

“Fight Club”: Symptomatic Analysis

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Abstract

This manuscript synthesizes the film “Fight Club”. This film is a 1999 drama that follows “Jack” (also referred to as the narrator) and his alter-ego, Tyler Durden. This peculiar individual establishes a “fight club” as a rebellious response to the sociocultural elements of the time. The paper argues that the film critiques the cultural structure of contemporary society, specifically the predominant corporatism in America. This particular topic was chosen because of the belief that the arguments within the film are undeniably pertinent to modern-day social realities. The film, though 25 years old, still provides arguments regarding the corporate structure that continues to be applicable presently. The paper delves into both the formal and, most notably, the symptomatic elements of the film (symptomatic meaning the social and historical commentary that is conveyed throughout the narrative). The paper emphasizes how they contribute to the central commentary of the film, which illustrates the dire impact consumerism and conformity have upon an individual’s overall self-identity and masculinity. It is divided into six separate sections, three of which include the intro, a review of the references utilized, and the conclusion. The rest includes the formal elements of the film that contribute to the film’s meaning at large. The formal elements are partitioned into sections, with one particular formal element representing a given section. Within these sections, the paper will explain exactly how the specific formal element contributes to the ideological commentary persistent throughout the film.

Keywords

Consumerism, Conformity, Self-Identity, Commentary, Social, Individual, Masculinity, Formal Elements, Ideological, Emasculation, Purpose, Overall, Arguments, Fight, Film, Generation, Dissociation, Power, Impact, Lifestyle, Jack, Tyler, Elements, Corporate, Sense

1. Introduction

Tyler Durden: “We’re the middle children of history, man: no purpose or place.

We have no Great War. No Great Depression. Our Great War's a spiritual war...our Great Depression is our lives."

The 20th century was nothing short of tumultuous and revolutionary; it consisted of unrelenting war upon a scale hitherto undreamt of, the perpetual technological progression that ranged from the invention of aircraft to space travel, and the socio-political uproar that permeated the 50s, 60s, and 70s. Gone were the days of "assured peace and protection", as the threat of nuclear war lingered within the psyches of Americans and those abroad. Subsequent to this, a confused, dissociative generation was formulated. This generation, in particular, struggled with instituting self-identity, purpose, and overall happiness. In the decades prior, purpose and self-determination were concepts significantly more attainable.

Though it was unmistakably an era of extreme violence and instability, it nonetheless offered individuals a pathway to purpose and the establishment of cardinal values, including familial prioritization, the importance of altruism, and the virtue of peace, among many others. It was an era where many would work towards or fight for causes greater than themselves. Be it the civil rights movement, the Great Depression, or the First and Second World Wars, individuals possessed a self-defined imperative that dictated their actions and ideological beliefs. They were adamant about providing care for family and friends and protecting their lives at all costs. Often, peace, freedom, and justice were at stake, and the citizenry was crucial to defending these important notions.

Generations later, however, this self-defined imperative ceased. An era of socioeconomic comfort and prosperity (specifically throughout the 80s and 90s) as a product of post-war financial booms and the overall growth of the military-industrial complex funneled money into the pocket of the consumer in ways that bewildered those who underwent the Great Depression. What essentially occurred was a substitution of purpose, self-determination, and individuality for increased economic security for the average person.

This point is further illustrated in "*SUBVERSION, DEMYSTIFICATION, AND HEGEMONY: FIGHT CLUB AS A POSTMODERN CULTURAL TEXT*," when discussing Tyler's ideology; "Tyler is clear that everybody has an identity crisis in this postmodern, corporate culture. Tyler tells Jack that people think of changing themselves every day, Jack was just brave enough to follow through with it. Tyler's overall feeling is that men have an identity problem. Ultimately, they have been stripped of their identity, which has been replaced with corporate logos. Moreover, men no longer have a means of creating identity. According to Tyler, there is no great war or great recession to struggle through. There are no defining moments, only superficial promises of rock or movie stardom" (Ortoleva, 2003: p. 74).

Given these incredibly advantageous factors, corporations capitalized accordingly. Amidst the economic prosperity and rapid technological progression, corporations were expanding and utilizing new technologies to facilitate consumerism. New innovations such as the internet, social media, and the augmentation of the use of credit cards elicited an age of consumerist culture that predo-

minated the American social climate. Individuals became fixated upon the material possessions that corporations offered on a mass scale (the “yuppie generation” being an example of this), which encompassed a multitude of desired purposes. Newer forms of advertising through social media and the internet aided in further enticing individuals to become part of a toxic consumerist culture. Online shopping introduced increasingly more convenient methods of shopping that further contributed to the conformity of the new consumerist lifestyle.

Corporations were thus indirectly controlling the populace in a way that was analogous to political despotism. The citizenry found purpose, implemented much value, and spent much of their time working towards the purchase of certain products and “almost being complete” in the context of material goods, as the narrator (Jack) elucidates in the film. A repetitive cycle propelled by ever-developing and changing products the capitalist system produces. Unlike prior generations where a sense of purpose (although not in absolute fashion) could be found, a shallow, falsely purposed citizenry was formed; they subscribed to the notion that they had found purpose and value through materialistic gain. This society was essentially devoid of pain, sacrifice, and suffering, and thus, a feeling of emptiness was ubiquitous among the general population.

The film: “*Fight Club*” delves deep into these social issues that plagued American culture. Often dubbed a postmodernist film by many scholars, it critiques the prevailing consumer culture within America, the danger this has upon the individual, and the inevitable formulation of a materialistic, shallow civilization. The fixation upon material possessions and consumer culture is the underlying factor in the blatant emptiness and lack of purpose that many people (particularly men) experience. The film explores the power of the corporate structure and its impact on the daily life and psyche of the individual. The dominance of the corporate elite and its versatile impact on the individual is an exemplification of Capitalism gone awry. It is a civilization of obsession with possessions and implementation of one’s value and worth predicated on their car, furniture, or house, for example.

These factors often led to dissociation and a question of one’s self-identity. They bring forth questions of masculinity (in the traditional sense of the concept) and how it is being stripped from individuals. The film correlates emasculation to consumerism by describing it as a product of modern consumerist culture, and physical confrontation is what’s requisite to reuniting with one’s masculine self and defeating said consumerist culture. Rebellious against societal norms, through examination of what society truly is, and fighting for a cause is crucial to enacting change, analogous to previous eras. Through their mise-en-scene, editing, and dialogue, these multifaceted arguments and theories are purveyed to the audience.

2. Literature Review

My literature review will encompass the scholarly writing that I have incorpo-

rated into my paper. I have implemented six books, one article, an online textbook, and two academic papers. Although all of these sources are inherently different, they are nevertheless relevant to the theories and ideologies that permeate this film. I included the ideological readings and philosophies that these sources consisted of in my paper to supplement the readings I have done myself on the mentioned film.

The three books include *Fight Club*, *The Society of the Spectacle*, and *Power: A Radical View*. These works discuss consumer culture, the expansion of corporatism as a product of Capitalism, and power structures within society and their impact upon identity. They discuss topics of conformism, power, identity, modernity, and economic philosophy. This is relevant to my arguments that explore the rapid expansion of the corporate structure and the socio-cultural impact this has on overall identity. If one were to possibly determine hypothetical disagreements between these works, it may include the proper solutions of how to overcome a corporatist system or the extent of the corporate power structure in comparison to governmental power.

I also included two academic papers: “*SUBVERSION, DEMYSTIFICATION, AND HEGEMONY: FIGHT CLUB AS A POSTMODERN CULTURAL TEXT*” and “*Fight Club: A Depiction of Contemporary Society as Dissociogenic.*” These papers discuss the impact and cause of a largely corporatist and consumerist society. The first paper explains that the film “*Fight Club*” is a critically subversive, postmodernist text that critiques the new era of conformity to consumerist ideology. It breaks down the formal elements of the film, as well as the theoretical. The second discusses the psychological effects that a consumer-based society has on the individual. It argues that dissociation, rather than insomnia, was a struggle the narrator fought. Each paper addresses topics including consumerism, conformity, identity, and Capitalist resistance. They address my essential arguments regarding rampant capitalism harboring consumerism, conformity, and thus an empty, disassociated populace. Possible disagreements may arise at the cause of the expanding corporatocracy and/or the solutions requisite.

The online textbook, *Film Art: An Introduction*, teaches all the formal elements within a film and what goes into the filmmaking process. It analyzes, extensively, fundamental film art elements including narrative, mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, genre, and much more. I implemented quotes from the readings into my essay to further illustrate the importance of formal film art elements in creating meaning and contributing to the overall narrative of the film.

3. Mise-En-Scene

The film: “*Fight Club*” incorporated unique and fitting mise-en-scene throughout that catalyzed the formulation of visual style and emotion, purveyed recurring themes, and delivered arguments and critiques the movie regurgitate. For “*Fight Club*” specifically, the mise-en-scene, particularly the color and lighting

schemes, induce what is a unique, gloomy atmosphere that coincides appropriately with the overarching themes and arguments that predominate within the film. The light and artificial style, coupled with the dark, gritty visual style, supplements crucial notions of consumerism, conformity, and self-identity that reside at the crux of the film at hand. Not only this, but the costumes of numerous characters are also integral to reinforcing these recurring notions. As stated in *Film Art: An Introduction*: “costumes can have a great variety of specific functions in the film’s overall form” and “costumes can become motifs, enhancing characterization and tracing changes in attitude” (Bordwell et al., 2020: p. 119). The costume design that the film contains is selected specifically to propel further recurring themes and conceptualizations of certain characters and what they represent symbolically.

For example, Jack (the narrator) is most frequently wearing a formal suit and tie. This is a fundamental element of a much broader lifestyle that Jack experiences and aids in shaping his identity in the film. He wears attire that is inherently odd and peculiar in comparison to the rest of society, thus it demonstrates the artificial sense that is induced within the corporate atmosphere. As explained in “*SUBVERSION, DEMYSTIFICATION, AND HEGEMONY: FIGHT CLUB AS A POSTMODERN CULTURAL TEXT*,” Jack is a corporate soldier with a catatonic existence. The film establishes Jack’s corporate identity not only by his job and lifestyle but also by his suit and tie that he perpetually wears. This outfit he often wears symbolizes his entrenchment within the corporate system; it portrays his affiliation with the catalyst of what the film argues against at large. He is essentially a fundamental component of a much broader, convoluted system that acts as a power structure in relation to the populace. The corporate structure is key to formulating said consumerist lifestyle that dictates numerous aspects of individuals’ lives.

However, the narrator and his outfit are in complete juxtaposition to the deuteragonist, Tyler Durden. Tyler typically wears, throughout the film, unique, aviator-like sunglasses, skinny jeans, a red leather jacket, and a button-down collared shirt with a pattern. This particular style is inherently the direct opposite of the formal, corporate-style uniform. He wears a more informal, flamboyant style that correlates with his overall character, lifestyle, and ideology. His particular, unique costume signifies his avoidance of societal norms and an urgency to resist conformist culture. He is unique in the sense that he speaks against the blind following of the collective consensus and implores others to embrace their individuality. To a certain extent, it suggests the slightly Queer nature of Tyler Durden. His outfit, thus, serves as an indicator of his broader, postmodernist ideology and aligns with the overarching themes of critiquing commercialism and conformity that separate him from the narrator, who, at first, embodies everything Tyler stands against.

Furthermore, the overall visual style, including elements such as the lighting, props, and setting scheme, are also fundamental elements of the film that help

purvey consistent themes of consumerism, conformity, and self-identity within the film. The film “*Fight Club*” specifically, obtains contrasting varieties of mise-en-scene that reflect the polarized lifestyles and ideologies of Tyler Durden and Jack (the narrator). As stated in the paper *SUBVERSION*:

DEMYSTIFICATION, AND HEGEMONY: FIGHT CLUB AS A POSTMODERN CULTURAL TEXT: “The mise-en-scene that Fincher uses when showing Jack’s corporate world is significantly different than the mise-en-scene he uses when Jack is with Tyler. Dark, vampire-like visions dominate when Tyler and Jack are together, including in scenes during *Fight Club*. Dank, half-lit rooms, urban decay, and sickly neon glows all spin around Tyler and Jack. In contrast, Jack’s button-down world is clean, crisp, and tends to be very light and bright” (Ortoleva, 2003: p. 31).

The first phase of the film often consists of very bright, vibrant atmospheres that align with the narrator’s position as a corporate worker. As stated previously, he is deeply entrenched within the catalyst of consumerist culture. Daily, he works within an environment of fluorescent lighting, mundane, identical colors, and isolated cubicles. This plain, sterilizing atmosphere portrays the emptiness and sense of dehumanization that Jack (the narrator) experiences. The corporate world ceases to represent life and all of its fruits. It is an artificial atmosphere that coincides with overarching themes of shallowness and materialism as a virtue that breeds purposelessness and dissociation. Workers’ lives are dictated by consistent, unrelenting schedules and deadlines given by the corporate structure. This ties into the critique of capitalism that permeates throughout the film.

This common criticism of this economic system is mentioned in *SUBVERSION, DEMYSTIFICATION, AND HEGEMONY: FIGHT CLUB AS A POSTMODERN CULTURAL TEXT*: “And the key cultural tenets challenged in *Fight Club* are rampant capitalism and materialistic narcissism” (Ortoleva, 2003: p. 64). Given the inherent structure of the system, consumerism is requisite. The overall wealth and financial survival of corporations are predicted solely upon consumer-driven actions. The average worker is being exploited and has their way of life, individuality, and free will stifled by the broader corporate structure that dictates their lives.

The audience observes this particular element of mise-en-scene particularly within the office scenes in the film. For example, the office that the narrator works in is shown with a plethora of workers, cubicles, and a variety of props. The scene portrays a close-up of a Starbucks coffee, him, a wide shot of the office, and then back to him. The audience can see cubicles, multiple Starbucks coffee cups, fluorescent lighting, and homogenous, plain colors throughout the environment. There are a variety of cubicles that dominate the space in the office and this not only serves to represent the style of an office set but also to establish symptomatic meaning. They signify isolation, dissociation, and the innate inhumanity that the corporate workplace entails.

This symbolism of isolation and dissociation is also emphasized in *Fight Club: A Depiction of Modern Society as Dissoslogenic*: “Various aspects of modern life

are pointedly depicted as fostering a world in which life is disjointed, spatially and temporally disorienting, socially alienating and isolating, and emotionally and experientially detached” (Gold, 2003: p. 15). Not only this but also in *The Society of the Spectacle*. “This society eliminates geographical distance only to produce a new internal separation” (Debord, 2021: p. 167). A sense of community no longer exists in the corporate world. Corporate workers are often, as a product of relentless deadlines, an artificial environment, and this sense of isolation the cubicles induce, grappling with feelings of derealization and detachment from reality itself. They feel akin to slaves or robots with designated jobs to fulfill—referencing Tyler’s statement: “slaves with white collars.”

This argument is further aided by the narrator’s facial expression and the thousand-yard stare that he gives to the camera as he gazes upon the beautiful scenery that is the corporate world. He appears tired, disassociated, and frankly, despondent. Jack embodies an American who is controlled by the corporate structure not only at the workplace but also at his home. He is fully enveloped in the corporate lifestyle as he isn’t just directing his life based upon the material possessions he obtains or wishes to obtain for that matter, but also by the profession he is in. The dominance of corporations within his life is prominent as they also control his paycheck and thus, his ability to stay afloat within society more broadly. The artificial environment that is felt within this particular scene is also further augmented by both the plain, homogenous color scheme and the fluorescent lighting. They reinforce the inherent other-worldly atmosphere that permeates throughout the corporate office. It does not represent the real world, rather, it appears as a fake and dreary environment that is undeniably a prominent impetus of feelings of dissociation, severance, and depression.

In addition, the abundance of Starbucks coffee cups also serves a greater purpose that not only increases immersivity but also aligns with the overarching arguments of the film. The audience can see a total of five coffee cups throughout the scene. These additions help to formulate what an American office looks like on a typical morning. They add realism to the scene and portray, accurately, a visual image of a corporate workplace. Starbucks is a very popular coffee company, given this, the viewer is immediately able to relate to what is within the scene and they thus become more immersed. Not only this, but the cups also expand upon arguments regarding consumerism predominant within the film. Individuals rely upon corporations and their consumerist focus on the daily. The abundance of coffee cups further illustrates the dependence that the workers have on corporate products and the foothold that the corporate structure has on the individual. The influence that consumerist culture has is ubiquitous and the daily life of an individual is rooted in said conformist lifestyle. Corporations create a soulless, aimless, and routinely ritualistic life based upon conformist-driven identity through not only the workforce but also through consumption. These cups further serve to critique this culture that is a fundamental product of a darker facet of American Capitalism.

4. Editing

The editing of any film is often a cardinal element of the visual style, emotions, and arguments that are persistent in the context of the broad narrative. If left out, movies would feel mundane and lack the equivalent complexity that produces such aspects of film. “*Fight Club*” obtained significant editing that serves as a fundamental element to their narratives and overall writing. It implements unique and frequent editing techniques that contribute to broader themes within the narrative and induce a particular visual style and a multitude of emotional implications. These editing techniques encompass, most notably, visual effects, and voice-overs from the narrator. These techniques are integral to the story and most importantly, promote significant themes and postmodernist arguments made about the sociological structure that currently exists. As explained in *Film Art: An Introduction*: “By stressing the shift from segment to segment, editing can shape our responses to individual scenes and the entire movie” (Bordwell et al., 2020: p. 224).

Based upon this indisputable reality, the visual effects are essential to the audience’s response and interpretation of relevant arguments proposed in the film. Many scenes within the film insert these film art elements. Specifically, a common visual that was included in a multitude of scenes was a pixelated, flickering image of Tyler Durden. The audience was able to observe this in the beginning scenes such as the corporate office scene, the doctor’s office, in the city, and the self-help support groups. The scene would appear normal and then suddenly, a quick, shocking flicker of Tyler Durden (though not known to the audience as of yet) would appear at the corner or middle of the screen. Then the scene would continue as if nothing had occurred. It was obvious that nobody had seen him and the only eyes able to be the narrator’s.

This conception was further supplemented using POV shots that were tailored to the narrator’s perspective. This inclusion unequivocally complicates visual style and incorporates a shocking feeling into the viewer. It elicits confusion and helps establish an unreliable atmosphere and narrator that is analogous to schizophrenic perception. It indicates the severely damaged mental state that the narrator is in and the feelings of dissociation that he grapples with daily. These visual clues serve as a foreshadowing element that hints at a larger, more significant part of the story that expands upon the narrator’s identity and convoluted life. They symbolize his degradation from a stable identity to one that is fragmented, two-sided, and slowly being overtaken by his alter-ego.

This implementation serves to represent a general, more impactful argument made within the film, particularly regarding dissociation and self-identity. Individuals have become far too enveloped in the predominant consumerist culture birthed by corporations that the entirety of their identity is based solely upon materialistic ownership and consumption. The corporatist structure has granted individuals a false sense of identity, happiness, and self-worth. The narrator specifically, embodies what it means to be controlled by the corporatocracy, both by

his job and consumer habits. Instead of, as it was in prior generations, valuing crucial values such as family, compassion, and duty, people are more fixated upon a shallow, materialistic culture as they subscribe to the notion that this is the key to a “purposeful” life.

This impact that societal structure has upon the psyche of an individual and dissociative behavior is further discussed in *Fight Club: A Depiction of Contemporary Society as Dissociogenic*. “...in addition to interpersonal factors such as attachment, socio-cultural forces play a powerful role in shaping self-concept, self-experience, and subjective reality. This viewpoint is strongly influenced by the conceptions of Sullivan (1953), in whose interpersonal theory the construct of dissociation assumed a prominent role. Sullivan suggested that interpersonal and socio-cultural factors produce, enhance, and maintain dissociative modes of experience” (Gold, 2003: p. 14).

It is important to evaluate the general society and deduce the impact its current socio-cultural bears on the individual’s mental state. Within the later part of the 20th century, life and overall purpose ceased to be reliant upon anything of true virtue and authentic purpose, but rather an imperative to consume that stems from corporate-driven financial initiatives. Given this, people feel disassociated and questionable over their self-identity. They question whether or not they feel as if they are “men” and grapple with an existential crisis over their own self-identity and overall individuality. Jack, within these scenes, represents on a broader scale, what the new generation experiences as they are accompanied by what is essentially a corporatocracy. He experiences feelings of purposelessness, unhappiness, and existential angst, not dissimilar to the generation at large.

Moreover, voice-overs are arguably the most notable parts of the film in relation to contributing to the narrative and purveying certain ideological arguments. The narrator throughout the entirety of the movie speaks over scenes, often discussing his lifestyle, present real-time occurrences, and his mindset. He relays his beliefs, the current corporate influence upon his life, and his consumer-driven actions. The incorporation of voice-overs by David Fincher is key to speaking directly to the audience and delivering the main arguments about consumerism, conformism, and self-identity that prevail within the film.

One particularly momentous voice-over was towards the very beginning of the film. Jack proclaims, “For six months, I couldn’t sleep. With insomnia, nothing’s real. Everything’s far away. Everything’s a copy of a copy of a copy. When deep space exploration ramps up, it’ll be the corporations that name everything. The IBM stellar sphere. The Microsoft Galaxy. The Planet Starbucks.” With even this short monologue, there is much symptomatic meaning to unpack. The quote encompasses two pertinent topics. One of which includes the persisting issue that Jack struggles with, insomnia. He experiences feelings of intense derealization and detachment as he wrestles with instituting his self-identity.

Amidst a culture that establishes identity through a largely materialistic culture, as seen most notably by the “yuppie” lifestyle through the 80s, Jack experiences much angst when trying to reconcile with his individuality. These partic-

ular existential feelings and philosophical gripings have led him, at least to the audience's knowledge up to that moment, to become an insomniac. However, it becomes increasingly clearer that the narrator's feelings can be attributed to dissociation. Although insomnia is overtly portrayed to be the problem, what truly lies at the crux of his issues is dissociation because of what exactly he is: a slave to the corporate structure that struggles to maintain a hold on reality and normalcy.

Moreover, the second phase of the quote discusses the dominance of corporations in modern society. The influence of corporations is ubiquitous and they have a strong bearing on one's character, lifestyle, and overall stability. It is argued that the true enforcement and hegemony over society fails to be governmental structures, but rather corporations. They have expanded beyond their respective position as merely financial industries and have a tight grip upon the very social fabric of civilization.

He goes on to state, "Like many others, I have 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... I'd flip through catalogs and wonder, what kind of dining set defines me as a person...I had it all. We used to read pornography, now it was the Horchow collection." The narrator delves into his hyper fixation upon materialistic items, thus illustrating his entrenchment within the consumerist lifestyle. As he proclaims, "...I have become a slave to the IKEA nesting instinct," he emphasizes that the influence of corporations has overtaken his mind, desires, and overall lifestyle.

This power structure that corporations maintain aligns with Lukes (2023) conceptualization of the third dimension of power in *Power: A Radical View*, which explores a much more convoluted, covert type of power that commandeers thoughts, desires, and internal decisions. This specific quote contributes to the much broader argument within the context of the film's narrative that individuals are essentially dictating their lives based upon the prevailing consumer culture. Chuck Palahnuik expands upon this in the novel adaptation of *Fight Club*. Tyler states within the book: "Warning: If you are reading this then this warning is for you. Every word you read of this useless fine print is another second of your life. Don't you have other things to do? Is your life so empty that you honestly can't think of a better way to spend these moments? Or are you so impressed with authority that you give respect and credence to all that claim it? Do you read everything you're supposed to read? Do you think everything you're supposed to think? Buy what you're told to want? Get out of your apartment. Meet a member of the opposite sex. Stop the excessive shopping and masturbation. Quit your job. Start a fight. Prove you're alive. If you don't claim your humanity you will become a statistic. You have been warned" (Palahnuik, 2021: p. 145).

Tyler intuits that individuals are grappling with feelings of emptiness and a lack of self-imperative. He encourages individuals, particularly the reader, to

resist societal norms that elicit these feelings and challenge authority. He implores that the time to change is now and if not, individuals will still experience the same false sense of purpose and imperative granted by the conformist culture that is controlled by the corporatocracy. This notion is further reaffirmed by the narrator claiming in the film, “What kind of dining set defines me as a person.” His identity, his individuality, must be elucidated by a particular dining set, according to him. His identity must be shown, as per his word, through an inanimate object. This highlights the inherent obsession with commercial goods and it’s far too close of a correlation it has with one’s identity, and this idea is further complemented by the end of the quote from the voice-over.

5. Dialogue

The convoluted, in-depth dialogue in the film is also a significant film art element that serves to expand upon the relevant arguments that permeate throughout the film. Specifically, for “*Fight Club*”, dialogue as a formal element is arguably the most important in terms of facilitating the mentioned postmodernist critiques and contentions. In *Film Art: An Introduction*, page 272: the importance of dialogue is heavily implored and the role it has within the film-making process cannot be understated. Moreover, the audience can see, most notably, through interpersonal reactions between Tyler Durden and the narrator, Tyler Durden’s monologues to his fight club, and other interactions, these arguments upon full display.

Tyler Durden and the narrator (although technically the same person) interact many times within the film and discuss the pertinent, significant topics of consumerism, identity, and resistance to social norms. Their contrast is displayed thoroughly through their discussions and Tyler, in particular, dominates the conversation by peddling his postmodernist, anti-conformist ideology. For instance, the scene where Tyler and the narrator are in Lou’s bar includes deep, meaningful dialogue between the two. The narrator begins by articulating, “It’s just when you buy furniture, you tell yourself: That’s it, that’s the last sofa I need. Whatever else happens, I’ve got the sofa problem handled. I had it all. I had a stereo that was very decent. A wardrobe that was getting very respectable. I was close to being complete.”

This reveals, among many things, the interwoven relationship that the material culture has with the narrator’s identity. He views himself and his own fulfillment solely based upon ownership of consumer goods. Tyler responds: “Sh*t, man. And now it’s all gone. Do you know why guys like us know what a duvet is? Is it essential to our survival in the hunter-gatherer sense of the word? No. What are we then?” The narrator responds: “I don’t know. Consumers.” Tyler: “Right. We’re consumers. We are by-products of a lifestyle obsession. Murder, crime, and poverty, these things don’t concern me. What concerns me are celebrity magazines, and television with 500 channels. Celestra, Rogaine, Viagra, Olestra, Martha Stewart. So f*ck off with your sofa units and Strinne green stripe

patterns. Stop being complete. Let the chips fall where they may.” And most likely the most notable and important piece of dialogue within the film and the novel is when Tyler states: “the things you own, end up owning you.”

The narrator is reliant upon a consumer culture that Tyler renounces. Unlike Tyler, the narrator is deeply entrenched within societal norms that often base meaning, “completeness” around concepts such as wealth, possessions, and commercial goods. Tyler is the polar opposite. As explained in *Fight Club: A Depiction of Modern Society as Dissociogenic*. “He is everything the Narrator is not. Tyler is a maverick and a free spirit. He is provocative and subversive. He not only sees through the pretenses of society, recognizing their stultifying effect and refusing to submit to society’s norms but mocks and disregards the tenets of the mainstream, responding to them with passionate anger, vengeance, and violence. Above all, he is confident and imposing. In brief, he is the match for Marla’s bold audaciousness and eccentricity that the Narrator is too uncertain and intimidated to dare to be” (Gold, 2003: p. 23).

Tyler views society and observes not people, but consumers. Breaking free from said societal norms that relegate citizens to “consumers” and potential prospects for corporate financial gain is essential, according to him. Tyler poses that the mainstream issues such as murder, crime, and poverty, are not truly the most important issues at hand. He views the lifestyle obsession that originates from corporate enterprise to be more troublesome. Elucidating that life isn’t about “being complete”, and rather, highlights the beauty of imperfection. Humans themselves aren’t meant to be perfect as they are imperfect in nature. Striving for said perfection will ineluctably lead to dissociation, depression, and in essence, insanity. Individuals are becoming isolated, emasculated, and detached.

This specific topic of emasculation is explored in *Fight Club: A Depiction of Contemporary Society as Dissociogenic*. “another theme that reemerges throughout Fight Club: the dissociative impact on men of the image of masculinity promulgated by contemporary society. The tension between the image of power and success promoted by contemporary culture as the masculine ideal and the reality that most men have little or no hope of attaining this coveted status is presented as yet another factor that contributes to dissociative forms of identity and experience (cf. Faludi, 1999). Intense pressure to live up to this ideal, in conjunction with the painful awareness of how distant from being able to attain it they are, promotes a poignantly fragmented and confused sense of self in many men” (Gold, 2003: p. 18). Men are often stripped of their individuality and masculinity because of the prevailing social culture. This method of thinking towards masculinity is further complemented by statements that consist throughout the film including: “Yes, men are what we are,” “Is that what a man looks like” and “I am a 30-year-old-boy.” Lastly, at the crux of his speech and what truly lies at the pinnacle of the film’s meaning and arguments, “the things you own end up owning you.” Although Tyler speaks to the narrator di-

rectly, as he needs to hear it given that he is an embodiment of a generation that succumbs to consumerist culture, he is also speaking to the audience (similar to the narrator's voice-overs). He is adamant that people understand the impact that the lifestyle obsession with material products has upon identity.

Alluding back to the sofa reference, Jack attributes much value to solving the sofa problem to the point where he attains the mindset that even in the face of other issues, rest assured, that that problem is handled. What is supposed to be merely a consumer good, an intimate object that obtains a purpose only to increase convenience, has evolved for Jack to have a strong grip upon his psyche and perception of the issues he experiences. He, similar to the rest of the Yuppie generation, obtains a conception of his own identity, worth, and character that is fundamentally rooted in materialistic ideology. This clear reality was further supported by other quotes by the narrator throughout the film, including but not limited to: "That was not just furniture, that was me." To him and the encompassing generation, a closely connected correlation exists between self-worth and materialistic ownership.

Furthermore, there are indeed many other bits of dialogue throughout the film that are relevant and significant to the overarching themes of the movie. Some of these include Tyler's emphatic, philosophical speeches to his club. Tyler exclaims in one speech: "Man, I see in Fight Club the strongest and smartest men who've ever lived. I see all this potential. And I see it squandered. Goddamn it, 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 sh*t we don't need it. We're the middle children of history, man. No purpose or place. We have no Great War. No Great Depression. Our Great War is a spiritual war. Our great depression is our lives. We've all been raised on television to believe that one day we'd be millionaires and movie Gods and rock stars. But we won't. Slowly learning that fact, We're very very pissed off."

Tyler posits that the new generation, although it obtains many potential and ingrained advantages, is unable to successfully utilize their skills and abilities accordingly given the social climate. The modern culture elicits individuals to engage in endeavors that do not tailor to these skills but instead, involve consumerism and materialistic initiatives governed by corporations. The conformist culture has bred a generation of people living lives of corporate isolation, unfulfilling duties, and a driven pursuit of wealth as a fundamental purpose of one's life. Dissimilar to prior generations, modern-day jobs and living are without true, authentic purpose. Pain, sacrifice, and a cause to fight for are absent.

As Tyler explained previously: "Without pain and sacrifice, we would have nothing." The new generation is comfortable and coddled. A common theme throughout emphasizes the importance of suffering and its fundamental role in shaping not only a person but a society. It is a cardinal element of life and if it does not exist, the human experience becomes increasingly dull, purposeless, and empty. It is essential to sculpting an individual and making them stronger.

Plato further reinforced this sentiment in “*Phaedo*”: “What a strange thing that which men call pleasure seems to be, and how astonishing the relation it has with what is thought to be its opposite, namely pain! A man cannot have both at the same time. Yet if he pursues and catches the one, he is almost always bound to catch the other also, like two creatures with one head” (Plato, 2021: p. 96). Tyler implores that previous generations attained this. Global and national conflicts were persistent and hence, a true purpose was much more attainable. People fought for a common cause and were guided by their primordial values, not the superficial corporate word of what can make one happy and fulfilled. He believes that through fighting, one can reunite with their true masculine self. The layers of conformism and consumerism that are deemed important and valuable would be stripped amidst physical combat. This is a methodology (although grotesque and a form of escapism in a sense) to funnel anger and aggression the modern generation experiences given the current socio-cultural climate.

This particular loss of values and common fight from past generations is explained in *SUBVERSION, DEMYSTIFICATION, AND HEGEMONY: FIGHT CLUB AS A POSTMODERN CULTURAL TEXT*: “Certainly Tyler’s belief that this generation of men “didn’t live through a depression or have a great war to fight,” is part of what he sees as the overall problem. He sees those catastrophic events as bringing purpose to life and establishing a generation’s attitude toward men. Tyler also takes a subversive shot at cultural history discussing how men are told that they are going to be rock stars or wealthy businessmen, and that is simply not the case. Tyler challenges America’s oldest grand narrative, that individual determination will lead to fame and fortune” (Ortoleva, 2003: p. 63).

Tyler further addresses in the last part of the quote the anger and rage that the modern generation feels. They are upset at the predominant culture and upset at their everyday lives of repetition, unfulfillment, and purposeless duty. What they truly are and their lifestyle pales in comparison to what they dreamed of when they were younger. This is a contributing factor that elicits said despondence and dissociation. Promises of mass media and television that suggest one can dream big and achieve anything are, according to Tyler, promises unfulfilled.

6. Conclusion

In summation, the film “*Fight Club*” offers plentiful arguments and critiques of modern society. They explore the rapid expansion of the corporate structure and thus the consumerist culture that is produced. The film delves deeply into the danger of conforming to this sociological culture, particularly how it can harm one’s self-identity, individuality, and overall sense of purpose. Unlike generations from the past, a pre-ordained sense of purpose and community is nonexistent. Pain, suffering, and sacrifice are not prevalent, but rather a generation that is coddled and comfortable.

Given this, people do not have the equivalent regard for cardinal values such as family, altruism, and peace. A true, self-defined imperative is absent. A cause

to stand for is absent. Instead of basing one's lifestyle, beliefs, and actions upon one's values, they are founded upon corporate financial initiatives. According to the ideologies of the film, mass consumerism breeds a covert form of control upon the greater society that influences multiple facets of one's life. This consumerist culture has to be, as the film argues, defeated and rebelled against. People must evaluate society for what it truly is and resist conforming to societal norms that elicit dissociation, emptiness, and emasculation in order to inspire change. Physical confrontation is key to not only reuniting with one's authentic self and breaking free from superficial layers of consumerism but also defeating the imposed oppressive system. Through mise-en-scene, editing, and dialogue, these theories are demonstrated to the audience.

Lastly, the books, papers, and articles reaffirm the arguments made regarding consumerism, conformism, and identity. The books, specifically, bring forth philosophical conceptions and notions pertinent to the ideas discussed extensively in this paper. This symptomatic and formal analysis provides extensive arguments about the social and political commentary of the film. It correlates both the formal elements of the film and the ideological elements. It explains how mise-en-scene, editing, and dialogue are crucial to delivering the commentary that is persistent throughout the film. It establishes the argument that *Fight Club* and its postmodernist nature critique the consumerism and conformity that dominated the late 20th century's cultural structure. The analysis of the film's formalistic elements and arguments may elicit further inquiry and discussion regarding the meaning or impact of the film. A refined understanding of the film is also a possible positive implication.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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