police that he has dealings as Keyser Söze and the camera faithfully accompanies his version of events, not suggesting that his version is incomplete. In fact, as mentioned in a previous section, much is done to remind the viewer of his disability by showing him in wide-angle shots clutching his arm or dragging his leg, unless he is sitting down (08:30, 27:10). Söze's next appearance is in the dreamlike sequence previously described (01:00:04-01:01:25). The odd quality of the sequence disassociates Kint from Söze even though the former is narrating the rather personal sequence. In this scene, Söze is shown briefly from behind, then excluded from shots as the camera focalises internally. Then only his hand is shown, from the side, wielding a gun. Finally, the last two shots show him in a mid-range shot from the side, the long mane of hair hiding his face and the over-exposure eradicating any detail remaining.

These two sequences depict Keyser Söze in a rather melodramatic light and simply avoid including his face in shot. Neither sequence implies Kint's presence in the vicinity, however, so the final scenes which Kint narrates to Kujan are of primary interest as Kint is now a definite suspect. In this scene, it appears that the camera for once acts independently of Kint's narration or at least includes memories that he is unlikely to have related to the police. The killer's presence on the boat is implied at 01:26:00 when a door is shown swinging to and the camera proceeds along a gangway in a zero-focalised POV-shot, then briefly observes McManus' progress. Thus, Kint is effectively cleared of suspicion early on as he is shown to be on the pier while the faceless killer is supposedly already on board (01:22:04). Kint is shown running along the pier and collapsing, panting, on the gangplank as he clutches a machine gun (01:27:18). The camera switches to zero focalisation of the killer again, seeing exactly what the murderous Söze sees as he stalks the gangways, interspersed with Keaton and McManus' interactions and a view of Söze's victim (01:25:08-01:28:20). Söze is not visually included in these scene (presumably because his costume would betray his

identity), but his presence is implied by the victim's reaction. Perspective then shifts to an outside view of the gunfire seen through a porthole as the camera pulls out (01:28:21-01:28:40). Immediately afterwards, Kint is shown still sitting on the gangplank, looking shiftier and still breathing heavily (01:28:40). What is implied is that the shooting inside occurred while he was approaching the boat; the cutting technique neatly incorporates the fact that he is in fact breathing heavily because he has completed a swift assassination and bolted back outside. Thus, the screen has been at once scrupulously honest and quietly deceptive. Kint's alibi of being on the gangplank is compounded by the fact that McManus then walks onto the deck with a knife in his back, an action which was not included in Söze's perspective shots and which, as it is implied, has taken place just seconds before (01:29:00). Presumably the first shots in first-person perspective on the boat, where the killer watches McManus move through the television room (01:25:50), are spliced in earlier than they actually took place, as McManus still has to meet Keaton in the engine room before he is stabbed (01:26:50). Accepting the explanation that the sequence of events has been manipulated in the cutting process would explain how Söze could have stabbed McManus as he was passing, actually after McManus meets Keaton although the cutting process suggests that McManus passes Söze unharmed before going to the engine room. Due to the slight change of scene to the foredeck and the camera swinging around, McManus is also not clearly identified as approaching from the same direction as Kint.

Next, cutting techniques take some liberty with sequence as they show a gun being aimed at Keaton from the bridge at the same time as Kint is frantically rummaging in the van – thus implying that Kint must be innocent, as he cannot be in two places at once (01:29:40-01:30:00). This deception is continued for three separate cuts, which show Keaton being shot contrasted with Kint hearing the shot near the van and looking up in shock, then Keaton lying on deck while Kint – still at the van – realises what is happening. Once the shadowy figure of the villain is shown in silhouette against the fog, there can be little doubt in the eyes of the viewer that another party is involved (01:29:55). At this point, clearly, the camera is depicting events as Kint reports them to the police: As Keyser Söze appears and Kint is “too afraid” to even approach the action on the foredeck, instead staring in awe at the figure on the bridge (01:29:58). After a brief interruption by Kujan the scene is continued in this format, cutting between wide shots of the figure descending to join Keaton and Kint limping along in parallel to hide on the pier (01:31:22-01:31:39). To lend credibility to Kint's account – Kint may be seen to be overcompensating here, rattled by Kujan's questioning – this scene is briefly very heavily focalised. The shot is unsteady, handheld, and framed by the ropes that Kint is

supposed to be peering through. His heavy, uneven breathing is as loud as the score (01:31:42-01:32:06). Then the focalisation ceases and the scene simply cuts between the pile of rope and the action on deck, this time from a stable third-person perspective in wide shot, until Söze tosses his cigarette aside (01:32:07-01:32:13). Again, Söze leaves in silhouette, though from a different angle, and a lingering shot of the coils of rope suggests that Kint remains behind (01:32:18-01:32:29).

In the initial scenes, it seems, where protecting Kint from suspicion is not an issue, rather conventional, slightly melodramatic methods protect Söze's identity. Having the character don traditional American gangster garb of a suit, trenchcoat and trilby echoes film noir to the extent that the roiling fog which both disguises the character further and adds to the air of mystery constitutes no surprise. Film noir lends itself to unreliable narratives; Laass comments on the text's refusal to show Söze more clearly in stating that "the mystification and postponed revelation of the culprit's identity is a conventionalised narrative strategy typical of the genre" (143-144). Later in the text, when Kint is a more obvious suspect, rapid cutting between a terrified and confused Kint and calm, collected Söze suggests that the latter must be the killer, as Kint cannot occupy two positions at once and certainly could not be seen watching himself kill Keaton.

Fight Club operates on a rather different principle. In this text, the narrator is shown interacting with Tyler, a man whom he is seen to meet for the first time and who appears to have a back story, plenty of character and a physical body, as his three separate jobs confirm. Viewers may note that Tyler does appear to be rather extraordinary; he is shown to contradict the narrative, or at least to lie, by asking "what car?" after he is plainly shown stealing a car at the airport (24:30). Few viewers are likely, on first viewing the film, to identify him as the flickering figure briefly spliced into previous scenes at the office and in the hospital, though this brief appearance is a strong indication that he is a figment of the narrator's imagination (03:57, 06:03).

Throughout the rest of the text until the twist, however, Tyler is shown on screen as a normal human being who obeys the laws of physics. The few exceptions are the times when he travels through space impossibly quickly, such as when he reaches Marla's flat before the end of her countdown to ten, which takes fourteen seconds of real time as it slows down in order not to impede the comprehensibility of the voiceover (48:30-48:44). Despite her dazed state, Marla remarks "You got here *fast*" (48:50). Even in the knowledge that the narrator is Tyler and therefore could have left for her apartment when he carefully lays the receiver down, the text never satisfactorily explains how either man could have reached the apartment

in the time suggested by the sound bridge. Viewers are unlikely to question this minor detail, though, while they digest the fact that Marla seems unsurprised to welcome a complete stranger in. The only concession she gives to having apparently asked the wrong man in is to peer dazedly at him and slur “Did I call you?”, whereby equal emphasis is put on “I” and “you” (46:56). This stress pattern allows viewers to interpret the question either as Marla asking Tyler whether she had called the right man or, on the second viewing, Marla asking the narrator whether it was she who had called him or if he had just decided to visit. Again, the factors which influence a character’s perception of the world provide an explanation for this chaotic and seemingly confused sequence: Marla’s overdose appears to have temporarily skewed reality beyond rational thinking.

Fight Club has the complex task of preventing not only the viewer from discovering the narrator’s schizophrenia, but also the narrator himself. To this effect, while the narrator can interact with either Tyler or Marla, the three can never be shown in the same shot. Omitting the fact that Marla sees both men as one and the same is a task more given over to the screenwriters than the cameramen, as Tyler emphatically states that the narrator must never mention him, Tyler, to Marla, in order to avoid the inevitable realisation that Tyler doesn’t exist. In fact, the script is masterfully engineered so that the narrator never exchanges a word with Tyler in front of their recruits – except in the scene where they drive off the road – as this would inevitably arouse suspicion and in the end cause the narrator to be diagnosed. In order to preserve the illusion of the world as the narrator sees it, Tyler must be filmed as a real person acting and speaking independently. The fact that he appears on screen as any other character does makes the plot twist near the end of the text all the more drastic. The viewer is forced to review and re-evaluate the text in an attempt to understand how the plotline is feasible without Tyler, who appears to have been such a driving force. After all, the visual deception of the viewer is complete, not relying on subtle angling or cutting; Tyler is first clearly shown thrashing the narrator on a car park, in a scene which later shows the narrator punching and abusing himself (34:09-34:19, 01:49:09-01:49:15). The use of wide shot in this sequence emphasises the suggested objectivity, and therefore reliability, of this sequence, which is supported by the lack of surprise shown by the two men who discover the narrator punching himself. Although his talent for such convincing self-abuse has been foreshadowed before his last meeting with his boss, the scene in which he beats himself in the office is darkly comedic and Tyler’s presence is only implied by the voiceover saying “For some reason I thought of my first fight with Tyler” (01:43:14).

In short, therefore, *Fight Club*'s deception of both the viewer and the narrator is so complex and so complete that the imaginary alter ego has to be shown as a normal character on screen. Like *The Usual Suspects*, this text has one man pretending to be in awe of another, fiercer man. Tyler could not conceivably be filmed consistently using angles or costumes to hide his face, however; he must be everything the narrator wishes he were, and his omnipresence and brash charisma rule out the use of techniques to hide his face, which are also likely to swiftly lose appeal given the amount of screen time devoted to him.

About Adam sets different requirements for the camera than the other two texts. This is the only text which shows extensive sequences from the points of view of two or more characters, so the camera is crucial to signalling focalisation and to showing how a certain character views the world. Because there is no main plot twist or big reveal at the end of the text, the only detectable deception takes place when one narrator-protagonist deceives another. This effect is achieved partly through simply omitting to show part of a conversation or a scene. When Lucy phones Adam from the nightclub where Simon is performing, Adam's side of the conversation is only heard as a voice through the telephone (16:40). When the same scene is relayed in Alice's narrative, Adam still acts the part of the loving fiancé, but within the context of his recently aborted lovemaking with Alice (01:11:23).

Further omissions are made which do require camerawork, however. Lucy's narrative shows Alice dropping Lucy off at the gallery, then Lucy and Adam embracing inside (11:00-11:12). Alice's narrative reveals that she sees Adam upstairs as Lucy enters the building and he beckons for Alice to join him while Lucy examines some prints downstairs. Only then are Lucy and Adam shown embracing – from outside the building this time – before Alice turns to leave (01:05:42-01:06:15). One scene which has already been discussed shows Laura leaving Adam's flat and turning to speak to him at the same time as he espies Alice hiding outside, also waiting to speak to him (46:35, 01:13:50). In this scene, only the camera angle is altered for the shots which portray the events included in both Laura's and Alice's narrative. The proposal scene can hardly be classed as deceptive as each one of the narratives slightly contradicts the others in some small details (20:04, 42:27, 48:54, 01:11:35). Indeed, the deception in this text is far subtler and less clear-cut than in the other two texts; great untruths such as Adam and Lucy's infidelities are never openly discussed, while less pertinent details such as the Jaguar's origins are the subjects of constant speculation and are never fully resolved. The intriguing side stories are merely discussed by characters on screen, while greater deceptions between characters mostly involve curtailing scenes in one narrative and allowing them to be extended in others, such as the scene in which Laura meets Adam.

This method of revealing hidden details piecewise throughout the film instead of having one revealing scene in which all is suddenly made clear is unusual in unnaturally and unreliably narrated films of the modern era. Instead, the text is rather reminiscent of *Rashomon*, in which four witnesses relate their account of the same story in radically different ways. However, *About Adam* goes one step further by revealing that some rather banal scenes are in fact much deeper and richer than the viewer might originally suppose. The scene in which Laura and Alice shop for clothes, for example, is rather unremarkable until Adam is revealed to have been pursuing the one sister while evading the other. In a manner reminiscent of Tyler, he must avoid being alone with both of them as this would mar his performance as the character they prefer. By extending some scenes in a timeline which is at times rather confused, the text suggests that there may be more details which are simply not revealed. Indeed, the adoring look which Peggy gives Adam in the Jaguar hints at a narrative which has not been related (14:06).

7.2. The deceptive or subjective camera

In each of the films, certain events are shown on screen which are, sooner or later, revealed to have been inaccurate. *The Usual Suspects* shows Kint watching the faceless killer descend the stairs to the foredeck and menace Keaton before shooting him (01:29:56). Unlike previous scenes, where deceptive cutting suggests that Kint is outside while the assassination takes place inside, what is shown here is later exposed as pure fiction. Clearly, Kint does not run alongside the villain to hide behind a pile of rope for the simple reason that he is on board, shooting Keaton – so, to a certain extent, the camera ‘lies’ in that it presumably shows the story as he tells it to the police. Equally, when Kujan believes that he has finally cracked the case and that Keaton is responsible for the massacre, Keaton is shown in the guise of Keyser Söze, approaching along the foredeck and shooting at thin air. Here the camera presumably shows the story as Kujan imagines it (01:34:42).

Several authorities have commented on the use of an unreliable camera, especially with reference to *The Usual Suspects*. Most authors stress the role of uncertainty regarding the objectivity of the camera. As Jörg Helbig points out,

It is not that the camera has made itself the accomplice of a criminal, it is that the impersonal mode has never been impersonal in the first place. [...] In breaking both the conventions of fair play and the viewing contract, *The Usual Suspects* might not play straight despite being realist throughout, but the film certainly entertainingly plays with viewers’ expectations” (*Camera Doesn’t Lie* 208).

At times, however, the camera is, if not impersonal, then at least objective enough to be reliable. By not “playing straight” and exploiting viewer expectations, unreliably narrated texts are able to portray events which do not really happen in the fictional world without being considered potentially unreliable, as the events portrayed suit the viewers’ scheme.

One reason for the complete surprise of *The Usual Suspects*’ plot twist at the time of its release may be that it headed the vogue of unreliably narrated texts in the mid-90s. As Laass writes, the technique of misinforming the viewer was unusual prior to Singer’s production:

[The plot twist of *The Usual Suspects*] suggests categorisation of narrative information given during the unfolding of the plot as intentionally misleading or even inaccurate, which makes the film such an interesting case study [...]. Since [...] *Stage Fright* (1950), it is the second example, to my knowledge, in which the camera can be perceived as actually ‘lying’[...]” (Laass, 136).

Laass does not consider *Fight Club* in this section of her work, which is interesting as the camera clearly misreports in this text as well.

It must be observed at this point that the camera is occasionally exposed as being unreliable in the short fantasy sequences which also call the narrator’s reliability into question. It is important to note that these scenes explicitly show the viewer that the camera is perfectly capable of adopting the narrator’s point of view and disregarding the viewing contract. The only real difference between these sequences and the entire text is the length of the scene, accompanied by the fact that the illusion is almost immediately dispelled. These fantasy sequences are essentially an unreliably narrated scene within an unreliably narrated text. Helbig sees the short imaginary sequences as indicators of unreliability: “Der Film benutzt hier eine geradezu perfide Markierungsstrategie – die Zuschauer erhalten an einer entscheidenden Stelle der Handlung die explizite Warnung, das Gezeigte nicht für bare Münze zu nehmen und können doch nicht durchschauen, dass sie weiterhin auf die gleiche Weise manipuliert werden” (“Follow the White Rabbit” 139). However, the sequences may be seen as a demonstration of how the text works, almost taunting the viewer with the idea that it is unreliably narrated. On the other hand, the clearly unreliable sequences seem to enhance the reliability of the text as a whole.

The theoretical position on the concept of a ‘deceptive’ camera is, of course, ambiguous at best. There is no denying that almost every scene of a commercial film is artificially created and that the story which the text relates is purely fictional. However,

viewers happily enter into a willing suspension of disbelief while watching a film, agreeing to believe what is shown on screen. It therefore appears to be a breach of the unwritten pact between director and audience to show events on screen which are later exposed as a fiction within the fictional world. Kujan's imagined events on deck, which cast Keaton as the villain, represent a more commonly accepted version of this breach.

On film, sleuths frequently suggest their version of a crime with their preferred suspect in the role of the perpetrator, in a sequence which is filmed as if that particular character had performed the crime, even if the character is later cleared of all blame. However, some warning of this diversion from the norm is given by the format, and frequently by the sleuth narrating the sequence in voiceover, opening with phrases such as "What if..." or "X could have done it, if...". This technique is often used in classic crime drama such as LWT/ITV's *Agatha Christie's Poirot*. However, these sequences are invariably marked as being speculative, or dispelled soon after being shown if the procedure is observed for several possible suspects – in which case one possible scenario often precludes the next. Testimony by suspects or witnesses in this format are often cast into doubt, but statements concerning past events which are not shown on screen are rather more likely to be untrue than those that are shown. It appears that there is some degree of taboo surrounding the breach of the viewing contract. While the camera is, technically speaking, always deceptive, it seems most uncomfortable for the director and production team to expose the camera as an untrustworthy medium.

Thus, when Kujan enters into his diatribe on the reasons why Keaton must be Keyser Söze, his increasingly excitable voiceover is supported by shots of Keaton taken from the film, partly from different angles but nonetheless consistent with what has been seen previously. Nothing new is revealed, but Keaton is portrayed looking shrewd, calculating and at times violent (01:33:35-01:34:56). Although Kujan is unwittingly telling an untrue story, therefore, the camera refuses to lie – no incriminating 'evidence' is slipped into the shots to lend weight to Kujan's argument. Similarly, the flashback sequence which shows how each of the characters comes to take part in the line-up is perfectly accurate; the detainment of McManus, Hockney, Fenster and Keaton is shown, but Kint simply appears at the police station (05:25-08:25). Again, the camera has not 'lied' as such. In sequences such as these, the voiceover does not lie either, as episodes which narrators do not wish to relate are simply omitted. Nevertheless, a marked disinclination to show events in the fictional world which are later shown to be false representations suggests that the pact is difficult to break.

Fight Club is a text which truly capitalises on this convention of honouring the viewing contract. Much of the text involves the filming of a character who does not, to all intents and purposes, exist. Alternatively, if one accepts that the narrator performs most of the actions attributed to Tyler, the character shown on screen certainly looks different to the way he should appear and performs actions later shown to have been undertaken by narrator instead. The happy blend of imagined events with 'real' events in the text is foreshadowed early in the film. Jack's imagination is shown to be particularly vivid in his guided meditation group, when the therapist's voiceover leads into a sequence showing him entering an icy cave and finding his power animal (10:14-10:38). The sequence is later revisited with Marla appearing instead of his penguin (13:58-14:12). When Marla disturbs his sleeping pattern, the voiceover states: "Next group, after guided meditation, after we open our heart-chakras, when it's time to hug, I'm gonna grab that little bitch Marla Singer and scream [Here the camera cuts to the imagined sequence as he grabs Marla in the gym and shakes her furiously] 'Marla you liar, you big tourist, I *need* this, now get out!'" (12:06-12:19). His last words echo slightly in a sound bridge as the camera returns to the narrator, sitting up in bed. The content of the voiceover, combined with the frame of the narrator lying in bed thinking wistfully of the scene, makes it clear to the viewer that the sequence is imagined.

The blurring of the 'real' and the imagined in the fictional world is somewhat called into question when Marla, on being confronted, states that she could see him rehearsing his speech all evening (15:00-15:08). This statement creates an unsettling feeling for the viewer as it implies that Marla has witnessed the same fantasy as the viewer has been privy to previously and which is supposedly completely private. Other imagined sequences are equally well marked, but bear far less relation to actual events, such as the scene in which the narrator imagines his death in an aeroplane. Again, the voiceover cues the imagined sequence: "Every time the plane banked too sharply on take-off or landing, I'd pray for a crash. Or a mid-air collision. Anything. [He looks thoughtfully out of the window. The bright lights of a plane are seen approaching at speed. Something tears through the fuselage and the interior of the plane is thrown into chaos. He sits, open-mouthed but entertained, watching the wind tear through the cabin and some passengers sucked out through the side of the ruined plane.] Life insurance pays off triple if you die on a business trip. [The 'Fasten seat-belts' light switches off with a beep and he wakes up on a different flight.]" (20:39-21:01).

In these imagined sequences, the beginning and end of the imaginary scene are clearly marked. It appears all the more remarkable, therefore, that most of the film consists of unmarked scenes which include imaginary elements and often shows events which are later

revealed to have happened quite differently. The inclusion of short fantasy sequences, therefore, far from undermining the credibility of the rest of the text, reinforces the impression that there is a strict boundary between the real and the imagined in this text. The scene which truly tests the viewer's suspension of disbelief is the scene in which the narrator describes Tyler's different occupations. As previously described, the narrator directly addresses the camera and interacts with Tyler, who is shown to be aware of or even manipulating the physical roll of film on which he is portrayed as a fictional character. Both characters also appear to be aware of the breaks between flashback and present day in the text, a concept which further tests the boundaries of fiction.

However, the fact that Tyler appears consistently as a physical being prevents the viewer from questioning his actions too closely, especially as none of his sequences are marked as being in any way imaginary. After the plot twist, the viewer is forced to mentally revise each scene involving Tyler. It would be too lengthy a process to show each scene again the way it 'actually' happened; instead the scenes most difficult to explain, especially those involving self-abuse, are visually revised in order for the viewer to grasp the extent of the narrator's self-delusion or violent schizophrenia. Critically, though, Tyler is allowed to appear in scenes after the plot twist in order to support the narrator's focalisation and to keep the interaction between them coherent. In these scenes, then, the screen shows the actions of a character who is known to be completely fictitious by the focaliser-narrator and the viewing audience. Nevertheless, the screen shows the world exactly as the focaliser perceives it and therefore could be said to be scrupulously accurate.

About Adam is the one text examined in this thesis which cannot be proven to include even one example of a 'dishonest' camera shot. Despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that this text has no big reveal or plot twist, nothing which is shown on camera is ever denied. Some scenes are later regarded literally from a different angle, such as the scene outside Adam's flat, which has already been discussed in other sections. Here, another layer is added to the narrative without denying that the first version was equally accurate, but simply limited. Other scenes may appear to deny previous versions of the scene at first as the versions are mutually exclusive.

An example of this type of contradiction is the scene in which Lucy proposes to Adam at the restaurant. In Lucy's narrative, Adam accepts immediately, in a somewhat awkward fashion but clearly pleased and completely unambiguous (20:04). In Lucy's version of this scene, Adam is initially distracted, then shell-shocked. There is a long silence as he struggles with his conscience, staring at Laura to gauge her reaction, then he manages to choke out a

brief acceptance (42:27). In David's narrative, Adam appears completely unfazed by the proposal, smiles and shrugs, appearing to ask David and Karen for advice, then drains his glass and pauses before stating confidently that he would love to accept (48:54). Alice's version shows Adam accepting happily and almost immediately without interacting with any of the others before standing and exchanging a knowing glance with Alice as he passes (01:11:35). Each of these scenes contradicts the other three at least in some small detail. However, since no indication is ever given as to which is the most reliable focaliser or 'what actually happened', the camera cannot in fact be said to be deceptive, merely deeply subjective. As in *Fight Club*, and to some extent *The Usual Suspects*, the camera is faithfully portraying the events as they are perceived by the focaliser in question. Most other scenes which are shown from more than one point of view include parts of the scene which have been omitted previously or simply include the voiceover of one of the other characters, thus adding a different kind of layer to an already familiar scene.

These revelations, however, only serve to make *Fight Club* seem all the more singular as a text. The extreme focus on one character as well as the almost constant voiceover, coupled with the foregrounding of his lack of sleep and frequent fantasy sequences should alert the viewer to the fact that the narrator's account may not be accurate. Yet such is the strength of the convention that only short scenes of a text should be deceptive to the viewer that the revelation that one of the main characters is a figment of the protagonist's imagination comes as a complete surprise. However, Tyler's inclusion in the narrative is crucial to understanding both the narrator's frame of mind and the plot as a whole, so that few viewers are likely to protest against the breach of the viewing contract even as they struggle to process what they have seen.

8. Conclusions

This thesis has attempted to answer how unreliably narrated texts are able to at least temporarily mislead the viewer and, in a related question, why these techniques work. After exploring a number of techniques used in the three films discussed in this thesis, several conclusions can be drawn concerning how and why unreliable narration is able to surprise the viewer with ‘the truth’ – or at least an astonishing level of confusion – at different points in the text.

It appears that each of the three texts share at least one principle, namely that they offer the viewer a familiar, at times almost clichéd basic script. Whether it is the small-time criminal reconstructing the story of his crime and capture in *The Usual Suspects* or any variation on the boy-meets-girl theme in *About Adam*, most viewers are likely to know what to expect from the text in terms of characters, events, themes and outcomes. *Fight Club* certainly has the least conventional of openings of the three texts discussed here, it is almost immediately disorients the reader (Ferenz 69-70). I would argue, however, that it closely follows the script of a rags-to-riches story, as an unassuming and bland protagonist meets an exciting stranger who changes their lives completely; in this case the text inverts this trope in a rich-to-rags story which nevertheless allows the main protagonist to attain great power and confidence as well as undergo a considerable change in character. These, incidentally, are also characteristics of rags-to-riches narrative, which often emphasise the insignificance of material goods. For the main part, however, it seems rather more likely that a mysterious and charismatic character brings about the changes in the narrator’s life than that he achieves enlightenment through his own schizophrenia.

Thus, the constructivist approach is prevalent in this aspect of misleading the viewer, as they are free to interpret the likely – and more familiar – scenario suggested by the text or to question the sequence of events and not rely on the truthful narration of the text. When Kujan appears to finally break down Kint’s barriers after hours of questioning, the viewer is likely to accept Kint’s confession, which after all occurs in a scene common to almost every crime drama narrative. Based on the viewer’s knowledge of *Fight Club*’s narrator, it seems unlikely that he should start punching *anyone* in a car park, let alone himself. His character, neurotic and retiring as it is, seems to require a more forceful personality to allow any development to occur. *About Adam*, meanwhile, offers no fewer than four basic plotlines which will be familiar to most viewers, namely ‘girl meets shy boy next door’ from romantic comedies, ‘forbidden passion between two lovers’ from classical romances, ‘desperate young

man takes lessons from love guru' from countless teen comedies and 'lonely housewife seeks distraction' from romantic dramas and other less salubrious genres. While the first two texts allow the viewer to continue reading the text as its genre suggests, *About Adam* mocks the genres it adopts by changing style intermittently, both unsettling the viewer and making the familiar tropes seem ridiculous. Nevertheless, readers of *About Adam* are unlikely to question events as they are presented in the narrative until the scene is reviewed from a different point of view. In short, therefore, it appears that offering a familiar basic plotline allows a text to temporarily mislead the viewer because they are likely to conform to the traditional reading of the text based on their experiences of other texts of the same (apparent) genre. As mixed-genre films are rather unusual, viewers are likely to interpret events as they are suitable to the genre to which they have ascribed the film. The findings of this thesis therefore support a point suggested in chapter 3 of this thesis:

3) Cinematic authors exploit viewers' need for coherence by providing a plausible – but false – interpretation of events (Ferenz, Poppe, Laass).

A second characteristic common to each of the three texts discussed in this thesis is the aspect of pace. Each text progresses at a great pace which reduces the likelihood of the viewer making the crucial connections between the clues provided or indeed doubting information provided by the character-narrators. As previously discussed, *The Usual Suspects* and *Fight Club* also boast incredibly complex, fractured and 'confused' or chaotic narratives. While the confusion of the narrative may well illustrate the state of mind of the narrator, it also fulfils another function; it thoroughly disorientates the viewer. Even when it is clear, as in some cases, that a sequence is imagined, the chaotic nature of the presentation of material combined with the pace of narration will cause most viewers to rely heavily on the narrator's version of the text rather than attempting to construct an independent storyline. *About Adam*'s pace may be more sedate and the presentation of information more conventional, but the achronicity and interweaving of the storylines also has a mildly disorientating effect. The fact that the viewer is frequently confronted with the revision of scenes they have already watched is likely to cause them to question subsequent scenes. Simultaneously, however, the revision of a scene creates a sense of satisfaction as the viewer feels that he or she now knows 'the whole truth' of the scene; a second revision of the scene calls for further revision and uncertainty, especially in cases where there is no one authoritative version, such as the proposal scene.

While the first two films are structurally fragmented and intermittently action-packed, therefore, *About Adam* requires an active viewer to work at a furious mental pace although the

storylines themselves unfold in an unhurried manner. The first two texts require the viewer to pay avid attention merely to absorb the information necessary to understanding the text, while *About Adam* causes them to question the information presented by the character-narrators after a mere twenty minutes of running time. In the first instance, the plot twist is revealed late in the film and so most of the mental revision and processing takes place after the text has been viewed. In the second, mental revision and processing takes place throughout the film and little reflection is required after the text has been viewed. It might be argued, therefore, that the first two texts concentrate more on the rhetorical construction of the text specifically to mislead the viewer and provide them with one (or, in the case of *The Usual Suspects*, two) plot twist(s). In these texts, considerable pains are taken to withhold certain information from the viewer and efforts made to covertly skirt certain issues. *About Adam* similarly uses certain shots or omits scenes in order to sustain one character's version of the narrative, but it also exposes the unreliability of its narrators at an early stage. Thus, it could be said to focus on the constructivist aspect of reading unreliable texts, as much of the text is taken up with pointing out why viewers will believe one version of the narrative without suspecting the other. No less artifice is used in the construction of this type of text, naturally, and it must be at least as carefully scripted as the previous two because several scenes are subject to two- or threefold scrutiny by viewers who are – by then – fully aware of its unreliable nature. However, it does give the viewer the information necessary to understanding the duplicity of the vile dissembler, and allows them enough time to review the narrative in the light of each revelation. As a matter of interest, the aspect of pace in fact covers points 4 to 6 of the list compiled in chapter 3:

- 4) Indicators of unreliability are swiftly eclipsed by some other event or shift of focus (Ferenz).
- 5) Vital information may be given or hinted at as long as the viewer does not recognize its importance (Nayman)
- 6) The viewer may be given a great deal of information at once and become quite confused, causing them to abandon hope of unraveling the plot and placing their trust in the narrator instead (Ferenz).

Overloading the viewer with information and proceeding at a great pace discourages viewers from decoding the clues vital to exposing an unreliably narrated text. Therefore, pace is crucial to retaining the viewer's trust in an unreliably narrated text.

The identification of lies and imaginary sequences is another factor common to all three texts which contributes to misleading the viewer. In *The Usual Suspects*, several of

Kint's statements or stories are revealed to have been distortions, omissions or outright lies in the course of the narrative. Kujan pressures Kint into admitting that Keyser Söze had been involved in the affair, for example, to Kint's obvious annoyance. Later, Kujan extracts a confession from Kint. It appears that Kujan discovers all of Kint's untruths in the end, which lulls the viewer into a false sense of security and makes the final plot twist all the more unexpected. *Fight Club* employs a more advanced form of this exposure in what amounts to a narrative double-bluff. The narrator occasionally imagines sequences, such as stepping into the ice cave, a mid-air collision and telling Marla off. These are subtly, but definitely, marked as being imaginary sequences. Many viewers would say that the inclusion of these scenes serves as a clue to the narrator's mental imbalance. I suggest, however, that while this may be so it is also true that the inclusion of these scenes strengthens the viewer's faith in the reliability of the narrator. If imaginary sequences are easily identifiable as being separate from the main narrative, few viewers would suspect that a large portion of the main narrative also consists of hallucination, memory loss and imagined sequences. Paradoxically, therefore, the signal of unreliability can also serve as a confirmation of the reliability of the narrator, as in this case he appears to demonstrate his ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality.

About Adam displays a rather more conservative version of this phenomenon, as like *The Usual Suspects* it relies on exposing the untruths of its chief liar to give viewers a sense of righted wrongs. In this text, however, 'the truth' is subject to constant revision as the extent of Adam's deceit is constantly expanded upon. Also, this text does not offer any one version as 'the truth', instead offering a multifaceted narrative open to interpretation. All three texts, however, offer a scapegoat in the form of an untruthful character, whether a narrator or not, who is responsible for clouding the issue of 'the truth'. The apparently clear separation of truth and lies in each of the texts deceives the reader into temporarily believing that the object of the text is to reveal 'the truth', not to conceal it until the plot twist or, more confusingly still, to offer several versions so that there is no discernible 'truth'. Therefore the inclusion and exposure of lies, untruths and imagined sequences play an important role in misleading the viewer in unreliably narrated texts.

It also appears that identity and naming play a vital role in unreliable narration. The theme of a mystery man may be common in thrillers, as the somewhat clichéd opening of *The Usual Suspects* illustrates, but it seems that even apparently mundane protagonists must be shrouded in mystery in unreliable narration. The character of Verbal Kint is an assumed identity, *Fight Club*'s narrator is leading an almost equally ambitious double life as an aspiring crime lord, and Adam's identity seems if anything less certain at the end of his text

that might have been assumed at the outset. In order to mislead a viewer, facts about the unreliable narrator must be omitted so that their real identity is not revealed; the intriguing point in unreliable narration is that unlike thrillers, these texts make no pretence of adopting a seemingly innocent, bland deceiver. Protagonists in these texts are revealed to be liars, criminals and fantasists who refuse to provide their full names or any relevant information about themselves. Verbal Kint might build up a credible character throughout the text of *The Usual Suspects*, but at the end of the text the entire character is revealed to be a fiction created by a crime lord whose own identity is a mystery. *Fight Club*'s narrator initially identifies himself through material possessions; at the end of the text only the impression of cynical wit and neuroticism with the name Tyler Durden belatedly attached to it remains. Virtually nothing can be said concretely about Adam's identity, as the impressions and accounts of each focaliser contradict one another on almost every count concerning Adam's character. It seems, therefore, that a lack of identifiability is common to the protagonists of unreliable narratives. This may appear frustrating to some viewers, yet the vagueness attached to identity and naming in this type of text adds to the air of uncertainty and ambiguity which they propagate.

Monoperspectivity also appears to play a great role in misleading viewers. Somewhat unexpectedly, perhaps, the analysis of the three films used in this thesis suggests that multi- or polyperspectively focalised texts are more reliable than those with one main focaliser. Multiperspectively focalised texts may simply appear more reliable because, in order to fit two or more versions of events into a text, the illusion of the viewing contract must be shattered earlier than in monoperspectival unreliably narrated texts. However, the inclusion of multiple focalisers and perspectives, even if they perceive mutually exclusive scenes, alert the viewer to the possibility that what they are seeing "does not really happen" the way it is shown on screen. While a viewer might accept Adam as he is focalised by Lucy, by the time Laura has contributed her version of events he and his actions will, no doubt, be viewed with increasing scepticism. Even if none of the accounts presented is accurate or reliable, each focaliser casts new aspects of the narrative into doubt. The opposite example is *Fight Club*, in which the narrator, as almost the sole focaliser, dominates the text completely. No secondary consciousness is allowed to permeate his narration or offer a different account of the events he recalls. Therefore, it seems that monoperspectivity is a key aspect of unreliability in films.

It is interesting to note that no type of camera work appears to be common to unreliably narrated texts. The camera operates in radically different ways in each of these texts. In *The Usual Suspects*, it protects Keyser Soze's identity and faithfully portrays Kint's

version of events. In *Fight Club*, it appears to be controlled by the pseudo-diegetic narrator, as it shows events as he first perceived them intermittently blended with events as they “actually happened”. In *About Adam*, it portrays extreme focalisation and uses different angles to withhold or relinquish visual information. However, the cutting process is certainly vital to unreliably narrated texts. The climax of *The Usual Suspects* uses deceptive cutting to suggest that Kint is on the pier listening to and watching the murders on board. A similar technique is used in *Fight Club* to suggest that the narrator is busy downstairs while Tyler disports himself with Marla upstairs. In this case, the sound track of one scene is essentially superimposed on the image track of another. In *About Adam*, relevant parts of scenes are frequently omitted until a later account includes them. In short, therefore, unconventional cutting techniques may help to persuade the viewer to perceive events happening in a certain way. This finding agrees with another point on the suggested list:

- 2) Conventional cinematic techniques are used to signify different things in unreliably narrated texts. The viewer does not become immediately suspicious but later questions the conventional reading of texts (Warth, Koebner).

Finally, it must be said that the viewing contract appears to exert great influence over the way that films are written and watched. The instances in which *About Adam* and *The Usual Suspects* can be proven to show events which “did not really happen” in the fictional world are scarce indeed. These scenes are later shown to have been ambiguous or are simply cast into doubt, they are not directly and definitely contradicted. *Fight Club* is the text which consistently violates the viewing contract by filming a character who doesn’t physically exist. It can be no coincidence that *Fight Club* is also the one text which refuses to commit to any kind of identification. Its narrator cannot be named until the last quarter of the text, and even then his name might be assumed. He also declines to name the company he works for or even the city in which he lives. This lack of identification suggests that the extreme violation of the viewing contract takes place outside the real world, in limbo. It seems that the contract is broken with extreme reluctance and that filmmakers would prefer to relegate this type of transgression to an otherworldly space. This precaution may be taken to avoid ‘contaminating’ reliably narrated films with the viewer’s mistrust of the camera. It appears that in order to mislead viewers successfully, therefore, if a filmmaker is going to break the viewing contract they should do so thoroughly.

In conclusion, several techniques may be used to mislead the viewer into believing an unreliably narrated text. Almost all of the theories summarized in chapter three have been

proven effective, at least to some extent, in the course of this investigation. However, narrative strategies are so diverse as to require very different reading strategies, so there can be no fixed set of techniques to temporarily deceive the viewer; instead, each unreliably narrated text appears to use a highly individual range of techniques to withhold or disguise vital information. In fact, it would be astonishing if there were certain techniques which were always employed, as their use would rather rob these texts of their capacity to surprise. The fact that viewers appear to want to be misled by an unreliably narrated text must surely be helpful in ensuring that they are, as Hölzer suggests. However, that is an investigation for another field of study. For this thesis, it is sufficient to say that an apparently familiar script, a fast pace, a slew of information and an unidentifiable but dominant narrator appear to be the key ingredients to successfully misleading viewers. Incorporating obviously subjective sequences also appears to convince the viewer that the main body of the text is filmed objectively.

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10. Appendix

10.1. Abstract

This thesis investigates the compositional and camera techniques which allow unreliable narration to be shown on screen. The methods which filmmakers use to realise narrative techniques such as perspectivity and the inclusion of unreliability markers are examined and analysed. Perspectivity and focalisation, as well as the character of the narrators of unreliable texts are a special focus of this thesis, as the level of subjectivity of the text depends upon the extent to which it is focalised. Because the function of unreliable narration is frequently to temporarily mislead the viewer, this thesis will also determine how information can be withheld from the viewer. The techniques used must also, however, be analysed in the context of both the rhetorical and the constructivist approach. The rhetorical approach concerns the text as composed by the author and includes the creation of the ‘implied author’. The constructivist approach applies to the reception of the text by the reader or viewer and the interpretation of the narrative in accordance with the acknowledgement of literary devices used to signal unnatural narration. As most of the information in a film is transmitted visually, not verbally, the role of the camera is of particular interest. In order to investigate the realisation of unreliable narration on screen, three films which employ unreliability are discussed. Bryan Singer’s *The Usual Suspects* and David Fincher’s *Fight Club* are well known for their use of unreliable narrators; the techniques used to achieve this effect of unbalancing the viewer have been the subject of some academic discussion. With the aid of a third film, Gerard Stembridge’s *About Adam*, this thesis is intended to help bridge the apparent gap in the field of narratological research which has so far failed to state just how and why the viewer can be deceived by the medium of film.

Deutsche Kurzfassung

Diese Arbeit erforscht die Techniken des Drehbuchs und der Kamera welche die Verfilmung von unzuverlässig erzählten Texten erlauben. Die Methoden die Filmmacher verwenden um Erzähltechniken wie Perspektivität und die Einbeziehung von Unzuverlässigkeitssignalen zu realisieren werden untersucht und analysiert. Perspektivität und Fokalisierung sowie die Persönlichkeit des unzuverlässigen Erzählers sind für diese Arbeit besonders bedeutend, weil das Ausmaß der Subjektivität des Texts von dem Fokalisierungsgrad abhängt. Da es eine

Hauptfunktion des unzuverlässigen Erzählens ist den Zuschauer zu täuschen wird diese Arbeit auch erforschen wie ein Film Informationen vorenthalten kann. Diese Methoden müssen aber auch im Kontext der rhetorischen und konstruktivistischen Theorien analysiert werden. Der rhetorische Denkansatz betrachtet den Text wie er von dem Schriftsteller kreiert wird und bezieht daher auch den ‚impliziten Autor‘ ein. Die konstruktivistische Herangehensweise betrifft die Rezeption und Interpretation der Narrative durch den Leser oder Zuschauer durch Wahrnehmung der im Text vorhandenen Unzuverlässigkeitssignale. Da ein Großteil der Information in einem Film statt verbal visuell übermittelt wird ist die Rolle der Kamera von besonderem Interesse. Um die Realisierung von unzuverlässiger Erzählung im Film zu erforschen werden drei unzuverlässig erzählte Filme untersucht. Bryan Singers *The Usual Suspects* und David Finchers *Fight Club* sind aufgrund ihrer unzuverlässigen Erzähler weithin bekannt, wobei die Techniken die verwendet werden um den Zuschauer irrezuführen schon in akademischen Kreisen diskutiert worden sind. Diese Arbeit soll mit Hilfe eines dritten Films, Gerard Stembridges *About Adam*, die offensichtliche Lücke in der narratologischen Forschung schließen, die bisher noch nicht festgestellt hat, wie und warum der Zuschauer vom Medium Film getäuscht werden kann.

10.2. Curriculum Vitae

Personal data

Name: Patricia Moises

Born in 1992 in Linz, Austria

Citizenship: Austrian and British

Education

1998 - 2002	Primary school Linz Harbach
2002 - 2010	Linz International School Auhof (LISA)
2010 – 2013	BA English and American Studies at the University of Vienna
2010 - 2015	“Lehramt” Englisch/Geschichte, Sozialkunde und Politische Bildung at the University of Vienna
2013 – present	Anglophone Literatures and Cultures (MA) at the University of Vienna

Qualifications

- “Matura (mit ausgezeichnetem Erfolg)” – Austrian A-levels (with distinction)
- International Baccalaureate (IB) with emphasis on English, German and History
- English and American Studies (BA)
- Mag. phil. Englisch/Geschichte – teaching degree in English and History at grammar school level

Language skills

English (mother tongue)

German (fluent)

French (advanced)

Spanish (basic)

Latin (“kleines Latinum” – very basic)