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## Enjoy your fight! - "Fight Club" as a symptom of the Network Society<sup>[1]</sup>

### Bülent Diken & Carsten Bagge Laustsen

September 2001

How is it that all the examples of lines of flight ... turn out so badly?

(Deleuze & Parnet 1987: 140)

*Fight Club*, David Fincher's recent film, poses significant questions about "microfascism": the heterogeneous, subterranean "other" of political theory that, in spite of public denial, persists in the network society as sexism, racism, hooliganism, fundamentalism and other "passionate attachments".

*Fight Club*'s protagonist, Jack (Edward Norton), is mobile: he has a career, travels in the space of flows, and fully but reflexively participates in consumerism. He is constantly on the move, yet his attitude toward his environment is blasé. As a spectator of his own life, he paradoxically lives in inertia in the midst of a mobile network society. Jack also suffers from insomnia, a typical pathology of the hyper-mobile network society. But, finding his pain negligible, his doctor does not want to give him sleeping pills: "You want to see pain? Swing by Meyer High on a Tuesday night and see the guys with testicular cancer." Jack does as the doctor says. Trying several therapy groups as a "tourist", he shares others' pain, which works as catharsis. He then starts to visit different self-help groups every day. In one of the groups he meets Marla (Helena B. Carter), the femme fatale who is to change his life. The real change, however, follows when the protagonist meets his *doppelgänger*, Tyler Durden (Brad



Pitt), the embodiment of a colourful and dynamic contrast to Jack himself, his messianic alter-ego. One day Tyler asks Jack to hit him as hard as possible. Jack hits him and Tyler returns the favour. After repetitive fights, fighting becomes an addiction. They are exhilarated by violence and through fighting they discover the corporeality of their existence.

The most powerful twist in the film is when it becomes obvious that Jack is in fact schizophrenic, that Tyler is a product of his fantasy. Tyler thus materializes Jack's unconscious wishes. Together, Jack/Tyler creates a Fight Club: a secret, fraternity-like, rhizomatic group, open to males only. It functions as a line of flight from the stratified society. Through perversion and transgression, Fight Club aims at a critique of capitalism. Yet, in spite of a deterritorializing start, Fight Club ends up transforming into a fascist organization with a new name: Project Mayhem. Violence is now turned outwards, which culminates in a plan for "organized" terror to undermine the foundations of the consumerist society. Thus, Fight Club oscillates between liberation and servitude, between escape from society and micro-fascism. Indeed, it is as if in Fight Club everything subversive turns out to be repressive: Fight Club is a comedy of subversion. The emerging question is whether and in what ways the *critique* of capitalism, based on the idea of subversion, nomadism and so on, still can hold in network society. What if micro-fascism itself constitutes a subversive line of flight, a question which preoccupied Bataille and Deleuze? What happens to the idea/project of subversion when power goes nomadic in the network society? And what if the idea of subversion is accommodated by the "new spirit of capitalism" that thrives well in aesthetic forms of justification based on inspiration and creativity (Boltanski & Chiapello 1999)? Is it, still, possible and feasible to say "More perversion!" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 321), when perversion has already become a big business? Fight Club accentuates such global questions.

### Capital and its subterranean other

"The first rule of Fight Club is: you do not speak about Fight Club. The second rule of Fight Club is: you–do–not–speak–about–Fight–Club!" Yet, of course, prohibition is an invitation to transgress the rule: go and tell about Fight Club, but treat this knowledge as a dirty secret that unites "us", the community of sworn brothers! Fight Club knows well that it cannot exist without secrecy, that, if transgression becomes all too obvious, its attraction would disappear: there is no social order without an obscene supplement, and no social bond without a dark, invisible downside. The heterogeneous supplement does not negate a given order but, rather, as Fight Club demonstrates, serves as its positive condition of possibility.

Does not the downside of the social bond today often materialize itself in "explosive communities" (Bauman 2000: 193), in arenas for acting out perverted scenarios, finding its form and expression in sexism, racism, ethnic passions and so on? Such forms of sociality are based on acting out certain fantasy scenarios, which are definitely not only a subtext to their public roles. In the context of Fight Club, no Jack without a Tyler Durden! The normalised and law abiding subject is haunted by a spectral double, by a subject that materializes the will to transgress the law in perverse enjoyment. Thus Tyler, Jack's ghostly double, says to him: "You were looking for a way to change your life. You could not do it on your own ... I look like you want to look. I fuck like you want to fuck. I'm smart and capable, and most importantly, I'm free in all the ways you're not".

If the subject, as Freud claims, internalizes social norms through a superego, one should add that this superego itself is split in two distinct but interrelated figures of the law, between the two figures of the father. First, the father of the law, of the symbolic order, castrating the subject through the law and language, and second, the obscene father commanding no less than transgression and enjoyment. Whereas the first authority simply prohibits, "Don't!", the latter says: "You may!" (Žižek 2000: 132). Because the transgressor needs a law to transgress, and because the law is not destroyed but rather confirmed though the act of transgression, any attempt at balancing these two functions is doomed to be fragile. And an important tendency of the contemporary society, be it the "network society" (Castells 1996) of deterritorialized flows or the detraditionalized, reflexive "risk society" (Beck 1993), is the disturbance of this fragile balance. We are witnessing the demise of symbolic efficiency, or, the fall of the father (Žižek 1999: 322-334). Socially produced risks are unpredictable, and



since there is no master in charge, which can reduce complexity, social spheres are “increasingly ‘colonized’ by reflexivity” (Ibid. 336). Things are to be decided upon without a symbolic authority, without somebody who “really knows” (the big Other) and can bear the burden of choosing. Foucault’s disciplinary society was about reproduction of power through “strategies without subject”. Today we are confronted with the exact opposite situation, subjects caught in the consequences of their actions without a master that regulates their interactions (Ibid. 340).

The de-traditionalized, increasingly reflexive individuals no longer have ready-made symbolic authorities, and they complain, as does Tyler in *Fight Club*, “we are a generation of men raised by women”. He never “knew his father” (Palahniuk 1997: 49). In the social space within which *Fight Club* emerges there is no father, only a ruse of signs, an experience of a smooth space without symbolic hierarchies. A place no longer determined by the law and tradition or by the solidity of a habitus. What follows is the burden of reflexivity as one has to choose one’s place in the social, because identity is no longer a matter of occupying an already given subject position. Hence one desperately searches for a true identity, tries to find an objective correlate to being. “I loved my life. I loved my condo. I loved every stick of furniture. That was my whole life. Everything—the lamps, the chairs, the rugs—were me. The dishes were me. The plants were me. The television was me”.

This “friction-free”, smooth space is of course the space of contemporary capitalism, of flows. What is often overlooked is that in this social space fantasies are violated, not because they are forbidden but because they are not. Today fantasies are subsumed under capital, and a market for the extreme and the perverted is growing. In our post-Oedipal era, the paradigmatic mode of subjectivity is the “polymorphously perverse” subject that follows the command to enjoy; no longer the Oedipal subject integrated into the symbolic order through castration (Žižek 1999: 248). If, in the reflexive society, the symbolic father of the uncompromising “No!” is in retreat, the void is filled with either ersatz authorities (e.g. ethical committees) or authorities that make transgression or perversion of the Law a rule in the service of enjoyment. Thus, the standard situation of the disciplinary subject is reversed: “we no longer have the public Order of hierarchy, repression and severe regulation, subverted by the secret acts of liberating transgression ... on the contrary, we have public social relations among free and equal individuals, where the ‘passionate attachment’ to some extreme form of strictly regulated domination and submission becomes the secret transgressive source of libidinal satisfaction, the obscene supplement to the public sphere of freedom and equality” (Žižek 1999: 345). The problem of authority today is not that of the symbolic authority that forbids enjoyment but that of the superego, of the obscene authority that enjoins one to enjoy. This is a scenario in which transgression does not result in freedom but in new, and even more rigid, authority structures.

The distinction between societies of discipline and societies of control, in which power goes nomadic, is illuminating here. Deleuze claims that capitalism is no longer characterized by panoptic, place-bounded discipline forcing people to overtake given subject positions, but by a permanent movement, in which the subject is always in a state of becoming. “Control”, he says, “is short-term and rapidly shifting, but at the same time continuous and unbounded, whereas discipline was long-term, infinite and discontinuous” (Deleuze 1995: 181). If the geography of discipline worked in terms of fixed points or positions, control operates in terms of mobility, speed, flexibility, anonymity and contingent identities, in terms of “the whatever” (Hardt 1998: 32). The symptom of control society is the collapse of the institutional walls: not that discipline ends with the deterritorialization of institutions. Rather, discipline, now freer than ever from territorial constraints, has become more immanent to the social field (Hardt & Negri 2000). In control society subjectivity is “produced simultaneously by numerous institutions in different combinations and doses”; hence social space tends to lose its delimitation: one “is factory worker outside the factory, student outside the school, inmate outside prison, insane outside the asylum—all at the same time. It belongs to no identity and all of them—outside the institutions but even more intensely ruled by their disciplinary logics” (Hardt & Negri 2000: 331-2). This unfinished, constantly mutating status of everything does not bring with it freedom, but control, which corresponds to the immanent, axiomatic logic of capital.



Capitalism does no longer function according to the discourse of the master (Žižek 1999: 373). Control is not given by castration, that is, by a restriction of the subject's ability to move and to act, by a limitation in being. It pertains to flows; the universe of capitalism is immanent, infinite, without an end. As *Fight Club* says, living in it is like living in "The IBM Stellar Sphere, The Philip Morris Galaxy, Planet Starbucks". The source of anxiety in this open, smooth space is not lack of being; rather, too much pseudo-freedom, e.g. freedom to consume. "[T]he anxiety generated by the risk society is that of a superego: what characterizes the superego is precisely the absence of a 'proper measure'—one obeys its commands not enough / or too much; whatever one does, the result is wrong and one is guilty. The problem with the superego is that it can never be translated into a positive rule to be followed" (Žižek 1999: 394). Thus, permitted enjoyment—You may!—turns into the prescriptive enjoyment—You must!—(Žižek 2000: 133). In other words, the demise of the symbolic authority does in no way imply the demise of authority as such, and herein lies the paradox of the theory of reflexivity, its blindness to the (re)emerging non-symbolic forms of authority. The paradox of postmodern individuality: the injunction to be oneself, to realize one's creative potential, results in the exact opposite, that is, the feeling of the inauthenticity of all acts. No act, no commodity is really it. My "inner being" is not expressed that way, either (Ibid. 22-23). Extreme individuality reverts to its opposite, causing the subject experience to be uncertain and faceless, changing from mask to mask, trying to fill the void behind the mask by shifting between idiosyncratic hobbies (Žižek 1999: 373).

### Undoing the social bond

Enter Jack's life in a rigidly segmented modern society. He is a white, male, middle-class member of generation X, "a slave to the IKEA nesting instinct". His cry is loud and clear: "my life just seemed too complete.... Deliver me from Swedish furniture. Deliver me from clever art.... May I never be content. May I never be complete. May I never be perfect. Deliver me" (Palahniuk 1997: 46, 52).

Enter Deleuze and Guattari: "We are segmented from all around and in every direction.... Dwelling, getting around, working, playing: life is spatially and socially segmented" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 209). The "social" is segmented in two ways simultaneously: one molar/rigid, the other molecular/supple. *Masses or flows*, with their molecular segmentarity (based on mutations, deterritorialization, connections, and accelerations) are different from classes or solids, with their rigid segmentarity (binary organization, resonance, overcoding). *Rhizomatic flow* versus rigid structure, lines versus points/positions, micropolitics versus macropolitics: a qualitative distinction, not between "society" (macro) and the individual or mass phenomena (micro), but between the molar and the molecular segments, both traversing the "social" and the "individual" at the same time. The two different segmentarities "are inseparable, they overlap, they are entangled.... Every society, and every individual, are thus plied by both segmentarities simultaneously.... every politics is simultaneously a *macropolitics* and *micropolitics*" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 213). There is always something that flows, that escapes from social segmentation. Every creative potential, and every profound movement in society, originates from "escape", not from antagonisms or contradictions between rigid segments (Ibid. 220). "What matters is to break through the wall" (Ibid. 277).

*Fight Club* is constructed along a line of flight in the Deleuzian sense. Its lines of flight are attempts to escape segmentarity, be it molar or molecular, to disorganize the social bond. It is "only after you lose everything ... that you're free to do anything.... We have to break everything to make something better out of ourselves" (Palahniuk 1997: 70, 52). *Fight Club* seeks to attain a Body without Organs, the zero-degree of symbolic difference, an undifferentiated body with no face, no privileged zones and forms: "a chaos so perfect, so pure, so complete that in it all differences, all articulations are effaced. Pure chaos, the undifferentiated reality" (Callinicos 1982: 95). Complete destratification. With *Bataille* its principle is "expenditure", with Deleuze and Guattari "antiproduction", a universal tendency co-existing with exchange and production. *Fight Club* wants to "go back to zero". "The answer is not improvement but destruction, including self-destruction" (Palahniuk 1997: 49).



In his *Programme* from 1936 and his analysis of fascism, Bataille concludes that there is much the Left can learn from the organizational forms of fascism (Bataille 1997, 1997b; Sørensen 2001). “Assume the function of destruction and decomposition.... Take part in the destruction of the existing world... Fight for the decomposition ... of all communities...” (Bataille 1997: 121). *Fight Club*, too, seeks “a prematurely induced dark age<sup>1/4</sup>. The complete and right-away destruction of civilization.” (Palahniuk 1997: 125). Bataille had argued that it is necessary to affirm the “value of violence” and “to take upon oneself perversion and crime” (1997: 121); and *Fight Club*, again, violently lifts the curse: “yes, you’re going to have to kill someone<sup>1/4</sup>. No excuses and no lies<sup>1/4</sup>. You are the same decaying organic matter as everyone else” (Palahniuk 1997: 125, 134). *Fight Club* wants the whole world to “hit the bottom” (Ibid. 123). Echoing the French *nouveaux philosophes*, especially the Situationist manifesto, it especially attacks the society of spectacle. “Fight club isn’t about words ... Fight club is not football on television. You aren’t watching a bunch of men you don’t know halfway around the world beating on each other live by satellite with a two-minute delay” (Ibid. 50, 51). *Fight Club* is about street fights, urban anarchism, and strategies of subversion.

“Realize ... the irony of the animal world”, continues Bataille’s *Programme* (1997: 121). In his imagination, Jack walks up the entrance of a cave and out comes a penguin. “Slide”, it says, smiling. “Without any effort, we slid through tunnels and galleries” (Palahniuk 1997: 20). It is no coincidence that the social space, in which Jack/penguin “slides”, is a smooth social space. Losing the social bond is freedom, and in this sense *Fight Club* is a Deleuzian “war machine”, a free assemblage oriented along a line of flight out of the repressive social machinery. It is that which cannot be contained in the striated, rigidly segmented social space; it consists of flows (speed), operates in a smooth space, and unties the social bond (codes) in multiplicity (mass-phenomena). In this respect “war”, or “fight”, is the surest mechanism against social organization: “just as Hobbes saw clearly that the State was against war, so war is against the State, and makes it impossible” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 357). It is crucial in this context that Deleuze and Guattari recognize a war machine as an assemblage that has as its object not war—war is only “the supplement” of the war machine—but the constitution of a creative line of flight, a smooth space. War is simply “a social state that wards off the State” (Ibid. 417). In this sense, violence is *Fight Club*’s supplement, not necessarily its object; *Fight Club* is above all a social state that wards off “society”. *Fight Club* proliferates in, or even better, constructs a nomadic social space without zones, centres, segments: a flattened space, in which one can “slide” through connections: “and” ... “and” ... “and”. Lines rather than points; connection rather than conjugation. *Fight Club* does not have a fixed spatiality, a permanent address; it grows like a rhizome, thorough discontinuous jumps. And temporally, it “exists only in the hours between when fight club starts and when fight club ends” (Palahniuk 1997: 48).

*Fight Club* is a film about mobility and mobilization. However, it depicts mobility as a paradoxical topic. “You wake up at Air Harbor International.... You wake up at O’Hare. You wake up at LaGuardia. You wake up at Logan.... you wake up and have to ask where you are.... You wake up, and you’re nowhere” (Ibid. 25, 33). Jack’s extreme geographical mobility leads to “inertia” à la Virilio’s theory (2000). Yet *Fight Club*’s nomadism is not (only) geographical mobility. It is, rather, a nomadism in the Deleuzian sense, which is related to *deviation*, however slowly, from fixation and linear movement (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 371). It is by staying non-socialized, by deviation, and not necessarily by physical movement, that the nomad creates his own space. That is, *Fight Club*’s nomadism is also spiritual: “keep moving, never stop moving, motionless voyage, desubjectification” (1987: 159). A sort of metaphysical mobility, a schizophrenic connectionism, in search of new possibilities that are to (be)come. “Let the chips fall where they may”, says *Fight Club*.

As a whole, the film *Fight Club* constantly makes use of a schizo-logic. For instance, the motif of “decomposition” throughout the movie is a double reference to the post-structuralist French philosophy and to post-apocalyptic primitivism à la *The Planet of the Apes* and *12 Monkeys*. The film is both a commercial blockbuster and a critique of consumer society. It demonstrates both modernist techniques (e.g. flashbacks-in-flashbacks, Brechtian epic cuts in which the narrator directly addresses the audience by breaking dramatic illusions, and so on) and pop-art. It is simultaneously loaded with motifs of the Christ (e.g. fights take place in parking lots and basements as the early Christian meetings in caves) and Nietzschean motifs of the anti-



Christ. It refers both to the Frankfurt style pessimism/elitism (may I never be content, deliver me from...) and mass movement (fascism), and so on. *Fight Club* is both violence and comedy, both popular culture and avantgarde art, both philosophy and pop-philosophy at the same time, in the same schizophrenic package. As a commentator put it, "for all its revolutionary, fuck-it-up fervor *Fight Club's* dirty little secret is it's one of the best comedies of the decade. Forget the blood, the explosions, the Nietzschean verbal jousting, the weird gender mutation ... this is some funny, subversive stuff" (Savlov 2000).

### Microfascism

Lines of flight, emphasise Deleuze and Guattari, are neither good nor bad in themselves; they are open-ended processes. There is not a dichotomy between schizophrenia and paranoia, between the rhizome and the tree, between the strata and lines of flight. And then it is not enough to be against the strata, to oppose the strata (organization) and the lines of flight (becoming body without organs) to one another. Lines of flight have their own dangers, which are interesting in relation to *Fight Club*.

The first danger is that a line of flight can become re-stratified: in the fear of complete destratification, rigid segmentation and segregation may seem attractive. Whenever a line of flight is stopped by an organization, institution, interpretation, a black hole, etc., a "reterritorialization" takes place. In spite of the fact that *Fight Club* makes a mockery of an "illusion of safety" in the beginning, its line of flight is followed by reterritorialization. It evolves into a *project*, Project Mayhem. Becoming a "bureaucracy of anarchy" (Palahniuk 1997: 119), Project Mayhem is the point at which *Fight Club* reterritorializes as "the paranoid position of the mass subject, with all the identifications of the individual with the group, the group with the leader, and the leader with the group" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 34). In comparison with *Fight Club*, Project Mayhem is centralised around Jack/Tyler who gives the multiplicity of lines of escape a resonance. Methods change too: "We have to show these men and women freedom by enslaving them, and show them courage by frightening them" (Ibid. 149). The new rules are: "you don't ask questions"; "you have to trust Tyler", and so on (Ibid. 125). *Fight Club* was a gang, Project Mayhem is more like an army. *Fight Club* produces a microcosm of the affections of the rigid: it deterritorializes, massifies, but only in order to stop deterritorialization, to invent new territorializations.

The second danger of the line of flight, which is less obvious but more interesting is "clarity". Clarity arises when one attains a perception of the molecular texture of the "social", when the holes in it are revealed. What used to be compact and whole seems now to be leaking, a texture that enables de-differentiations, overlappings, migrations, hybridizations. Clarity emerges with the transformation of *Fight Club* into Project Mayhem. "Everything is nothing, and it's cool to be enlightened" (Palahniuk 1997: 64). Clarity is also the reason why *Fight Club* fascinates its members. In this sense, *Fight Club* does not only reproduce the dangers of the rigid in a miniature scale; it is *microfascism*. "Instead of the great paranoid fear, we are trapped in a thousand little monomanias, self-evident truths, and clarities that gush from every black hole and no longer form a system, but are only rumble and buzz, blinding lights giving any and everybody the mission of self-appointed judge, dispenser of the justice, policeman, neighbourhood SS man" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 228).

Interestingly, whereas the movie clearly makes a self-reflexive mockery of Project Mayhem in the context of the first danger (macrofascism), the aspects of *Fight Club* that do not resonate in Project Mayhem (that is, its microfascist aspects) escape its ironic perspective. It seems as if the movie assumes that power predominantly pertains to molar lines. But lines of flight are not exempted from power relations, and there is a microfascism in *Fight Club* that cannot be confined to Project Mayhem. It is in this context remarkable that *Fight Club* operates as a deterritorialized line of flight, as a war machine that is violently opposed to the state; its members are not merely the Oedipalized paranoiacs of the capitalist state order. Its microfascism can be understood best as a transgressive delirium. "What makes fascism dangerous is its molecular or micropolitical power, for it is a mass movement", a proliferation of molecular interactions, "skipping from point to point, before beginning to resonate together in the National Socialist State" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 214-5). If Project Mayhem is the ridiculous



Nazi-type organization with unreflexive skinheads who just repeat Tyler's orders, Fight Club is the molecular face of fascism.

The third danger: a line of flight can lose its creative potentials and become a line of death. This is precisely what happens in Fight Club: "the line of flight crossing the wall, getting out of the black holes, but instead of connecting with other lines and each time augmenting its valence, *turning to destruction, abolition pure and simple, the passion for abolition*" (1987: 229). In fact, fascism is the result of an intense line of flight that becomes a line of death, wanting self-destruction and "death through the death of others" (Ibid. 230). A line of flight that desires its own repression. The point at which escape becomes a line of death is the point at which war (destruction) becomes the main object of the war machine rather than its supplement. Fight Club, transforming into Project Mayhem, becomes an instrument of pure destruction and violence, of complete destratification, a war machine that has war as its object. In other words, the regression to the undifferentiated or complete disorganization is as dangerous as transcendence and organization. Tyler, the alluring and charismatic, the free-wheeling pervert of Fight Club, is as dangerous as society. If there are two dangers, the strata and complete destratification, suicide, Fight Club fights only the first. Therefore a relevant question, never asked by microfascists, is whether it is not "necessary to retain a minimum of strata, a minimum of forms and functions, a minimal subject from which to extract materials, affects, and assemblages" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 270). The test of desire is not denouncing false desires but distinguishing between that which pertains to the strata, complete destratification, and that which pertains to line of flight, a test, which Fight Club does not pass (Ibid. 165). Let's qualify this point by investigating the way the logic of the cut works in the film.

### The cut

In insomnia Jack feels nothing real. Everything seems distant and far away. Everything is like "a copy of a copy of a copy". Merely following a career and striving for unnecessary commodities are felt as a sign of lack of "real" experience. Much action takes place, but never a genuine act. Life passes by. "We're virgins. Neither one of us has ever been hit". Fight Club is not merely about physical pain; physical pain is sublated into affirmative joy. Through physical pain a sublime body arises: a living body. Fighting is a way to be hit by life. "You weren't alive anywhere like you were alive at fight club."

Our central concern in this context is the way Fight Club's depiction of the lack of real life experience juxtaposes the body and words. "Fight club isn't about words". Fighting is not communication; it is not, for instance, a way of saying: I hate you, I want to destroy you. In fact, the members of Fight Club are solipsists: they only feel the pain in their own bodies. Tyler is, one is tempted to say, wrong, when he stresses that after a few nights in Fight Club men are hardened like wood. The aim is not to become immune towards pain but to live through it. Being hit and feeling pain is a way to reconquer life. The practice of Fight Club invokes a life with scars. "I don't want to die without any scars".

Why the body and why scars? The body is that which is not just a "copy of a copy of a copy". And it is *my* body. However, one should also stress capitalism as a background for such practices. If capitalism is given by the logic of accumulation, the production of still more goods, the reaction must necessarily take the form of a useless expenditure: potlach, destruction, or senseless pain. "Self-improvement is masturbation. Self-destruction is the answer", in Fight Club's terminology. The answer to a one-eyed universe driven by a utilitarian logic is destruction. Furthermore, the scar on the body is lasting. It cannot be changed like clothes or like postmodern life forms can. If the experience has disappeared, bodily harm offers an experience of life (and death). Through fighting, fighters feel the finality of life, and life itself.

The relationship between the body, pain and existence is however more complicated. We witness in Fight Club a gradual process of sublation of pain. First, when Jack visits different self-help groups, pain is experienced through sharing others' pain, at a safe distance. Then it is recognized that the other's pain basically mirrors one's own, that one does not need the other and his pain at all. Later in the film, pain is sublated into terror when it is recognized that the solipsism of pain has the capitalist system as its frame. To cure one's pain one needs to



demolish the system that creates it, which is the purpose of Project Mayhem. Yet, when the direction of violence changes from inwards to outwards, it becomes a hard task to distinguish between fascism and benevolent terror. Both are carried out for the sake of a greater cause. The difference is the subject serving as the agent of violence. Does the subject heroically accept its role as a vanishing mediator? Does the revolutionary act transform the subject? Or, does it lay the ground for a regime of terror sustained by an unchanged subject?

The crucial shift between the four forms of violence identified so far is the one from inward pain to outward terror. It is a change from subject to cause. Or better, it is a question whether the real of pain is inscribed in the imaginary or the symbolic order. In the first, pain seeks to “harden” a *subject*; in the latter, it has as its goal to install a new community. To clarify this difference, let’s investigate the different rites of initiation described in the film. What is the difference between the scars obtained through fighting in *Fight Club*, and the scars burned on the right hand of the space monkeys? What is the logic of the cut? The first cut has, as mentioned before, the wish to escape from the imaginary simulacra dominating our society (Salecl 1998: 159-160). Mutilation of the body is a way of creating the body as a work of art. Piercing and tattooing are other similar techniques for the same purpose. What is crucial to remember is that it is a cut on my body, a way through which I feel my existence. The cut does not mark an inclusion in a society, but rather a movement away from it, it is narcissistic, signalling that I can do whatever I want to my body. My body is my possession.

In this sense, *Fight Club* remains within the confines of what it criticises. It criticises capitalism for reducing everything to imaginary simulacra, but paradoxically it is entrapped within the imaginary register itself. Tyler is a soap expert. The best soap is made from human fat because the balance of salt is just right, he claims. Jack and Tyler steal fat from a liposuction clinic with the sign: *Body Sculpting Clinic*. The inter-textual references are here dense. Producing soap from human fat is of course a reference to a Nazi practice; as Tyler puts it, “I make and sell soap - a yardstick for civilization”. At the same time, as a critique of capitalism, fat refers to greed, to useless consumption. “We were selling rich women their own fat.” The irony is that the fat is stolen from a body sculpting clinic. But isn’t *Fight Club* also about a sculpting of the body, creating oneself as a work of art? Does self-creation not in this case mirror what it attempts to criticise? The postmodern cut is different from the traditional one:

the traditional cut ran in the direction *from the Real to the Symbolic*, while the postmodern cut runs in the opposite direction, *from the symbolic to the Real*. The aim of the traditional cut was to inscribe the symbolic form on the raw flesh, to ‘gentrify’ raw flesh, to mark its inclusion into the big Other, its subjection to it; the aim of postmodern sado-maso practices of bodily mutilation is, rather, the opposite one - to guarantee, to give access to the ‘pain of existence’, the minimum of the bodily Real in the universe of symbolic simulacra. In other words, the function of today’s ‘postmodern’ cut in the body is to serve not as the mark of symbolic castration but, rather, as its exact opposite: to designate the body’s resistance against submission to the socio-symbolic Law. (Žižek 1999: 372)

Another way to approach the problem of the postmodern cut is to focus on the notion of masochism. Obviously, the practice of *Fight Club* is masochistic. As Salecl reminds us, the masochist is the executioner of his own law. But this law is not that of the symbolic but that of the imaginary. A masochist is the one who longs for the cut of castration. He wishes to feel the pressure of the law, and hence accepts to install it himself. Since for the masochist castration is not completed, that is, the symbolic is not fully operative, in his rituals of torture the masochist stages castration, trying to operationalise the law. But he finds “enjoyment in the punishment imposed by the law that he himself establishes. Since he lacks the symbolic prohibition, the masochist becomes his own executioner.” (Salecl 1998: 156). It is important to note that the fundamental fantasy of masochism is one of identity, of existence (Žižek 1999: 281). It is a version of Descartes’ doxa for tough men: *I hurt, therefore I am*. Indeed, one of the major sequences of the film is the scene that reveals that Jack is in fact fighting himself (that Tyler is his own creation).

The scars obtained in *Fight Club* is however not the only example of the cut in the film. One day, producing soap at home, Tyler kisses Jack’s hand and puts some lye on it. Lye and water makes a chemical reaction whereupon the substance rises up to two hundred degrees.



Such a burn is of course a source of terrible pain and it does leave a scar. Yet, we do not see any trace of pleasure in Jack's face during this act, neither is this related to masochism or sadism. It is a cut of another kind. Later in the film, in *Project Mayhem* we find out that all members have a burn like Jack's on their right hands. This wound, remembered by any and every member, marks the membership of a community. It signals that one has passed through an initiation ritual. The passage regarding the question of whether the real of the cut is inscribed in the imaginary or in the symbolic reflects a change in the structure of *Fight Club* too: from being a rhizomatic structure it is now transformed into a stratified, segmented structure.

Regarding the cut, Elias' description of the practice of duelling resembles *Fight Club*. In *Germans*, Elias (1997) argues that duels were constitutive of the German upper class. Of course one was born into this social strata, yet membership still had to be confirmed, which took place through duelling, with a visible cut on the flesh as a mark of membership. Upper class men would never fight lower classes. Importantly, the duel had to be kept secret; what mattered to show was the scar itself, a proof of the willingness to risk death. Fighting was forbidden and hence sublimated as a transgression of a rule as is the case with *Fight Club*. The crucial difference between the duel and fighting in *Fight Club*, however, is that in the duel the scar marked a membership of a social strata, whereas *Fight Club* is more a mass phenomenon until it is transformed into *Project Mayhem*. In this respect, *Fight Club* is the undifferentiated mass resembling Canetti's "crowd" (1996), while *Project Mayhem* is internally stratified in line with Freud's "mass" (1976). In Freud's theory, the mass is organized like a family, it has a father, a leader or a master, and the members' being are constituted through identification with this father. Such an internal differentiation also emerges within *Fight Club* when its rules shift from commanding secrecy to obedience, when Jack/Tyler, as a Fascist leader, becomes an object of desire and of identification.

### **Fight Club as critique**

Chuck Palahniuk is celebrated as an "anti-institutional writer" (see Spear 2001: 37). At first sight *Fight Club* does not really fit into the universe of Hollywood. Indeed, publishers initially refused the first version of the book, claiming it to be too dark, too offensive and too risky. Yet, as a response, Palahniuk only took its violence to the extreme rather than toning it down: "I made it even darker and riskier and more offensive, all the things they didn't want.... And it turns out, boom—they loved it" (quoted in Tomlinson 1999). Why? Why does "more" excess sell better? Is the aesthetic critique capitalism, which *Fight Club* enjoys, really "anti-institutional", or subversive, in today's world?

It is the French *nouveaux philosophes* who most visibly opposed capitalism and power with an aesthetic critique: inspiration, perversion and transgression versus the power of inertia, paranoia and the law. Nomadism versus sedentariness; situationism versus the society of spectacle. Yet, what *Fight Club* ironically highlights once more is that lines of flight emanating from critique are open-ended and that they can be accommodated by a power which itself goes nomadic today.

In the contemporary network society real geography is to a large extent cancelled by the deterritorialized logic of flows (Virilio 2000: 8; Castells 1996). Power works according to the principle of mobility: the fast eat the slow (see Bauman 2000: 188). Ours is a "nomad capitalism" (Williams 1989: 124); it justifies itself and advertises its products also with reference to the aesthetic regime of inspiration: "Be Inspired", as Siemens says. Meanwhile, capitalists themselves boast in new ways—"I am such a nomad, I am such a tramp" (A. Roddick, the owner of *Body Shop*, quoted in Caplan 1995: 54)—and a new capitalist discourse based on metaphors of mobility is emerging in business organizations, promoting the notion of a "constant adaptive movement" and flexible organizational forms that can "go with the flow" (Thrift 1997: 38-39). In a nutshell, today "we are witnessing the revenge of nomadism over the principle of territoriality and settlement" (Bauman 2000: 13). We are today "condemned to nomadism, at the very moment that we think we can make displacement the most effective means of subversion" (Lotringer & Virilio 1997: 74). And it is increasingly becoming visible that the "new spirit of capitalism" is based on a compromise between



hitherto separated regimes of justification and critique, between the aesthetic regime of inspiration, of industry, and of the market (see Boltanski & Chiapello 1999).

Aesthetic creativity, which is related to the idea of transgressing oneself, industrialist productivity, and the market's grandeur, willingness to take risks, are no longer exclusive worlds. Boltanski and Chiapello call this new compromise "project regime", a new regime of justification and critique adjusted to network mobility whose grandeur is connectionism, always being on the move towards a new project, new ideas, living a life of simultaneous and successive projects. In this connectionist, reticular world, in which a pre-established habitus is not desirable, one "should be physically and intellectually mobile" and be able to respond to the call of "a moving world": the "grand person is mobile. Nothing must disturb his displacements" (Boltanski & Chiapello 1999: 168, 183; quoted in Albertsen & Diken 2001: 19-20).

The development of the contemporary society confirms that critique is not a peripheral activity; rather, it contributes to capitalist innovations that assimilate critique, which is constantly confronted with the danger of becoming dysfunctional. Capitalism had received mainly two forms of critique until the 1970s: the social critique from the Marxist camp (exploitation) and the aesthetic critique from the new French philosophy (nomadism). Since the 1970s capitalism has found new forms of legitimation in the artist critique, which resulted in a "transfer of competencies from leftist radicalism toward management" (Boltanski & Chiapello; quoted in Guilhot 2000: 360). Consequently, the aesthetic critique has dissolved into a post-Fordist normative regime of justification, the notion of creativity is re-coded in terms of flexibility, and difference is commercialized. This is perhaps nowhere more visible than in the production process of the movie *Fight Club* itself as an aesthetic commodity: "David [Fincher] said to me, 'You know, Chuck, we're not just selling the movie *Fight Club*. We're selling the idea of fight clubs.'" (Palahniuk quoted in Sult 1999).

Thus *Fight Club* is hardly an "anti-institutional" response to contemporary capitalism, just as creativity, perversion or transgression are not necessarily emancipatory today. Power has already evacuated the bastion *Fight Club* is attacking and it can effortlessly support *Fight Club*'s assault on sedentariness. Palahniuk says: "We really have no freedom about creating our identities, because we are trained to want what we want. What is it going to take to break out and establish some modicum of *freedom*, despite all the cultural training that's been our entire existence? It's about doing the things that are completely *forbidden*, that we are trained not to want to do" (quoted in Jenkins 1999). What Palahniuk enjoys the luxury of overseeing here is precisely that such strategies are emancipatory only in so far as power poses hierarchy exclusively through essentialism and stable binary divisions. But many of the concepts romanticised by Palahniuk's *Fight Club* find a correspondence in the network capitalism and its aesthetic Mecca, Hollywood, today.

As Deleuze and Guattari repeatedly emphasized, smooth space and nomadism do not have an irresistible revolutionary calling but change meaning drastically depending on the context (see 1987: 387). Neither mobility nor immobility are liberatory in themselves. Subversion or liberation can only be related to taking control of the production of mobility and stasis (Hardt & Negri 2000: 156). In this respect, *Fight Club*'s aesthetic critique sounds, if not cynical, naïve. Asked by CNN if he is amused by the irony that Hollywood decided to make a violent movie about anti-consumerism by spending millions of dollars, Palahniuk answers that "it seems like the ultimate absurd joke. In a way it's funnier than the movie itself" (CNN 1999). Yes, indeed, but as we tried to show there are reasons why it is so.

Palahniuk himself emphasizes *Fight Club*'s social critique. "The system is more frightened of our anti-consumerist message than they are of our violence. The violence is just an excuse to trash us" (Palahniuk in CNN interview, 1999). Right. *Fight Club* overtly takes issue with strategies of social critique too and launches an articulated critique of the contemporary society. While Marx is disregarded by much mainstream academia, his philosophy seems to reappear as a Hollywood brand. Indeed, although *Fight Club* has been called "nihilism for dummies" by some reviewers, it is perhaps more adequate to label it "marxism for dummies". Let's begin with the most basic form of social critique: the critique of commodity fetishism, of sublimation of objects that are treated as objects of desire and not as use-value. A commodity is simultaneously determined according to its use-value, its exchange-value, and its fetish- or



sign-value (that is, according to its status as an object of desire), and *Fight Club* articulates its anti-consumerist critique as a critique of exchange and fetish value with reference to use value. “Generations have been working in jobs they hate, just so they can buy what they don’t really need”. The value of what one really needs, use-value, is considered to be exterior to the consumer society. Following this, *Fight Club*’s critique takes two moves: first, it experiments with (aesthetic) sublimation of violence as an alternative to commodity fetishism, and second, it calls for a (social) *potlach* that aims at the destruction of the exchange system, at an escape from the lure of the commodity form. What both have in common is of course a search for an outside, for what is exterior to capitalism.

Regarding the first, *Fight Club* perfectly illustrates that what is threatened in contemporary society in which the aesthetic critique is increasingly accommodated by capital is sublimation itself. Not only because it is difficult to create sublime objects, but in an even more radical sense. In the contemporary society:

the very fundamental matrix of sublimation, that of the central Void, the empty (‘sacred’) place of the Thing exempted from the circuit of everyday economy, which is then filled in by a positive object that is thereby ‘elevated to the dignity of the Thing’ (Lacan’s definition of sublimation), seems to be increasingly under threat; what is threatened is the very gap between the empty Place and the (positive) element filling it in. (Žižek 2000: 26)

In the face of this threat, the strategy which *Fight Club* adopts is that of sustaining the void—“so it is as if, paradoxically, the only way to sustain the (Sacred) Place is to fill it up with trash, with an excremental abject” (Žižek 2000). Thus the “abjective” quality of violence, “the last real form of honesty” (Palahniuk quoted in Sult 1999). Seen in this way, *Fight Club* is trying to save the logic of sublimation. The problem is that the collapse of the sublimated element, violence, into the Void, that is, the destruction of the gap between the element and the void, brings with it a psychotic collapse of the symbolic order. When the Thing, or the Real, becomes directly present, the symbolic order (the impersonal set of rules that co-ordinate social existence) is destroyed, the reason why the intervention of the Real is a source of anxiety. Without sublimation, that is, *objet petit a* as a stand-in for the Real, the symbolic order is not possible; but if the gap is not sustained, “the social” disintegrates: welcome to the Real, post-Oedipal sociality of the “men raised by women”. Thus, although Palahniuk sees *Fight Club* as a “convenient, short-term psychosis” in a “consensual controlled situation” (quoted in Tomlinson 1999), the traumatic impact of violence in *Fight Club* is so strong that it cannot be located within the horizon sustained by the void of the Real. In *Fight Club* the Real is no longer absent, or present as a void, as the background of events, but is directly present (see Žižek 2000: 39).

The second strategy *Fight Club* adopts is, desperately searching for a non-consumerist domain outside capitalist exchange, heading toward a total anti-production, a *potlach*. The destruction of Jack’s perfectly appointed condo, his moving into Tyler’s dilapidated mansion on the edge of a toxic-waste dump, terrorizing the food industry, blowing up the financial buildings to sabotage the credit-card society, and so on. The ultimate aim of all this is the destruction of capitalism. Capitalism survives by sublimating commodities, transforming them into objects of desire, and *Fight Club* is obsessed by the desire to escape from the lure of the commodity form. Yet, is this desire for anti-production not the other side of the very capitalist fantasy? The reverse case of commodity fetishism is waste: the object devoid of its fetish-value; totally de-commodified and de-sublimated object, which is indeed, according to Jacques-Alain Miller, the main production of contemporary capitalism. What makes *Fight Club* postmodern is precisely the realization that all consumption artefacts will become obsolete before being used and end as waste, transforming the earth into a gigantic waste land, which is a permanent feature of the capitalist drive (see Žižek 2000: 40-41).

Waste is a sign of the growing significance of desublimation in contemporary capitalism. Herein lies also *Fight Club*’s mistake: the idea that use-value could be sustained without surplus-value production, that objects of desire would remain without their fetish value, that is, *objet petit a* (see Žižek 2000: 19, 21). *Fight Club*’s anti-consumerism is in this sense capitalism’s inherent fantasy, concealing the fact that capitalism without surplus-value production (and without surplus-enjoyment based on sublimation) is impossible. When the



object is delivered from the sublime *objet petit a*, it becomes waste. Waste produced by Fight Club itself is thus the melancholy of capitalism in so far as melancholy defines the subject's relation to objects that are deprived of their aura.

Therefore Fight Club's "sacrifice" is not subversive but supportive of capitalist desire. The paradox of Fight Club is that it makes an excess of sacrifice. It invests sacrifice itself with desire. "And it is only this desire, the very anti-desire, that is desire par excellence" (Žižek 2001: 41). Fight Club's secret is then the culmination of the fetish character of the commodity. "The opaque character of the object *a* in the imaginary fantasy determines it in its most pronounced forms as the pole of perverse desire" (Lacan; quoted in Žižek 2001: 42). If avoidance of excess itself generates an excess, "surplus enjoyment", what Lacan calls the "temptation of sacrifice" is to ascertain that there is some symbolic authority, some Other, even if it does not grant what I want (see Žižek 2001: 64-5). Enter Fight Club: "getting God's attention for being bad was better than getting no attention at all ... God's hate is better than His indifference" (Palahniuk 1997: 141). Again, Fight Club's social critique is trapped in the framework of the symbolic order.

Does the domain outside exchange, which Fight Club seeks to find, really exist in the network society? No. "There is no more outside" (Hardt & Negri 2000: 187). With the "real subsumption" of society under capital, "capital has become a world. Use value and all the other references to values and processes of valorization that were conceived to be outside the capitalist mode of production have progressively vanished" (Ibid. 386). The dialectic between "society" and "nature", the "modern" and the "primitive", the "mind" and the "drives", the "public" and the "private"... has come to an end. What we have in the contemporary society is "a non-place of politics", a spectacle, a virtual place, which is at once diffuse and unified (Ibid. 188-9). The smooth space, which is created by Fight Club, is in a sense also the space of the network society and its powers to be. Perhaps there is no topological contradiction between the *ou-topia* of the network society and the *utopia* of Fight Club. In this sense, Fight Club is the truth, or the symptom, of the reticular world.

But Fight Club is in many respects typical of contemporary social movements. The masses in the contemporary society are driven by a desire for mobility: desertion, exodus and nomadism. Whereas resistance took the form of sabotage (direct/dialectical opposition) in the disciplinary era, in the contemporary era of control, resistance takes the form of desertion (flight, battles through subtraction, defection). Indeed, the mobility of the multitude, the migration of the masses, is the new "spectre" that haunts today's reticular world (Ibid. 213-3). The new terrain of political struggle is mobility (Ibid. 214). Yet, as is the case with Fight Club, contemporary political struggles proliferate in an age of communication but they are "incommunicable". But what they tend to lose regarding extension, duration and communicability, they gain regarding intensity. "They are forced to leap vertically and touch immediately on the global level" (Ibid. 54-55). In so far as capital extends its networks, singular points of revolt tend to become more powerful: "Empire presents a superficial world, the virtual center of which can be accessed immediately from any point across the surface"; in the depthless, spectacle-ised society every point is potentially a center (Ibid. 58). Which means that, for immanent struggles *au milieu*, the desire to be against, or disobedience to authorities, is no longer an obvious notion. Palahniuk argues that "Tyler plays the devil's advocate against society.... Tyler's motivation is perhaps to be against something, anything" (in CNN 1999). Yet, being against is not enough; as is the case with Fight Club, the problem of the network society is, rather, "how to determine the enemy against which to rebel" (Hardt & Negri 2000: 211).

## Act?

How is an ethical and political act possible when there is no outside? It is relevant in this context that the narrator of Fight Club, Jack/Tyler, speaks from an impossible position, namely the position of the dead. Speaking from this phantasmatic outside, he places himself outside the symbolic order. In this sense, Fight Club exempts itself from the concrete historical context and from an actual involvement with politics. Rather than a political act, Fight Club thus seems to be a trancelike subjective experience, a kind of pseudo-Bakhtinian carnivalesque activity in which the rhythm of everyday life is only temporarily suspended.



“You know the rage is coming out some way. And if this stuff can be sort of vented in a consensual controlled situation like a fight club, I just see that as an improvement” (Palahniuk; quoted in Tomlinson 1999). *This* transgressive character accounts for the “surplus-enjoyment” Fight Club gets from excess. However, as we already pointed out, in Jack/Tyler’s suicide, there is an act in the proper sense of the word. The act differs from *action* in that it radically transforms the agent, that is why suicide the act *par excellence*. In the act, “the subject is annihilated and subsequently reborn (or not), i.e., the act involves a kind of temporary eclipse, *aphanisis*, of the subject. Which is why every act worthy of this name is ‘mad’ in the sense of radical *unaccountability*: by means of it, I put at stake everything, including myself, my symbolic identity; the act is therefore always a ‘crime,’ a ‘transgression,’ namely of the limit of the symbolic community to which I belong” (Žižek 1992: 44).

Regarding Jack’s suicide (and thus attempt at killing Tyler) it is important to delimit two kinds of sacrifice/suicide. The first aims at securing a position within the symbolic order. The second, and the more radical one, aims at the denial of this very place within the symbolic. The radical act sacrifices the sacrifice itself, condemning the actor, excluding him or her from the symbolic order. Killing himself, and thus Tyler, who is posed throughout the film as an object of desire and of identification, Jack sacrifices the social bond (Fight Club), assuming the limit-position of the impossible zero-level of symbolization. As such he is, while still alive, regarding the symbolic order already dead and excluded.

The Lacanian concept of drive is crucial in this context. Drive enables desire to break out from the framework of fantasy, which freezes the metonym of desire in fixed coordinates. It is a line of flight that escapes from a given economy of desire. In a sense, the death drive is really about life. “Dying people are so alive”, as Jack says. Yet, the death drive is also about death: it “kills” the old subject in order to give birth to a new one. The death drive is the force enabling the subject to redefine itself, and it is in this sense that “destruction makes way for the character to evolve into a better, stronger person, not so hampered by their past” (Palahniuk; quoted in PageOne 1999: 3). Here is, again, the difference between *action* (orientated toward and conditioned by the symbolic space) and an act (that destroys the symbolic space and the fantasy that sustains it). In other words, the final scene of Fight Club is not about desire or enjoyment, but about drive. Trying to commit suicide, Jack goes through fantasy. As a tragic hero he uncouples himself from the symbolic through a process of subjective destitution.

Yet, an act is not beyond the “reality principle”, rather it is an involvement with changing the very coordinates of the “reality principle”, of social reality; it is not “beyond the Good”, it redefines what is defined as “Good” (Žižek 2001: 167). In this context, one could say that Fight Club is radically critical of the dominant economy of desire, but it does not attempt a re- definition of a new, another economy: at redefinition of the value of values as well as a destruction of them. A new economy is necessary, for there is no escape from the symbolic order: there is no outside, only lines of flight, a moment of death, sacrifice, and revolution that can subvert the old economy and install a new one. Without this insight it is impossible to distinguish act and terror, flight and micro-fascism, experience of immanence and Fight Club.

for Lacan, a true act does not only retroactively change the rules of the symbolic space; it also disturbs the underlying fantasy—and here, concerning this crucial dimension, Fascism emphatically does not pass the criterion of act. Fascist ‘Revolution’ is, on the contrary, the paradigmatic case of a psydo-Event, of a spectacular turmoil destined to conceal the fact that, on the most fundamental level (that of the relations of production), *nothing really changes*.... far from disturbing/‘traversing’ the fantasy that underlies and sustains the capitalist social edifice, Fascist ideological revolution merely brings to the light the phantasmic inherent transgression of the ‘normal’ bourgeois ideological situation (the set of implicit racist, sexist, etc., ‘prejudices’ that effectively determine the activity of individuals in it, although they are not publicly recognized). (Žižek 1999: 200)

There is much action but not much act in Fight Club. It is in this respect thought-provoking that, when asked about “consumerism is bad ... but what is good?”, Palahniuk can only reply with irony: “Haha. I want to sidestep that one! Seriously, buy my book ... or better yet ... just send me gobs of money. Please don’t make me wrestle that intellectual greased pig any



more" (Palahniuk in CNN 1999). The problem with *Fight Club* is that it falls into the trap of presenting its problematique, violence, from a cynical distance. *Fight Club* is of course extremely reflexive and ironic. It can even be said that it is an irony on fascism. Thus of course it should not be taken literally. Further, does not *Fight Club* even deny its own existence?

Then a magazine editor, another magazine editor, calls me, angry and ranting because he wants to send a writer to the underground fight club in his area. 'It's cool, man,' he says from New York. 'You can tell me where. We won't screw it up.' I tell him there's no such place. There's no secret society of clubs where guys bash each other and gripe about their empty lives, their hollow careers, their absent fathers. Fight clubs are make-believe. You can't go there. I made them up. (Palahniuk 1999)

It is perhaps the case that "today's neo-Fascism is more and more 'postmodern', civilized, playful, involving ironic self-distance ... *yet no less Fascist for all that*" (Žižek 1997: 64).

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[1] The film is based on a novel by Chuck Palahniuk with the same title. Obviously, the screenwriter Jim Uhls adapted the book with considerable fidelity. In this article the quotations from the book refer to Palahniuk (1997), while the quotations from the film appear in the text without a specific reference. Thanks to Civan Gürel for useful comments.