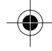
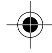


Kyle Bishop

Artistic Schizophrenia:How *Fight Club*'s Message Is Subverted by Its Own Nature

Art is often used to address social issues and offer cultural criticism behind a thin veil of aesthetics. A powerful example of such societal criticism is Chuck Palahniuk's 1996 debut novel *Fight Club*, which is ostensibly about a man with multiple personality disorder who tries to combat his disillusionment with consumer culture by turning to violence and anarchy. The protagonist first attempts to fight the capitalist system from both within and without, but in the end he strives to thwart the very social movement his actions have created. Additionally, David Fincher's 1999 cinematic adaptation of Palahniuk's book is even more subversive than the novel, showing an apparently successful campaign against "The Man" with the destruction of multiple credit card companies—allegedly wiping the debt record clean and plunging America into financial chaos. But is Fincher's version of *Fight Club* really suggesting the revolution of the proletariat, or is it simply using such a model to encourage greater awareness of the problems associated with unchecked commercialism?

To get at the heart of this question, one must consider the nature of Marxist cultural criticism and modern film theory, as well as gain an understanding of *Fight Club* itself. This examination will argue that although Fincher's *Fight Club* strongly criticizes modern consumerism, it suffers from the same sense of schizophrenia as its protagonist. While *Fight Club*'s projected ideals may call for the abandonment and suppression of mate-



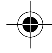
rialism and gross consumption, its existence as a Hollywood commodity complicates that very message. The unequivocally commercial nature of the medium itself makes it virtually impossible for such a "major motion picture" to present convincing criticism of America's consumer culture.

Marxist Concerns and Film Theory

Modern culture must deal with conflicts arising between members of different social classes. Industrialization invariably splits a society into a large class of workers and a smaller group of bourgeois owners, and the elite continue to acquire wealth while exploiting the oppressed masses, who struggle just to survive. Those theorists who follow the teachings of Karl Marx attempt to identify these class conflicts as they appear in modern society, both literally and symbolically through their representation in art.

In their landmark work *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels define society as a series of opposing class struggles. They emphasize that "the modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society, has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones" (9). Such a view of society as a set of binary opposites implies the constant threat of revolution, which may inspire the masses, but generally causes paranoia among the elite. As an essential part of society, these political concerns unavoidably surface in the arts as well.

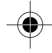
Literary critic Mike Austin describes the Marxist "theory of reflection" as "the assumption that class conflicts and workers' struggles are so deeply imbedded in society's consciousness that literature cannot help but reflect them" (199). That is, the practical problems associated with a classed society run so deep that art invariably addresses those concerns. This almost subconscious reference to the class system can either be positive or negative, supportive or reactionary. The task of the Marxist critic lies in analyzing the class tensions present in a work of art to better understand the symbolic or didactic meaning behind the work.



Popular culture theorist John Storey identifies a critical approach called "Neo-Gramscian hegemony theory," based on the work of Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci. Proponents of this theory see "popular culture as a site of struggle between the forces of resistance of subordinate groups in society, and the forces of incorporation of dominant groups in society" (13). The oppressed class resists the dominance of the oppressing class through aesthetic discourse, and film and pop art are often the locations of this intense debate. Cultural struggle becomes polarized into two reductive camps, for "those looking at popular culture from a neo-Gramscian perspective tend to see it as a terrain of ideological struggle between dominant and subordinate classes" (13). The practical struggles exhibited by classed people in the workplace are reduced to their ideological foundations, and the aesthetic realm represents a forum for discussion and even revolution.

One of the most dominant forms of popular culture today is obviously film, which has been used since its invention as an acceptable medium for expressing political concerns and personal agendas. Playwright Bertolt Brecht identified this potential of staged drama, claiming "there is no play and no theatrical performance which does not in some way affect the dispositions and conceptions of the audience. Art is never without consequences" (151). Since cinema is also arguably a "theatrical performance," such a view clearly applies to film as well, where a receptive, attentive audience must unavoidably absorb something of the movie's ideology into their own thinking. Although they may not directly accept the position endorsed by the work of art, it encourages them to take a stand one way or another.

Even the most lighthearted film makes value judgments. As film historian Louis Giannetti points out, "the tradition of classical cinema avoids the extremes of didacticism and pure abstraction, but even light entertainment movies are steeped in value judgments" (428). Giannetti emphasizes the indirect nature by which cinema can make its arguments. Because his perception of "classical cinema" tends to be popular, narrative cinema—which generally avoids the more overt political messages of propaganda



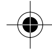
films and documentaries to secure the greatest measure of commercial success—Giannetti clearly believes that even "light entertainment" can express ideological viewpoints.

Art has always had a concealed didactic ability. Giannetti writes, "Since ancient times, critics have discussed art as having a double function: to teach and to provide pleasure" (428). Morality tales and fables could entertain an audience while simultaneously teaching an important precept. Parables concealed higher intellectual messages in simple stories that were easy to understand and remember. For a more modern audience, cinema is perhaps the best example of contrived allegory, entertaining on the surface while simultaneously offering an instructive subtext. When considering a Marxist or anti-commercial message, few films better portray the binary conflict of a classed society than Fincher's *Fight Club*, a film rife with the dichotomies and contradictions of capitalism.

Tyler Durden and the War on Consumerism

Like Palahniuk's novel, the film version of *Fight Club* tells the story of a middle-class office worker who cracks under the pressure of living a dissatisfying—if opulently comfortable—lifestyle. The unnamed narrator of the tale (usually referred to simply as "Jack") wallows in his atrophic, white-collar job and nests in his trendy, IKEA-furnished apartment. He travels all the time, cataloging accidents and fatalities as a recall coordinator for a major car company—in a very literal way, Jack's luxurious lifestyle is made possible by the tragic losses of others. Ironically, Jack is the ultimate oppressing bourgeois, for the proletariat must literally suffer death for him to keep his job and status. Jack's general frustration (and possible guilt) eventually fractures his personality, and Tyler Durden is born—the freethinking anarchist Jack could never consciously allow himself to become. *Fight Club* therefore chronicles Jack's ill-fated attempts to reconcile the two divergent sides of his personality.

When asked to comment on the origins of the novel for the DVD release, Palahniuk said it was "just a matter of looking for the themes, the



topics that brought people together in excited conversation. . . . The resentment of lifestyle standards imposed by advertising [was a theme I heard a lot]" ("How to Start a Fight"). This resentment is manifested allegorically in Tyler Durden. Whereas Jack loves his possessions, like all good capitalists, Tyler forswears materialism completely. Jack lives in an upscale apartment; Tyler squats in an abandoned building. If Jack is the representation of the modern bourgeoisie, then Tyler is the new proletariat: carefree, anti-establishment, and ascetic. Although *Fight Club* is largely about disassociation, violence, and gender identity (the subjects of most recent criticism), the movie also uses the binary oppositions between Jack and Tyler as a scathing critique of conspicuous consumption and rampant consumerism.

In an important cultural critique of *Fight Club* and 2000's *Memento*, University of Haifa professor Bennett Kravitz analyzes the contradictions and conflicts present in Fincher's film. Kravitz discusses the complex relationship between capitalism and capital by unpacking the theories laid out by Deleuze Gilles and Felix Guattari in their 2000 book *Anti-Oedipus*. According to Kravitz, capitalism is represented as "the body without organs" and capital as "desire production" (32). Like a fungus or other plant, capitalism spreads relentlessly and tirelessly, but with no real pleasure—just as Jack consumes and purchases without satisfaction. In contrast, Tyler is the raging animal; he doesn't care about anything other than desire—passion and production without possession. These two seemingly contradictory impulses form a symbiotic relationship, for "[t]he body is made whole again by desire, which is the same phenomenon that occurs with capital and social relations" (Kravitz 32).

This symbiotic dichotomy is readily apparent in *Fight Club*. Jack has spent his whole life gathering material possessions—the things people are told they should desire and accumulate—and lives in a "condo on the fifteenth floor of a filing cabinet for widows and young professionals" (Fincher). While waiting on hold for the phone operator to process his latest purchase, Jack muses on what could be termed "catalog culture":

> Like so many others I had become a slave to the IKEA-nesting instinct. If I saw something clever like a little coffee table in the

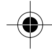
> shape of a yin-yang, I had to have it. The Klips personal office unit, the Hovetrekke home exer-bike, or the Johanneshov sofa with the Strinne green stripe pattern—even the Rislamp wire lamps of environmentally friendly unbleached paper. I'd flip through catalogs and wonder what kind of dining set defines me as a person. I had it all, even the glass dishes with tiny bubbles and imperfections, proof that they were crafted by the honest, simple, hard-working, indigenous peoples of . . . wherever.
>
> We used to read pornography; now it's the Hoarshack collection. (Fincher)

The parallel between consumerism and masturbation is clear. Rather than filling a personal void with sexual satisfaction, the modern yuppie turns to the latest and trendiest of catalogs. Shopping has replaced sexual stimulation as the preferred form of self-gratification.

While he is away on one of his morbid business trips, Jack's sterile apartment blows up—supposedly the result of arsonist subterfuge. He arrives on the scene and mournfully surveys the remains of his once-comfortable life, noting the disemboweled carcass of his refrigerator with embarrassment: "A house full of condiments and no food" (Fincher). His chic furniture and kitschy accoutrements are little more than set dressing—all flavor and no nutritional value. Jack is forced to call someone for help; through their destruction, Jack's possessions have failed to provide the succor he needs. For reasons unknown to him at the time, he dials the number of Tyler Durden, a mysterious soap salesman he had met on his most recent business trip.

Tyler is cheerful and accommodating, and the two meet at a local bar to share a few pitchers of beer. In the resulting discussion, Tyler questions the mourning Jack and begins to clarify the key points of his own ascetic manifesto:

> TYLER. Do you know what a duvet is?
>
> JACK. A comforter.
>
> TYLER. It's a blanket. Just a blanket. Now why do guys like you and I know what a duvet is? Is this essential to our survival, in the hunter-gatherer sense of the word? No. What are we then?
>
> JACK. I don't know . . . consumers?



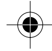
> TYLER. Right! We are consumers. We are byproducts of a lifestyle obsession. Murder, crime, poverty—these things don't concern me. What concerns me are celebrity magazines, television with 500 channels, some guy's name on my underwear. Rogaine, Viagra, Olestra. . . . I say never be complete. I say stop being perfect. I say let's evolve and let the chips fall where they may. . . . (Fincher)

Although Jack bemoans the loss of his property, the Tyler side of his personality revels in what he considers to be liberation and freedom. Tyler ends his philosophizing with the comment, "The things you own end up owning you" (Fincher). Consumers ultimately become chained to their own possessions—caring more about them than their personal relationships.

Jack moves in with Tyler, and the change of scenery couldn't be more dramatic. Jack explains his living conditions in the heart of an industrial district:

> I don't know how Tyler found that house, but he said he'd been there for a year. It looked like it was waiting to be torn down. Most of the windows were boarded up. There was no lock on the front door from when the police or whoever kicked it in. Stairs were ready to collapse. I didn't know if he owned it or if he was squatting. . . . What a shithole. Nothing worked. Turning on one light meant another light in the house went out... . Every time it rained we had to kill the power.
>
> By the end of the first month, I didn't miss TV. (Fincher)

The unexpected turn at the end of this voice-over monolog emphasizes Jack's transformation: he comes to find his new accommodations quite satisfactory—having already lost his precious possessions, he doesn't have to worry about losing anything else. Besides, he now has something other than conspicuous consumption to focus on: Fight Club. Jack and Tyler organize an underground boxing society where dissatisfied young men test their strength on a visceral, primitive level. Fight Club simplifies everything; it doesn't matter who you are, what you own, or how much money you make—everyone is equal in the circle of the fight. Members of Fight Club worry more about their next opponent than they do about their clothes (most of which are covered with blood anyway).



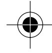
Jack gives up his materialistic ways and finds fulfillment and satisfaction in the energy of the fight. Unfortunately, the matter of his apartment fire is still of interest to others, namely the police officer investigating the apparent arson. As Jack tries to discuss the matter with the detective on the phone, the Tyler side of his personality shouts revolutionary mantras in his ear, like "The liberator who destroyed my property has realigned my perceptions!" and "We reject the basic assumptions of civilization, especially the importance of material possessions!" (Fincher). Jack gets understandably flustered at both Tyler's droning and the detective's suspicions, ultimately moaning, "I loved every stick of furniture in that place. That was not just a bunch of stuff that got destroyed, it was me!" (Fincher). Jack struggles to hold on to reason; perhaps he begins to suspect the truth (that it was he himself who destroyed his own apartment), but on the surface he still has some longing attachment to his possessions. The "cult of consumerism" has deep-rooted teachings that are hard to forget.

Tyler's ascetic philosophy eventually breaks out of Jack's subconscious and becomes its own movement; he decides to bring Fight Club out of the basement and onto the streets. Just before Tyler takes things to the level of urban terrorism, he addresses the assembled crowd:

> I see in Fight Club the strongest and smartest men who've ever lived. . . . An entire generation pumping gas, waiting tables, slaves with white collars. Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don't need. . . . We've all been raised on television to believe that one day we'd all be millionaires and movie gods and rock stars—but we won't. We're slowly learning that fact, and we're very, very pissed off. (Fincher)

Tyler gives the members of Fight Club "homework assignments" intended to break down the status quo and punish those who enjoy too much material comfort. Members of Fight Club destroy TV antennas and satellite dishes with bats, blow up computer retail stores, and shatter car headlights—but on luxury cars only.

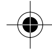
Tyler has created an army of anti-capitalists, and all too late Jack recognizes what is happening. He realizes Tyler is in fact himself, and Jack begins to fathom the true scope of Fight Club—which Tyler has since



renamed Project Mayhem. In a frantic attempt to prevent a full-scale terrorist attack, Jack tries to confess his deeds to the police, explaining the scheduled destruction of a number of credit card companies. When the detectives ask him why Project Mayhem would want to blow up such buildings, Jack replies, "If you erase the debt record then we all go back to zero. It'll create total chaos" (Fincher). Tyler's ultimate goal is to reduce everything to a more primitive time, a time before money, credit, and debt. Project Mayhem's true purpose is the utter destruction of the American economic system.

Jack tries to prevent the coordinated demolition from taking place, but Tyler resurfaces and physically beats Jack into submission. He wakes to find himself on the top floor of an empty office building, the panorama of credit card corporate headquarters clearly visible. Tyler tells Jack, "Out these windows we will view the collapse of financial history—one step closer to economic equilibrium" (Fincher). In a last desperate attempt to foil his self-reflective nemesis, Jack shoots himself in the mouth, blowing out his cheek (and the back of Tyler's head). Jack's assassination attempt appears to succeed, for Tyler disappears. However, Jack then gives orders to the awaiting members of Project Mayhem—to meet him downstairs *after* the demolition has taken place, *not* to call it all off. The two halves of his personality are apparently reconciled, but Jack seems to have embraced Tyler's plans and philosophy. In the end Tyler clearly wins the psychological struggle, for Jack calmly watches the spectacular demolition of the credit card company skyscrapers, a faint smile on his lips.

This resolution to the story is fundamentally different from the one Palahniuk envisioned. In the novel, Tyler only wants to blow up the Parker-Morris Building (described as the world's tallest)—but his real goal is to destroy the neighboring natural history museum with all the falling debris (14). At the same time he wants to martyr himself (and Jack) by remaining inside the doomed building. However, Tyler fails to mix the paraffin-based explosives properly (Jack knows paraffin never works, but he has somehow kept that knowledge from Tyler), and the buildings are spared (205). After Jack shoots himself, he considers Tyler dead and once again has full

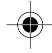


control of his own psyche (206). Fight Club continues to exist, but Jack remains his own man (although understandably hospitalized by the gunshot to the face).

By significantly changing Palahniuk's ending, Fincher's film presents a more complete and successful manifestation of anti-consumer politics. Palahniuk's Tyler Durden is more interested in general anarchy and chaos, desiring a violent reclamation of the world: "We wanted to blast the world free of history" (124). Fincher's Tyler Durden is all about inciting the masses to revolt against consumerism and the established economic system, realizing "the collapse of financial history" (Fincher). Palahniuk's Tyler wants to destroy museums; Fincher's Tyler wants to erase the debt record. Although both works are irrevocably tied to the capitalist system, Fincher's is more overtly duplicitous. His version of Tyler Durden takes a much more aggressive stance against the very system to which the film belongs. This apparent contradiction establishes the crucial problem of the movie version of *Fight Club*.

The Split Personality of *Fight Club*

Unlike members of the academic intelligentsia, a Hollywood director is thoroughly dependent on the capitalist system to measure success. University professors and pop culture theorists operate as members of the bourgeois elite, but their efforts and criticisms are not contingent on financial success; instead, they function in a world of specialized publications (written for a similarly bourgeois readership) and the attainment of tenure. The film studio, on the other hand, must keep the bottom line a priority, for one failed movie at the box office can literally result in the end of a career (see Hal Warren, for example). Furthermore, academic critics normally are not directly attempting social change; their role is to interpret and evaluate the cultural products of others, those who specifically strive to make a broad impact on contemporary society. *Fight Club* makes claims about modern society as a whole, whereas a study such as this one

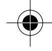


merely assesses how effectively the film accomplishes (or fails to accomplish) its goal.

In Kravitz's recent analysis of the schizophrenic nature of *Fight Club*, he discusses some of the fundamental contradictions within the film itself, which warrant attention before looking at the fractured relationship between the film and its message. Tyler creates Fight Club to break down class barriers and to combat capitalist enterprises (like Starbuck's Coffee) with Project Mayhem's "homework" assignments. However, Fight Club ends up having an organized structure and an almost militaristic hierarchy: that which was designed to resist the dominant culture "becomes part of the institution" (39). Furthermore, once Fight Club spreads across the nation, it develops into a network—a chain franchise not unlike Burger King (Kravitz 43-44). In effect, Tyler's messianic mission is ultimately thwarted because "the desire to reassert male authority leads to a totalitarian organization developed by Jack and Tyler that is just as dangerous to the individual spirit as is the society they so despise" (Kravitz 44-45). Members of Fight Club simply become cogs in a new machine.

Kravitz's observations underscore the schizophrenic problems between Tyler Durden and his counterculture movement, but that message is also contradicted by its connection to the motion picture industry. One of the central messages of Fincher's *Fight Club* is clearly a warning against excessive and unchecked commercialism; but as an undeniably marketable product itself, can the film's message be taken seriously? On the one hand, film critics and theorists continue to make detailed arguments that support the view of film as an important tool to promote ideologies and to affect social change. For instance, in his discussion of film perception, film theorist Dudley Andrew claims that "cinema mediates reality" (*Concepts in Film Theory* 21). In other words, although films can sometimes portray serious problems in a lighthearted manner, they still fulfill their role as mediator, re-presenting reality for aesthetic study by the mass audience.

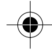
The Hollywood film is primarily a mode of entertainment; nevertheless, Sergei Eisenstein presents the claim that "true art must necessarily be an insurgent force destined to manifest, at the level of perception and



imagination, the antinomies of a society not in tune with man and nature. Art, therefore, can still change behavior by changing perception, but it does so indirectly, as a natural byproduct of simply being itself" (Andrew, *The Major Film Theories* 74). According to Eisenstein, the ideological message conveyed through the pleasure of the film experience can subtly change the opinions and even the actions of the audience, if only at a subconscious level. Eisenstein also has the support of French theorist Andre Bazin, who identifies cinema as "a unique and valuable *tool* for knowledge, perception, and, ultimately, action" (Andrew, *Theories* 171). As a tool, film's definitive intent must be to transcend entertainment to become the motivation for real social action.

In contrast, Marxist theorists, particularly those of the Frankfurt School, have been openly critical of the value of popular art. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" of 1935, Walter Benjamin criticizes the mass production of film and music recordings; and Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer worry in "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" that commercialized art results in a passive audience. They all do, however, assign a measure of value to popular art. Whereas some early theorists had "worried that popular culture represented a threat to cultural and social authority, the Frankfurt School argues that it actually produces the opposite effect; it maintains social authority" (Storey 101). Rather than being a vehicle for radical change in thought and action, popular culture in fact works to keep the masses placated and passive, content with society the way it is.

Perhaps the harshest critics of popular entertainment have been Adorno and Horkheimer, who use blunt language to condemn the premise that popular entertainment is real art: "Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce" (121). Their main criticism centers on the necessity of popular culture to be dependent upon the capitalist economy. Since multi-million dollar Hollywood films must embrace capitalism to succeed—through marketing, product



placement and tie-ins, and a ticket-buying fan base—any subversive or revolutionary messages are rendered basically mute.

Cahiers du Cinéma critics Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni emphasize that film "is a particular product, manufactured within a given system of economic relations" (753). They go on to claim that "all films are commodities and therefore objects of trade, even those whose discourse is explicitly political" (755). No matter what the message behind a work of art, it cannot distance itself from the embrace of capitalist ideology. Horkheimer and Adorno re-christen popular entertainment as "the culture industry," which "remains the entertainment *business* [emphasis added]" (136). Therefore, *Fight Club* ultimately cannot make a serious critique of American consumer culture because "as a result of being a material product of the system, it is also an ideological product of the system, which . . . means capitalism. . . . [*e*]*very film is political*, inasmuch as it is determined by the ideology which produces it" (Comolli & Narboni 754). The commercial Hollywood system—capitalism—produced *Fight Club*, which must unavoidably embrace that same system.

The only possible way for a mainstream cinematic message to truly escape the bonds of the capitalistic system would be via free exhibition and distribution. A low-budget, independent, or digital film could conceivably be shown at community film festivals, shared through e-mail, or posted on web sites like MySpace or Ifilm, thus circumventing the commodification of art. At the very least, movies could be screened at a discounted rate—much like the $20-a-seat tickets offered at performances of *Rent* on Broadway during the 1990s (McDonnell 30)—and DVDs could be made more cheaply available to consumers. However, none of these alternatives could ever result in a profit for the producing studio; those involved in the film's creation would either have to donate their time and talents, or the entire undertaking would have to be funded by a magnanimous philanthropist. At any rate, such a hypothetical film production system is a far cry from the existing Hollywood model.

As a mainstream, commercial Hollywood commodity, *Fight Club*'s message simply cannot carry any substantial weight as a critique of capi-

talism, and the philosophies of Tyler Durden certainly can't be taken literally—at best the film is a satire or example of ironic criticism. For one thing, the movie is hardly an independent film or an art-house "thought piece"—its theatrical release grossed just over $37 million domestically and $71 million internationally ("Business Data"). In addition, the film itself is rife with contradiction: superstar Brad Pitt plays Tyler Durden (the very embodiment of the "movie god" against whom Tyler rails) and members of Project Mayhem are shown magnetically erasing VHS tapes in local video rental stores—which represent the very product *Fight Club* is eventually to become. Such facts and scenes only further diminish the political message of *Fight Club*, turning Palahiuk's thought-provoking text into just another commercial product.

Yet Kravitz claims that Fincher's film is quite openly artificial and ironic. In a parallel between the film and its story, Fincher inserts flash-cut images of Tyler Durden/Brad Pitt during certain reels of the film in exactly the same way Tyler inserts images of pornography into otherwise family-friendly movies. By playing on this theme of subliminal messages, "[t]he inserted images remind us that *Fight Club* is a cultural artifact, a product of mainstream Hollywood, and will not significantly alter the society from which it comes. Everything is artificial in this portrayal of late capitalism, even the film itself" (Kravitz 40). However, even if this were Fincher's true intent—to tip his hand, as it were, to the viewing public—it is unlikely the average moviegoer—especially one only interested in seeing Brad Pitt with his shirt off—would read the subtext over and above the text. The anti-consumer propaganda spouted over and over by Tyler, in conjunction with the destruction of the buildings at the end, must overpower any such subtle clues in editing.

Of course, the goal of Fincher's movie was probably never the universal adoption of Tyler Durden's ascetic philosophy, but because *Fight Club*'s central conflicts are essentially binary in nature, it's natural to read the film in terms of extreme contrasts. Either Jack is right, and there's nothing wrong with rampant consumerism, or Tyler is right, and the proletariat should rise up, abandon their possessions, and combat the fran-

chises of capitalism. However, since Tyler's extremism is contradicted by the essential nature of the Hollywood blockbuster, the film cannot be taken seriously as a manifesto of revolution. Instead, and much more likely, the film accomplishes simply getting the average film viewer to reconsider his or her own lifestyle. The Brad Pitt movie can attract an audience that would possibly be put off or intimidated by Palahniuk's novel, since the movie overall broadcasts a message of moderation (rejecting the Jack/Tyler conflict) rather than anarchy. Although viewers are unlikely to join an underground society or bomb the local Starbuck's, they might make fewer frivolous purchases or adopt a recycling program, and if that does happen, the film can in some ways be considered a success.

Ultimately, however, the Hollywood film industry belongs to the cult of capitalism because popular cinema exists primarily to make money. Although mainstream movies may make grand statements regarding social reform, they can rarely be taken sincerely without appearing philosophically insincere. In the words of Herbert Marcuse, "art cannot abolish the social division of labor which makes for its esoteric character, but neither can art 'popularize' itself without weakening its emancipatory impact" (556). Fincher's version of *Fight Club* suffers from the same split-personality disorder affecting its protagonist. By showing Tyler as victor, the film clearly wants to embrace his anti-commercial philosophies on some level; but to reach a receptive public, the message must become the very thing it criticizes. The tale of *Fight Club* changes on an ideological level when adapted from a novel to a Hollywood movie. Although it is not without value—as aesthetic art object, cathartic release, or pure escapist entertainment—such a cinematic representation of society cannot significantly change the ideas or behavior of the viewing audience.

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