UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL

INSTITUTO DE LETRAS

DEPARTAMENTO DE LÍNGUAS MODERNAS

HENRIQUE LEONARDI DE OLIVEIRA

FIGHT CLUB

clash of ideas

Porto Alegre

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Convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies.

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche.

RESUMO

Este trabalho analisa o romance Fight Club, de Chuck Palahniuk, focando-se nas ideias desenvolvidas ao longo da narrativa e nos significados que elas implicam. Isso é realizado através de uma análise atenta do texto e da importância de conceitos presentes no romance, tais como: disciplina, valores, poder e moral. A definição desses conceitos é baseada em obras de Friedrich Nietzsche e Michel Foulcault. O pano de fundo histórico é também considerado, o que se reflete na hipótese de que as contradições da mente pós-moderna são diretamente relacionadas ao constante distúrbio presente na narrativa.

Palavras-chave: Clube da Luta; Palahniuk; Nietzsche; Foucault;

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the novel *Fight Club,* by Chuck Palahniuk, aiming at the ideas developed throughout the narrative and the meanings they imply. This is carried out through a close analysis of the text and of the importance of concepts, such as: discipline, values, power and moral. The definition of these concepts is based on works of Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault. The historical background is also considered, reflected in the hypothesis that the contradictions of the postmodern mind are directly related with the constant disturbance present in the narrative.

Keywords: Fight Club; Palahniuk; Nietzsche; Foucault;

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1. BREAKING THE FIRST RULE: AN INTRODUCTION

Fight Club is the debut novel of the American writer Chuck Palahniuk, first published in 1996. He had the idea of writing this story after going to work with a black eye from a fist fighting during his summer vacations, but none of his co-workers ever asked him about it. He also heard that gangs were formed by young men raised without a father. These groups helped each other by establishing discipline and internal rules, just as a coach or a Sargent would do. After that, he wrote a seven-page short story called *Fight Club,* which later became chapter three in the novel. To transform the short-story into a book, Palahniuk collected bizarre stories from his friends, who told him, for example, that they had put porn into family movies and pissed in soups as banquet waiters.

In 1999, *Fight Club* became a film under the same name, directed by David Fincher, starring Brad Pitt, Edward Norton and Helena Bonham Carter. The movie depicts the story as faithfully as a movie can, within certain limitations and obviously showing one of the point of views allowed by the novel.

The novel presents characters who face internal conflicts that are externalized through extreme actions in an attempt to change their perspectives in life. In order to do that, they seriously question important aspects of the Western society. In this process, they deal with a set of ideas represented in their actions and also in their incisive words.

These ideas conveyed by the novel express a disagreement in regards to the values at the basis of society. Over the next chapters we are going to analyze how this disagreement is important to the novel and what relations can be made between the novel, current society and the ideas that formed this society. Since *Fight Club* was published not long ago, there are not many critical essays on the novel. This makes writing about it challenging and motivates the comparison of the ideas in the narrative with the words of some of the greatest thinkers of the last centuries, such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault, whose writings are going to help us understand or, at least, think a little deeper about the issues brought up by this book.

2. *FIGHT CLUB*: CLASH OF IDEAS

Fight Club is about a man around his thirties who tells the story of how his heavy problem of insomnia makes him look for relief in support groups for fatally sick people, such as those with cancer. At the meetings, he manages to cry, and this allows him some hours of sleep (if we can rely on what is narrated, since we will see that our narrator lacks the definition of what is real to him for most of the story). It is after this experience that he has the idea of creating a brand new support group where he would get to make the rules and there would be no crying to unleash men's sufferings. Fight Club is a place in which more than punches would be exchanged: ideas would come out of the rage released by common men who suddenly become fighters.

The narrator, who is also the main character, does not reveal his name throughout the whole story. He is a successful product recall specialist working for a car company traveling from airport to airport to attend to the scenes of defective cars. Dealing with the stress of determining if recalls would be financially necessary or if it would be better for the company to deal with lawsuits from the deaths and crippling cases that result from the accidents; added to the trouble of going from one time zone to another, places him in a physical and mental state in which the emptiness and constraint of his life set a "bomb" ready to explode against everything that led him to the way he was living. In the first chapter, which presents events that chronologically take place at the end of the story, the reader already has a taste of how the ideas of bringing down civilization would influence the narrator, his "friend" Tyler Durden and Marla Singer to act in the manner they do and which eventually results in this situation described right at beginning of the narrative:

> Tyler gets me a job as a waiter, after that Tyler's pushing a gun in my mouth and saying, the first step to eternal life is you have to die. For a long time though, Tyler and I were best friends. People are always asking, did I know about Tyler Durden.
> The barrel of the gun pressed against the back of my throat, Tyler says "We really won't die."(PALAHNIUK, p.11)
>
> Up on top of the Parker-Morris Building with Tyler's gun in my mouth. While desks and filing cabinets and computers meteor down on the crowd around the building and smoke funnels up from the broken windows and three

> blocks down the street the demolition team watches the clock, I know all of this: the gun, the anarchy, the explosion is really about Marla Singer. (PALAHNIUK, p.14)

In this first chapter, the three main characters appear in a situation where the reader questions himself about the reason for these people to be on the top of a building which is about to be destroyed, while a gun is being pushed into the mouth of the nameless narrator by Tyler Durden. At the same time, there is a possibility that this conflict might have resulted from a not very well defined affair going on between Marla and the "two" other men.

However, as soon as the second chapter starts, we are taken to another location in time and space: the narrator is in the arms of very big guy, as part of the hug therapy of one of the support groups the narrator had being going to for some time. This is the testicular cancer support group, called Remaining Men Together. The man who is hugging our narrator is Robert Paulson, or Big Bob, who has "bitch tits" for having his testicles removed because of cancer. It is when he is being hugged by Bob that the narrator cries for the first time, thus recovering his sleep: *"And I slept. Babies don't sleep this well"* (PALAHNIUK, p.22). This positive result makes him become addicted to this kind of group, and so he attends one of them every day, pretending he is also dying.

At these support groups our "hero" meets his "damsel in distress", Marla Singer, who suddenly starts to attend the same groups he does, even the testicular cancer group. This evidently gives away that she is not dying, much in the same way he is not either. Her lying makes his lying reveal a fact he cannot deny: that he had been going to these groups for two years and had started to believe in his own lie in such a way that he did not need to face his true problems. Marla's presence stops him from getting the therapeutic effect crying was having on him, so, once again, he cannot sleep. He wants her out of his sight, but the most he can get from her is an arrangement in which the groups are divided between them so they would not go to the same ones. This deal allows them to exchange phone numbers, a vital instrument for Marla to become a part of his life, though he does not mean to show that he cares about the girl.

It is only after his conflict with Marla Singer that this other character appears in the novel: Tyler Durden. Tyler can be considered as no more than a projection of the narrator's own psyche or another personality he develops because of the insomnia, but let us think of

Tyler more as a metaphor of his internal conflicts about his dissatisfaction with himself and with his life. The narrator does not realize that Tyler is not real until a certain part of the story in which he cannot continue to go along with Tyler's actions. It is Tyler who brings Marla back into his life, by saving hers when she tries to kill herself. He, then, "has to" keep her awake the whole night and does so by having sex with her.

It is interesting to notice that only after meeting Marla does this division of personality in the narrator apparently happen. This is indicated in the quotation previously referred to: "the explosion is really about Marla Singer"(PALAHNIUK, p.22), because his explosion can be seen by many angles, including the creation of Tyler, whose objective is to cause everything and everybody to "hit bottom". Nevertheless, the narrator demonstrates to us readers how much he hates his life through some attitudes, such as: the way he does not find any meaning in his job; how he wishes to die in a plane crash and is jealous of the cancer deceased people (because of the attention they receive, in a way he never does). But none of these dissatisfactions were enough for Tyler's arising to take place. Therefore, the push he needed to change his life, to leave his complacent state of mind, only comes after this specific girl comes into his life, which seems to act as the trigger for the "birth" of Tyler to rescue him from his miserable life. Still, it is open to speculation to say that Marla is just as unreal as Tyler, only the narrator never realizes that, given his mental condition, and there is also a great similarity between Tyler's and Marla's self-destructive personalities.

However, this change of thoughts that Mr. Durden represents does not happen consciously, since Tyler only acts, at least most of the time, when the narrator thinks he is sleeping. Therefore, it is acceptable to say that Tyler's "presence" takes place long before the narrator realizes it, since his insomnia and Tyler's existence are obviously related. Considering the end of the story when he fights Tyler by not sleeping, there is a chance that his insomnia, since its beginning, was actually Tyler acting during his sleep. Nevertheless, we readers can never be certain of this, since we only have access to the story through this disturbed narrator's words.

Still, Tyler could be the embodiment of the narrator's desires, a person who could do what he was not capable of doing, though they were his deepest wishes. Tyler is possibly the way his subconscious finds to escape everything that has trapped him inside the reality that he, and every other man he knows, cannot fight. Because the narrator could not find a way of denying this reality's strength, a man appears from inside his fantasies to tell him and the other Fight Club members that they still have power to be released. And this starts

happening when they give up whatever is called civility and start to punch and kick each other as a way to try to state to themselves that they could face whatever they fear: their bosses, their financial problems, their family issues, their relationships and every single thing that bothers them. These things are hardships they would not take a stand against because common-sense states that it is normal to live with the acceptance of being degraded, or frustrated in many aspects of life. These all were little sacrifices they had to perform in order to fit into society so they might be able to reach an ultimate goal: to consume. Reaching this goal was not taking them anywhere and, though many of these men might be considered financially successful, they felt powerless.

The men of Tyler's generation (most men in Western society fit into this type) live in a time when consumerism is experienced almost as a religion and everyone is involuntarily "registered" to it from childhood to old age. It strongly influences everyone's actions and makes them dedicate their lives to doing whatever is necessary to obtain the objects of desire that eventually reveal themselves to be pointless: *"(. . .)Advertising has these people chasing cars and clothes they don't need. Generations have been working in jobs they hate, just so they can buy what they don't really need."* (PALAHNIUK, p.149). They are all men who have mostly been raised by their mothers, without the presence of a strong father figure. In a way, Tyler acts as a substitute for this father figure, even for the narrator himself, who sees Tyler as a real friend he could count on, admire, talk to about his problems and his unresolved issues, even those from his childhood.

Gradually, we are able to relate the situation in which the narrator "meets" Tyler Durden to what this man represents to him. The narrator is complaining about how he has to travel constantly to attend to his job's tasks, complaining about the "jet lag" it causes him. Then, suddenly, he is on vacation at a nude beach, where Tyler asks him the time and builds, in the sand, a strange hand made from the shadow formed by wooden logs where Tyler sits on. This scene (that certainly belongs much more to his onirical world than anything else) is one of the tips we readers have to identify how fictional his relationship with Tyler is, or how internal it is, created by his mind. We discover that other people really see Tyler, though only in the narrator. Marla is a clear example, as they later argue: "she doesn't know the difference". And, because we can only have access to the story through the narrator's point of view, we readers might not see Tyler at first as an immaterial figure, only figuring this out as the narrative evolves.

Right after Tyler "comes into the narrator's life", Fight Club is founded, or more specifically, after the narrator has his apartment destroyed by a "sudden" explosion. He

then asks Tyler if he could stay at his house, to which Tyler's reaction is "I want you to hit me as hard as you can.". "Their" fight calls the attention of other men, which leads to the foundation of the club that later moves to the basement of a bar when the cold winter days come. Fight Club has seven basic rules, followed by everyone, except for rule number one and number two, a fact that becomes obvious as we observe the number of members increasing as time goes by:

> (. . .)First thing Tyler yells is, "The first rule about fight club is you don't talk about fight club.
>
> "The second rule about fight club," Tyler yells, "is you don't talk about fight club."
>
> (. . .)
>
> Tyler standing under the one light in the after-midnight blackness of a basement full of men, Tyler runs through the other rules: two men per fight, one fight at a time, no shoes no shirts, fights go on as long as they have to.
>
> "And the seventh rule," Tyler yells, "is if this is your first night at fight club, you have to fight."(PALAHNIUK, p.50)

The narrator demonstrates to have a deep desire to destroy himself, because he sees in his own figure the representation of everything accumulated over the centuries by western culture which eventually gave this final shape to the capitalist American white consumer that he became. Then, it is by erasing that horrid figure, by "hitting bottom", that these elements which made him so miserable would disappear from his life, would be detached from his identity. He reaches this conclusion with the help of Tyler, who starts "liberating" him from this life by blowing up his apartment. To continue pursuing this objective, he creates Fight Club, which is, at first, only a much more efficient therapy he comes up with, intending to fight his insomnia. Later, it becomes something much bigger, since it is where his other self, Tyler, starts to express his leadership among other men, his capacity of creating from scratch a brand new organization. A club which is so peculiar that it cannot be described in a whole through words, as declared by the narrator: *What happens at fight club doesn't happen in words.*"(PALAHNIUK, p.51), which means that in order to try to grasp what this club represents to its members, one would have to experience it.

Eventually, Fight Club becomes ineffective to fight the narrator's insomnia: it is necessary to go even further with destruction. The narrator and Tyler express their need to destroy whatever society holds as sacred, untouchable. In order to do this, they create Project Mayhem, an underground guerrilla constituted of Fight Club members who become Tyler's "Space Monkeys", people who are very useful to the cause, though they do not understand what they are doing. Tyler is ready to offer any of his "Monkeys" (if not himself) as a sacrifice this organization in the name of the evolution of society which, paradoxically, they would achieve through its destruction. Project Mayhem has many committees to divide the tasks among the large number of members:

> They meet in the basement where fight club meets on Saturday night. Each
> committee meets on a different night:
> Arson meets on Monday.
> Assault on Tuesday.
> Mischief meets on Wednesday.
> And Misinformation meets on Thursday.
> Organized Chaos. The Bureaucracy of Anarchy. You figure it
> out.(PALAHNIUK, p.119)

Project Mayhem does not seem to have any primordial intention beyond destruction: *"This was the goal of Project Mayhem, Tyler said, the complete and right away destruction of civilization."*(PALAHNIUK, 2006, p.125). Nevertheless, this desire for destruction is not for free, because Tyler Durden sees himself (as he sees the narrator) as a representative of the average man who society programmed throughout history to be submitted to a certain set of values so he would not question anything and work everyday as a "space monkey" for the big corporations or the government. By destroying and putting in suspension the stability of this society, Tyler would be questioning the reliance on the values that support this state of things. But most important of all, he would put an end to his identification with those values, and build new ones that should rise after the old ones were torn apart.

Such is Tyler's philosophy: destruction is the possibility men like him have to come up with something better. The narrator would never be the same, for even if Tyler died, this other personality he develops would mean an awakening for him to oppose that ordinary

life. It would mean opposing the acceptance of old values, and old forms of art, as well as religious dogmas, which are the basis that supports how society works and that manages to trap men just like the way he was feeling trapped before his mind comes up with the Tyler figure.

Both Fight Club and Project Mayhem not only intend to destroy whatever their members come across, but are also a set of actions and of postures before society which could enable the men who take part to change how they perceive themselves among other men, and mainly how other men perceive them, which forms their identity. In the narrative, there are some situations which are representative of this change in these men's identities: for instance, there is the description of a fight, from the narrator's point of view, of a very small and weak young man, both in the physical and social sense, who beats up a much bigger man during Fight Club:

> You saw the kid who works in the copy center, a month ago you saw this kid who can't remember to three-hole-punch an order or put colored slip sheets between the copy packets, but this kid was a god for ten minutes when you saw him kick the air out of an account representative twice his size then land on the man and pound him limp until the kid had to stop.(. . .) (PALAHNIUK, p.48-49)

It is by stating this power that can be unleashed in a fight that Tyler/ narrator (based on his/ their own experimentation) finds that those men who go to Fight Club can recover their sense of being alive, of still being capable of changing something in their lives. It starts with the simple posture of simply not caring about their ordinary responsibilities and it evolves to a self-affirmation in which this characters state state to themselves: this specific individual is from now on detaching himself from the common sense civilized "real world".

> Who guys are in fight club is not who they are in the real world. Even if you told the kid in the copy center that he had a good fight, you wouldn't be talking to the same man.
> Who I am in fight club is not someone my boss knows.

> After a night in fight club, everything in the real world gets the volume turned down. Nothing can piss you off. Your word is law, and if other people break that law or question you, even that doesn't piss you off.(PALAHNIUK, p.49)

Thus, Fight Club works as the first step for Tyler to build his ideas towards confrontation with ordinary life. Through the fights, his other self feels empowered before other men, even those who he normally feels inferior to, such as his boss. The designation of the rules the members have to follow is another aspect through which Tyler gains power over other men and, most significantly, over society. Though the operation of the club is an illegal activity to the rest of the world, it has its own rules. Paradoxically, at the same time the creation of the club represents despising "civil" rules (or laws), it institutes internal rules, which are (mostly) only applied and make sense inside those hours in which Fight Club exists. This reality only exists during this short period, while the rest of the time Fight Club members are once again regular men. That is why the creation of Project Mayhem becomes necessary.

> I said I felt like crap and not relaxed at all. I didn't get any kind of buzz. Maybe I'd developed a Jones. You can build up a tolerance to fighting, and maybe I needed to move on to something bigger.
> It was that morning, Tyler invented Project Mayhem.
> Tyler asked what I was really fighting.
> What Tyler says about being the crap and the slaves of history, that's how I felt. I wanted to destroy everything beautiful I'd never have. Burn the Amazon rain forests. Pump chlorofluorocarbons straight up to gobble the ozone. Open the dump valves on supertankers and uncap offshore oil wells. I wanted to kill all the fish I couldn't afford to eat, and smother the French beaches I'd never see.
> I wanted the whole world to hit bottom.(PALAHNIUK, p.123)

Project Mayhem has to face some barriers in order to be instituted: first, there is the financial aspect, which is easily solved by Tyler and his other self by threatening their bosses to come public with things "they" know or have done against the projectionists union, the catering company and the car company (for instance, Tyler inserts frames of

pornographic movies into family movies, spoils the food he serves, while the narrator knows about the defective cars the company he worked for sells). By doing that, the characters manage to keep receiving their pay checks even though they have quit their jobs. On the other hand, they also make a good amount of money selling soaps produced by the members who join Project Mayhem as one of their duties. They still have to deal with the police, snitches, etc. and any sphere of power that supports civilized society and would be opposed to Tyler's ideas, but it does not menace the group immediately, because the large number of Space Monkeys becomes Tyler's private army to defend himself from any attack.

Tyler and his other self live in a very old house, on Paper Street, where the former members of Fight Club enlist themselves to join Project Mayhem, having to put up with tougher regulations than those at Fight Club, such as only being admitted after spending three days waiting on the porch and bringing some essential items, as described in the following excerpt:

> It costs at least three hundred dollars to cremate an indigent corpse, Tyler told me, and the price was going up. Anyone who dies without at least this much money, their body goes to an autopsy class.
> This money must always be carried in the student's shoe so if the student is ever killed, his death will not be a burden on Project Mayhem.
> In addition, the applicant has to arrive with the following:
> Two black shirts.
> Two black pair of trousers.
> One pair of heavy black shoes.
> Two pair of black socks and two pair of plain underwear.
> One heavy black coat.
> This includes the clothes the applicant has on his back.
> One white towel.
> One army surplus cot mattress.
> One white plastic mixing bowl (PALAHNIUK, p.127 -128)

By bringing these items and waiting with the "zen" patience Tyler expects from them, these men can join the army he manages to put at his service. Here they become his Space Monkeys, soldiers who are not allowed to question anything, therefore, voluntarily enslaved by Tyler's ideas: *"Pull a lever. Push a button. You don't really understand any of it."* (PALAHNIUK, p.193). These Monkeys are the voice and body for

Tyler when he is not around; they reproduce his actions and words when he is not able to do or say them. Project Mayhem not only has a pre-requisite for admittance, but has rules in the same way Fight Club does. *"No questions. No questions. No excuses and no lies. The fifth rule about Project Mayhem is you have to trust Tyler."*(PALAHNIUK, p.125) Once again, Tyler creates something totally illegal, with the intention of destroying what is considered legal, but working under some legality of his own, with simple rules which should be followed religiously. However, now the activity of the group is not restricted to some hours every night: it is in action all the time, challenging the regular structure of society, such as the police, government and private companies.

This structure, that is society's basis, tries to fight Tyler's attacks. This resistance is the biggest barrier Project Mayhem has to deal with in order to keep working beyond the limits imposed by the law. This problem seems to be solved by a very efficient method: the very large number of Space Monkeys "go for their huevos", which means that every authority that tries or menaces to close Fight Club or Project Mayhem is threatened with castration, with the cooperation of men from every level of society who are also Tyler's allies, but mainly of those on who these authorities depend the most:

> "Remember this," Tyler said. "The people you're trying to step on, we're everyone you depend on. We're the people who do your laundry and cook your food and serve your dinner. We make your bed. We guard you while you're asleep. We drive the ambulances. We direct your call. We are cooks and taxi drivers and we know everything about you. We process your insurance claims and credit card charges. We control every part of your life. (PALAHNIUK, p.166)

Since they use the services these men offer, every policeman, politician, member of the government or business man is obliged to trust people who keep their "world turning". Tyler, with the close control he has over his subordinates, manages to put in his favor the increasing number of Fight Club and Project Mayhem members, "planting" eyes everywhere to work for him. No one can do anything, according to the narrator's description, without bumping into a man with a black eye or a twisted nose. Therefore, the control society has over its citizens by having them under non-stop surveillance is turned upside down when these "citizens" unite to attack the authorities who are supposed to

control and suppress any deviating behavior. This strategy works similarly to the "panopticon" concept of control of the society, described by the philosopher Michel Foucault. We are going to take a better look into this concept further ahead in this paper.

With this structure in his hands, Tyler can control everything he needs to keep moving on with his plans of destroying civilization. He does that, as we have seen, not through a traditional political method, such as going after the main authorities to bring the government down, or combating certain political party, or certain politicians, but by attacking the people who support the political view that, for example, favors consumerism in society. One of the first attacks is performed when he is still working as an "independent" waiter, he attacks rich people by spoiling their food, or, for instance, by threatening to have very expensive perfumes bottles spoiled:

> Loud and fast, Tyler says how they kill whales, Tyler says, to make that perfume that costs more than gold per ounce. Most people have never seen a whale. Leslie has two kids in an apartment next to the freeway and Madam hostess has more bucks than we'll make in a year in bottles on her bathroom counter. (PALAHNIUK, p.83)

The great despair of the woman, whose perfume is Tyler's target, shows that a very simple act, if done against the right target, can cause huge damage on those people who rely on consumerist symbols to feel complete. This is a statement by which, even before Project Mayhem, the narrator, or Tyler intend to shake society's stability by planting fear among rich people, a statement of how Tyler and narrator try to find a "chink" in the wall that imprisons them, ultimately trying to bring it fully down.

However, Project Mayhem goes deeper than only establishing fear among the rich and privileged, it also starts to have lethal victims. Throughout the novel, three deaths are described: one, that of a member of the project, and two other people who are considered representatives of the opposition to the project or to Tyler. One of the victims is the narrator's boss, who is killed by Tyler:

> I know my boss is dead.

> The three ways to make napalm. I knew Tyler was going to kill my boss. The second I smelled gasoline on my hands, when I said I wanted out of my job, I was giving him permission. Be my guest.
> Kill my boss. (PALAHNIUK, p.185)

The other victim is one of the major objectors of Fight Club, Patrick Madden, killed by Tyler too: "*His name was Patrick Madden, and he was the mayor's special envoy on recycling. His name was Patrick Madden, and he was an enemy of Project Mayhem.*(. . .) *Patrick Madden was compiling a list of bars where fight clubs met.*" (PALAHNIUK, p.198). His assassination takes place during a party where a fake murder is supposed to be enacted by the guests, but, ironically, Tyler Durden makes it become real by killing the man. Next, comes the death of Robert Paulson, Big Bob, who dies in a Project Mayhem operation, killed by the police for not dropping a driller he was carrying which is taken for a gun. Robert Paulson, being the first member to die, is honored by receiving his identity back, therefore no longer being a Space Monkey: "*Only in death will we have our own names since only in death are we no longer part of the effort. In death we become heroes.*" (PALAHNIUK, p.178).

It is after these deaths that the narrator tries to stop Project Mayhem and shut down the Fight Clubs. For him, killing people would not be a border he was willing to cross to "hit bottom"; as "Tyler" wanted him and civilization to do. However, by going against Tyler, he brings the Space Monkeys against himself, who try to castrate him as they would anyone who tries to stop them. The Space Monkeys are no more than "little Tylers": they do what Tyler would. Therefore, as soon as the narrator tries to make Tyler stop, realizing they are the same person (Tyler's actions take place while he thinks he is sleeping), the Space Monkeys go on to keep Tyler's ideas alive. Tyler knows his other self could eventually revolt against him, and thus he teaches his followers to be prepared to act and maintain Fight Club and Project Mayhem working, even in his absence.

This turning against Tyler, carried out by the nameless narrator, is what defines them as separate characters in the novel, though they are the same person. It represents that they are actually personifications of opposite ideas, at least in this part of the story. When the narrator wanted freedom to be released from the life he used to lead, Tyler's ideas fit perfectly, but when they reach a point in which murders are being committed, the narrator does not want to continue "being" Tyler any longer. His alternative is to try not to sleep to avoid Tyler from taking control over his body. By choosing this path he intends to

"kill" Tyler and, incoherently, he also wants to interrupt Fight Club and Project Mayhem's activities.

> I go to fight club tonight to shut it down. I stand in the one light at the center of the room, and the club cheers. To everyone here, I'm Tyler Durden. Smart. Forceful. Gutsy. I hold up my hands for silence, and I suggest, why don't we all just call it a night. Go home, tonight, and forget about fight club. I think fight club has served its purpose, don't you?
> Project Mayhem is canceled.
> I hear there's a good football game on television ...(PALAHNIUK, p.178)

It seems that the narrator, after going a long way in fighting his miserable life, with Tyler's essential support, wanted everything to be the way it was before Fight Club. He tells the members at Fight Club to go home to watch football on television, but this complacent life of sitting on the couch watching TV is one of the main attitudes that should be avoided, according to his and Tyler's ideas spread through Fight Club and Project Mayhem. It is not a coincidence that one of the arguments the narrator comes up with to support his foundation of Fight Club is also related to football:

> 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, commercials pitching beer every ten minutes, and a pause now for station identification. After you've been to fight club, watching football on television is watching pornography when you could be having great sex. (PALAHNIUK, p.50)

This attitude leaves the reader with two options: to consider it is an inconsistency in the novel or to consider that the narrator changes his mind in this decision of killing Tyler and breaking up with whatever idea he represents. I believe the best way out of this dilemma is to assume it is an inconsistency in the story, instead of a complete regret over the ideas stated by the narrator and his other personality during the rest of the novel, since Fight Club for him represented the choice for living, instead of sitting at home consuming football. It was living opposed to denying life, and the narrator finds out that living was the best choice, in other words, stating his still existent power was the choice he made, an

affirmation he makes when he starts a club from his own ideas (which come from Tyler), with his rules, and not the rules already given. Why would he want to go back to be only a consumer who achieves nothing but symbolic objects which do nothing for his fulfillment? If we consider fight a metaphor, to the narrator, Tyler and his "friends", it represents the idea of taking action, confronting fear, since they never felt complete as men, since they felt as if they were castrated, inoffensive as rats, or panda bears: "(. . .)*I really wanted to put a bullet between the eyes every endangered panda that wouldn't screw to save its species and every whale or dolphin that gave up and ran itself aground."* (PALAHNIUK, p.123). It is not the fight that makes the narrator feel so much better, feel free from what was crushing his life. It is the courage to face something different, the courage to transgress and trespass limits he was not supposed to. Doing that was the first step in denying the rest of the truths he was undeniably tied to in his previous life, when his lack of of power stopped him from taking any action other than those he was expected to, repeatedly and automatically.

Tyler and the narrator are not the opposite of each other, since Tyler would not exist if the narrator did not need him, even though the "creation" of Tyler happens at an unconscious level (a point which is not going to be explored here because it would take an extended study on the matter). Nevertheless, it is important here to say that both narrator and his other self are representative of the same set of values, which can be seen in the explicit opposition to the consumerist life the narrator was leading and the loss of power entailed in accepting this kind of life. This is not only proved by the often repeated sentence: "(. . .) *Generations have been working in jobs they hate, just so they can buy what they don't really need*" (PALAHNIUK, p.149), but also by one of the "home assignments" performed by the narrator when he threatens to kill a young man if he did not quit his low-paying job and go back to school:

> I know who you are. I know where you live. I'm keeping your license, and I'm going to check on you, mister Raymond K. Hessel. In three months, and then in six months, and then in a year, and if you aren't back in school on your way to being a veterinarian, you will be dead.(PALAHNIUK, p.154)

There is the possibility of looking at narrator and Tyler and classifying them as opposites. However, this can only be done until Fight Club is founded, only by comparing

the ideas implied by the narrator's attitudes towards his life with the ideas that Tyler brings. But they are more contrasting if you compare the person the narrator describes he used to be before his insomnia, since the idea of looking for death, or for relief in support groups, already represents a dissatisfaction with his lifestyle, as much as the insomnia itself (if physical factors are disconsidered), which points out that that life was not only unbearable, but it became something unreal, considering the lack of meaning it had to him.

Hence, if Tyler and his "other half" defend the many ideas approached so far (and combat some others), and put them in practice, to the point that other men reproduce these ideas and spell them out around the streets, does that affiliate them to any "stream of thought"? This is what is going to be analyzed throughout the next chapters of this paper.

3. TYLER MEETS NIETZSCHE

Similarly to the character in *Fight* Club, Tyler Durden, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche did not hide that he was not at all pleased with the world he lived in. Though much of this German philosopher's world were only the seeds for what Tyler would see at the end of the 20th century, many issues Nietzsche dealt with in his time were very similar with those that *Fight Club* presents.

Nevertheless, it should be clear that the intention of putting Tyler's and Nietzsche's ideas side by side is not to state that the author of *Fight Club*, Chuck Palahniuk, was influenced or directly used any of Nietzsche's philosophy in order to write his novel. The objective here is to carry out an analysis of the ideas conveyed by Palahniuk's text and its similarities with Nietzsche's ideas.

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was born in Röcken, Germany, and lived between 1844 and 1900. His productiveness and consciousness, however, were limited to the year 1889, since that is when he had his last nervous crisis which completely alienated him from reality until his death. This crisis was caused by a degenerative disease he had been fighting over the years and which some scholars assume was the result of Syphilis.

Nietzsche's life-time took place in a historical age full of great wars and revolutions that caused many changes around Europe, including Germany, which went through the process of unification into a nation state that historically ended in 1871. However, he did not see these changes as progress for the European man: he saw them as a continuum of change that was leading man to a deep mediocrity as a result of the domination of Christian and bourgeois values. Most of these values have a very old origin, in the Jewish/ Christian religions, which, according to Nietzsche, have slave values, constituting a slave moral that came simply from the opposition to the morals of their lords, who made them suffer. Because of that, the values created by the exploited put a sign of evil in the the values of their rulers, who considered the strong, the brave, the merciless, the healthy and the rich as good. Thus, an inversion was produced, in which the humble and the poor would go to "heaven", while being merciful (coward) or weak was not a flaw. Subsequently, with the advent of Christianity and its eventual dominance around Europe, this kind of thought became an undeniable truth which was strengthened during the Medieval Age,

when the European empires were mainly Christian oriented and even killed the non-Christian.

The bourgeois class (who followed the Christian emperors in the domain of power in Europe) did not change much from the Christian values when the middle-class they formed took the role of government. As key features they kept the repression of emotional and sexual desires related to self-control, which become part of their morals that allowed them to have an intensely controlled social space where private property is the center of all things.

3.1 *Democracy: moral of equals?*

This moral that gathered around it a very large number of "believers" was also the basis for the affirmation of the kind of democracy Nietzsche feared, but had already risen in the French Revolution and had taken place yet before in The United States when, through the American Revolution, Americans obtained their independence. The *Declaration of Independence* textually states that all men are equal: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men **are created equal**, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights(. . .)"(our emphasis). Nietzsche points out that the origin of democracy lies in the negation of noble values performed by Christians, who condemn the exceptional, the strong and the creative, essentially, those who theoretically do not need morals to live by. It is a requirement of democracy that this kind of person should be avoided in order to keep everyone under control with the same set of values and rules. The figure of the genius is always misrepresented as a person who, above all, follows rules exemplary, and the ones who explicitly do not are labeled as a waste of talent, when not of God's gift.

Nietzsche sees in this practice of condemning the aristocratic figure (in the sense of personality, not family origin) the cause for European society to level men by the lowest standards, through the religious excuse of man's parity: since all men have the same origin, they are "brothers". This false equality is also perceived by Palahniuk's character Tyler Durden. His ideas of enslaving the "Space Monkeys" would not exist if he thought they were not already slaves, turned into... *"The crap and the trash of the world. Post-*

consumer human butt wipe(. . .)" (PALAHNIUK, 2006, p.109). Tyler functions in the novel as a character that provides his "other half", the narrator, the possibility of differentiating himself from others by quitting his ordinary life. Actually, Tyler is "born" from the narrator's dissatisfaction with being just another number in the postmodern world, where his individuality is suppressed by his consumer habits, by the fetishistic objects he owns and that ultimately were the only elements to constitute his identity.

The *Fight Club* narrator finds in these objects he buys the only alternative through which he is allowed to express himself, since he cannot create anything that could "save him", considering the limitations imposed by the restraints society forces upon him. His only option is to allow the "stream" to take him so he does not risk being considered an outcast (which ultimately is what Tyler makes him become). He would direct all his energy in turning himself into the successful employee and bystander consumer he is until Tyler makes him "part of the show", "delivers" him from being "perfect". We can not forget, though, that this perfection achieved is according to the standards of the world he cannot agree with less, standards that drive him almost insane and make him miserable.

This ordinary creature the *Fight Club* narrator was shaped into is very similar to what the European man was starting to become in Nietzsche's time. With the Industrial Revolution and the increase in the urban population, the control of labour workers becomes a huge concern among authorities. Hence, the creation of the urban middle-man is fundamental for the societies that were going through such a change of configuration, with the population leaving the countryside to occupy cities in search for a way to financially survive. These people start to produce goods but, as a counterpart, they consume some products, which is essential for the internal market to work and increase profit. This system in which men are not much more than part of the "chain of production" creates an urban life centered in the repetitious cycle of producing and buying products. Disregarding the obvious differences in the consuming habits between Nietzsche's and Tyler's time, since the 19th century middle-man never reached the same level of consuming superfluous products, the 20th century consumerist *Fight Club* narrator is in his "before Tyler age" certainly an extrapolation of the figure created by the liberties combined with reason that the bourgeois values supported in the name of progress.

This kind of life is considered unnatural by Nietzsche, not because he is against Capitalism, but because a man who subjects himself to living as nothing more than a "puppet" of the system denies much of his strength and weakens himself by accepting the morals of the urban group. This "everyman" is supposed to live in a manner which his own

needs are left aside for him to be able to dedicate himself to his fellow "brothers" needs. This attitude is the opposite of what Nietzsche considers necessary for someone's life, since it takes the pleasure out of it:

> (. . .)the gregarious European man nowadays assumes an air as if he were the only kind of man that is allowable, he glorifies his qualities, such as public spirit, kindness, deference, industry, temperance, modesty, indulgence, sympathy, by virtue of which he is gentle, endurable, and useful to the herd, as the peculiarly human virtues. (NIETZSCHE, 2010, Beyond Good and Evil, chap. 199, p.133)

Any man who wants to preserve his image in his "community" must be a man whose morality cannot have any flaw, he must then deny his well-being if it is against the well-being of others, because this is one of the premises of Christian morality, as much as it is for the bourgeois'. Nietzsche is, therefore, against democracy, since it works as a way of forcing man to live submitted to other men, powerless and dependent. The talented men are not stimulated to improve themselves, since they have to, first of all, consider if they do any good to their "brothers". Being gifted is not an advantage in a society that rewards the sick, weak and poor, as long as they continue to be ordinarily inoffensive. It is almost forbidden to be extraordinary, since the ordinary is the rule and the guilt for "leaving others behind" makes most people follow every rule, which means to adapt to lower levels than one could achieve if not restrained by concern with others.

3.2 *Will to Power*

According to Nietzsche, the option for leading a life conformed to a group has flaws, since it is natural for man to follow the instinct of detaching himself from others, because man is guided by a force called "will to power". This acts as an instinct that pushes every living creature to go after anything that might grant him or her to obtain more power over others. The ones who succeed in this task are always the ones who manage to become the happiest, proving to be the strongest, the freer and, ultimately, the leader of his

inferiors.

> What is good?--Whatever augments the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself, in man.
> What is evil?--Whatever springs from weakness.
> What is happiness?--The feeling that power increases--that resistance is overcome. (NIETZSCHE, 2010, *The Antichrist,* chap. 2, p. 17)

In addition, Nietzsche says that the conduction of life must take into consideration the "will to power", because to live is the constant search for power; other than that, there is a denial of life. Therefore, the values that constitute any morals should be measured in terms of to what level they are beneficial to life. Considering that values are only created by men, not given rules, the "will to power" is the main source for man to create any value.

> Under what conditions did men invent for themselves these value judgments good and evil? And what inherent value do they have? Have they hindered or fostered human well-being up to now? Are they a sign of some emergency, of impoverishment, of an atrophying life? Or is it the other way around—do they indicate fullness, power, a will for living, courage, confidence, the future? (NIETZSCHE, 2010, On the Genealogy of Morals, chap. 3, p. 2)

However, the religious characteristic of the morals come from the opposition to the "will to power", from a denial first of the noble values previously mentioned, then a denial of life itself. Nietzsche states that men who deprive themselves of their wishes make their "will to power" act inwardly by suppressing their desires. These men find happiness only in defeating their wills. This behavior is, for them, the only one accepted as moral, justified by the argument that the person who manages to fit into this becomes attested to live eternally in another reality, the after-life reality.

> When the centre of gravity of life is placed, not in life itself, but in "the beyond"--in nothingness--then one has taken away its centre of gravity altogether. The vast lie of personal immortality destroys all reason, all natural instinct--henceforth, everything in the instincts that is beneficial, that fosters life and that safeguards the future is a cause of suspicion. So to live

that life no longer has any meaning: this is now the "meaning" of life....
(NIETZSCHE, 2010, The Antichrist, chap. 43, p.51)

This theory of the "will to power" cannot be scientifically proven, though Nietzsche certainly based his idea on the scientific "Darwinian" maxim of the survival of the strongest and the fittest. This only proves that nature has no morals, while morals are creation of men, if not an illusion. Furthermore, we can see that the matter of having power is fundamental in Nietzsche's philosophy, because he states that a creature would rather risk its life than lose the opportunity of acquiring power. "*A living thing seeks above all to DISCHARGE its strength—life itself is WILL TO POWER; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent RESULTS thereof.*" (NIETZSCHE, 2010, Beyond God and Evil, chap 13, p. 24) In his opinion, the man who chooses to become part of a group instead of fighting for his own ideas and creating his own morals ends up unfulfilled, since the group allows him no power. The weakening of man, in the sense of having actual power in society, is one of the subjects present in *Fight Club.* This is done in a way whereby the ideas implied by the situations the character/ narrator describes are similar to Nietzsche's. We can see this because the narrator of the novel "creates" his second personality for two main reasons: first, the lack of power caused by his lifestyle; second, the absence of meaning his life had.

The narrator's life before he and Tyler founded Fight Club was only dedicated to consumerism, acting inside the limits society allows him. The narrator could not avoid this kind of life, nor have any idea of how to quit the full-circle he was is caught in. Therefore, aware of this or not, he creates another personality who not only is completely detached from what society considers as normal, but has all the power he lacks. The search for consumerism and the obedience to society's rules is not something Tyler is concerned about. "*Then you're trapped in your lovely nest, and the things you used to own, now they own you.(p.44)".* The narrator (exactly like the other men he meets) felt so powerless that he had to trust the goods he bought to find any meaning in his life, since postmodern society only leaves people the option to build their identity through their consumer choices, but it still does not prevent the feeling of emptiness the narrator had.

Another example of a character who struggles to find meaning in his life and a reason for his actions is Big Bob who, crying at the support group, says ""*All my life," Bob cries. "Why I do anything, I don't know.""* (PALAHNIUK, 2006, p.18). He dedicated his

whole life to Bodybuilding, a sport whose central idea is that competitors must reach the most perfect figure by building their muscles to inhumane extremes. This practice idolizes unnatural figures that have no other reason to cultivate this kind of body if not to show it in contests. Bob is a miserable person after being successful in his field, falling ill of testicular cancer because of his life-style, which included taking steroids. His life has no meaning after the disease strikes, but before he led a life that was no more than an idealization of the consumerist images and he served as one of these images, which eventually rotted, though he could not realize that before his disease. The narrator often repeats a sentence about how things and people around him might look good, but which always hide some problem. "Under and behind and inside everything I took for granted, something horrible has been growing."(PALAHNIUK, 2006, p.202). This means that the narrator understands that he lives in a society where images (such as Bob's) are supposed to look "pure", but he fears what these perfections might hide. The narrator himself is a clear example of a person who might look good, but this appearance is only sustained by the same standards that classify him as good, which are not worth anything for him, since he is extremely miserable, he cannot accept such standards.

Fight Club characters feel powerless, find no meaning in their lives because there is nothing that could grant them power. In Nietzsche's words, men need to feel power increasing in order to be happy. These characters' "will to power" was directed to consumerist objects that, in themselves, have no value, are only objects that allow them to feel they are part of a society that evaluates people through their consumer habits. Beyond that, there is nothing. There is no other choice for them than to suppress their wills, which they perform by consuming sleeping pills, going to support groups or wishing for death. Starting to take action, as they do after Fight Club, was not a conceivable idea.

3.3 *Superman (Übermensch)*

Nietzsche originally uses the German word Übermensch, which can be translated as "over-man", a man that overcomes others, but the most popular translation is Superman. Thus, we are going to refer to this concept only through the term Superman.

With the death of God (which is one of Nietzsche's main statements and would be a

consequence of evolution of science) men would have to evolve to a next step, creating new values, which would have to be dedicated to life, not to Platonic idealism or asceticism, the "slave values" of Christianity. And a new form of man would have to rise in order to "save" humanity from the ordinary bourgeois society that was still in the process of formation during the 19th century. This man would have to mean an evolution for European society, thus he would have to come up with his own morals, regardless of any rules; in other words, he would have to be able to create his own. His values would be, though somehow adapted to the specifications of time, very similar to those Nietzsche admired from the Classic Greek/ Roman aristocracy who ruled other peoples without any shame of imposing the power they had. But then, Christianity weakened this kind of civilization where the morals supported the strong, to the point in which this morals ceased to exist, only being brought back to life during a brief time at the Renaissance, represented by the tyrant art supporters who would do anything in the name of art.

"I TEACH YOU THE SUPERMAN. Man is something that is to be surpassed. What have ye done to surpass man?(chap3); "Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman--a rope over an abyss."(chap4); "I want to teach men the sense of their existence, which is the Superman, the lightning out of the dark cloud—man." (NIETZSCHE, 2010, Thus Spake Zarathustra, chap. 7, p. 21)

Superman is not, according to Nietzsche, only a fictional-theoretical character, he actually existed in the figure of many historical men: Napoleon was regarded by this philosopher as the closest to the Superman who ever walked the Earth. "(. . .)*Napoleon appeared, the most singular and late-born man there ever was, and in him the problem of the inherently noble ideal was made flesh.*" (NIETZSCHE, 2010, On the Genealogy of Morals, chap 16). Still there were other figures such as Aristotle, his pupil, Alexander The Great, or any other classic figure whose values still associated good with strong, respectable and brave. This figure of the Superman would rise in a near future to put an end to the democratic culture of the weak and, as Napoleon, he would lead the gregarious, heading towards a transformation of all values, starting with the destruction of the truths that were the basis for the European morals. If Nietzsche himself was not a Superman, it was just because he was a moral man, he wanted the noble moral to comeback, though his own life, just as Napoleon's, was adapted to the morals of the ordinary. Nietzsche did

not have the physical or mental strength to lead anybody, only an extraordinary intellect that allowed him to draw this figure of the Superman that would be necessary to liberate the world from the popular morals he saw in even his friends such as the musician Richard Wagner who broke up with him after the release of *Human, All Too Human,* 1878*,* in which Nietzsche attacks "bourgeois music" that Wagner would be producing at the time.

Through this image, could Tyler Durden be considered a prototype of the postmodern Superman? There are characteristics in the novel through which we could put him side by side with Nietzsche's ideal. First is that he starts his path in the story by creating a club in which the rules others have to follow come from his ideas of what is just. There is not a moment when he even considers asking if anyone agrees with him or not, he only states the rules and is obeyed, plain and simple. Those who do not fit into his rules are literally expelled from his club. Later, the creation of Project Mayhem follows the same basic idea: his rules are written and followed, he commands without worrying about wrong and right. There are actually two rules that refer directly to his authority: "*No questions.*(. . .) *you have to trust Tyler."* (PALAHNIUK, 2006, p.125)

Tyler's lack of concern with external rules is certainly a desirable feature for a Nietzscheian Superman. But it is not the only one, since his ideas of destroying everything, even his "other self' (the narrator) imply an opposition to the predominant morals in 20th century American society. The attacks he performs with his "Space Monkeys" are representative of his intention to change society in order for it to follow values he finds appropriate for a rebirth. His destructive actions put in practice the course of revaluation of all values Nietzsche considers necessary for men to evolve. Tyler wants the world to experience an evolution only after its complete destruction: ""Disaster is a natural part of my evolution," Tyler whispered, "toward tragedy and dissolution."' (PALAHNIUK, 2006, p. 110)

It seems that Tyler has no idea of what would happen afterwards if he managed to cause the "end of the world": "*"We're going to break up civilization so we can make something better out of the world."*"(PALAHNIUK, 2006, p.208). But he does demonstrates in one of his speeches that he has an image of what the world would look like after his "work" were finished:

> "Imagine," Tyler said, "stalking elk past department store windows and stinking racks of beautiful rotting dresses and tuxedos on hangers; you'll wear leather clothes that will last you the rest of your life, and you'll climb

the wristthick kudzu vines that wrap the Sears Tower. Jack and the beanstalk, you'll climb up through the dripping forest canopy and the air will be so clean you'll see tiny figures pounding corn and laying strips of venison to dry in the empty car pool lane of an abandoned superhighway stretching eight-lanes-wide and August-hot for a thousand miles." (PALAHNIUK, 2006, p.125)

This illustrates his thoughts about what men should have: it is a pastoral ideal of life, where the rebirth of civilization would come without any artificial resource, in a life in direct contact with nature. The goods necessary to life would be collected from nature and would "last the rest of your life". The huge monuments of "progress", such as department stores and car pool tracks would only be part of the scenario. All of this is a clear statement that Tyler has the intention of leading men to a regression to the past, when life had a natural meaning and not one that is made up, such as the uncontrolled consumerism the narrator experiences. Certainly Tyler does not declare what kind of values this renewed pastoral society would have, such as Nietzsche's Superman should dictate to others, but the opposition to nihilism is implied, considering that life would have a meaning in itself, excusing the need for made up realities.

Tyler Durden fights for his own destruction, not because he wants to destroy himself, but the pathetic figure of his other personality, the narrator. And, in order to do that, he drives both of them to a self-destructive end, hoping that only his personality would somehow remain alive. By doing that, taking total control of the two personalities, he would be free to act the way he needs to. The narrator would become Tyler Durden full-time, an individual distant from the morals that imprisoned him. Such purification of personality, if it were possible, would maybe allow Tyler to be free enough to create his own morals as Nietzsche's Superman would have to do. But, even with the confusing ending the narrative has, neither Tyler nor the narrator reach a level of liberty in which they are able to detach themselves completely from the moralized world they live in. Nevertheless, the novel does not bring answers at its end. Thus, one could say they might still reach this level in a potential "non-narrated" continuation of the story. Or, better yet, they are not characters intended to reach any elevated goal, but to question the world around them, bringing doubts to the truths they manage to "shake" a little.

3.4 Nihilism (Will to nothing)

Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy is not nihilistic, though many scholars seem to have a tendency to label his ideas as nihilistic because of his denial of the existence of God, his disbelief in any religion and his opposition to idealism. These positions mean exactly the opposite, in other words, Nietzsche is against the creation of alternative worlds, positioning the focus on the sensualization of the only world man can live in, the one he can perceive and experience through the senses. Though, he does support nihilism, but only as a step towards the revaluation of all values.

This is one of the reasons why he criticizes Christianity so much as well as its hatred towards mundane elements, such as sex, food, wealth or any other pleasure the human-being is able to feel during his life-time. According to Nietzsche, the ascetic ideal drives man to a nihilistic life, wanting nothing from the only life he can have. From this, man develops a "will to nothing" and follows the Christian doctrines. This is because there is nothing interesting in this Christian "real" world, only in a fictional after-life world with its "heavenly" experiences.

Though we do not have religious characters in *Fight Club*, the narrator's "religion" is his consuming habits, as already mentioned some pages ago. Then, in what sense does the excessive shopping digress him from life? He loses track of what his instincts ask from him, need him to do, when he reaches a level of consumerism automatically pushed by advertising, when it is not even a pleasure anymore (even if an empty pleasure) "*Advertising has these people chasing cars and clothes they don't need.*"(p.149). And this automatic behavior is a symptom of the lack of meaning his life has. He realizes this problem, sees and resents not having an outcome from this, but he continues leading this life, though he does not know why.

> What destroys a man more quickly than to work, think and feel without inner necessity, without any deep personal desire, without pleasure--as a mere automaton of duty? That is the recipe for décadence, and no less for idiocy....(NIETZSCHE, 2010, The Antichrist, chap. 11, p. 22)

As is very well said by Nietzsche in the quotation above, a man who lives without any personal interest in what he does ends up as miserable and sick as the *Fight Club* narrator. His life is nihilistic in every sense, since his actions are followed by unwanted results and his dissatisfaction makes him see a way out only in death and lethal diseases, which means he loses interest in what Nietzsche says should be the target of any activity: this life, not an alternative illusion.

It is part of Nietzsche's idea of the Superman that this figure should be not only an atheist, but also a nihilist, though not in the sense of wanting nothing, but not desiring any of the morals of the people. He would be a person raised surrounded by these morals, but would be a nihilist until his own values could be implemented. Thus, we can consider the *Fight Club* narrator as a step of evolution for Tyler to exist, because his deep nihilistic life, though not very conscious or critical as it should be, prepares the path for Tyler to lay down his laws later.

This postmodern consumerist life certainly encourages a nihilist world-view, one that is apolitical and indifferent to whatever does not benefit the construction of an always more individualistic image through the options a consumer is offered to build his identity and to provide instant selfish pleasures. The problem is that eventually this image reveals itself as meaningless and empty, and that is when the person who realizes this wants to break up with this life-style, such as what happens in *Fight Club.*

4. SMILE, YOU'RE BEING CONTROLLED!

In *Fight Club,* criticism of society is one of the main elements of the novel. We can figure that, for instance, through Tyler Durden's words and actions that reflect the reality he and the other characters face throughout the narrative. We readers listen to what the narrator has to say about his discontentment with his life, but he also shows that he has always been an exemplar employee for his company and a nice co-worker. This behavior characterizes him as a person who is not used to going "out of line", who has (supposedly) studied and worked hard, being approved by many "judges" on the way, only so he could reach a very steady financial situation that would have been "perfect", if it were not empty. This "role model" behavior, if not formative of extraordinary personalities, constitutes the basis for passive characters who do not question anything and never realize what part they play in the social structure. Characters outside "Tyler's world" appear in the novel as "hindu cows", people who never take any extreme action, such as fighting, for instance: *"A man on the street will do anything not to fight."*(PALAHNIUK, p.119). They act like this for a reason: they were, somehow, taught to have this attitude towards society and they feel safe maintaining this. Tyler and Marla are the obvious exceptions, characters who, during the whole time they appear in the novel, do not seem to respect any patterns.

As readers we are unable to get a complete picture of the narrator's life, since he focuses the narrative in telling his "after Tyler Durden story", but, from the little we know, we are able to figure that he is a very righteous citizen, disciplined to feel guilty if he were to break any rule. *"Deliver me, Tyler, from being perfect and complete."* (PALAHNIUK, p.46) This "perfection" he claims (or complains about) to have reached is not only characterized by his financial status, but also by the absence of any misbehavior that has so far assured him the full approval from society. On the other hand, his life never got him anywhere he really intended; he only achieves a certain social status at the expense of having his actions regulated. Such process also shapes his identity according to his social position.

When the *Fight Club* narrator engages in fights and his face gets bruised, his co-workers do not ask about it. His boss only interferes in his "extra-curricular" activity when it reflects in his performance in the company or when it invades the company (when he

takes copies of the rules, for instance). His boss' reaction is the first example of how limited the authorities around him are to stop him from doing what he wanted. Considering that his boss is the first authority to whom he has to give any account of what he does in Fight Club, he figures that he is able to avoid any punishment from this "authority"; thus he could find a way to overcome any other "authority". With this reasoning (which might seem a little simplistic, but comes from a disturbed man) he and Tyler feel confident to look for failures in the surveillance that society constantly puts on its members and to create methods for him and his "friend" to act as freely as they might need later.

The French philosopher, Michel Foucault (1926-1984), in his book *Discipline & Punish: the birth of the prison, "*diagnoses*"* the modern society as a disciplinary society. According to him, the model which society finds to discipline its members has as its central characteristic a detailed, constant and individualized observation of people, in a manner that allows a profound examination of individuals. Even in the Postmodern time, when *Fight Club* takes place, the ways of controlling men are basically still the same. The alienation or suspension of communication of people who commit "crimes" is not necessary, because it is much cheaper and effective to put them under constant watch than totally isolate them from any contact with society.

Foucault analyzes discipline in society having as one of his concepts the idea of the Panopticon. This principle comes from an application carried out by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) in a description of how an ideal prison should be. This prison has as its main structure a tower from which anyone can act as a watcher of every single prisoner who is put in an individual cell. The visibility and the solitude of the prisoner, allowed by this architectural structure, subjects the prisoner to non-stop control, making him powerless. Therefore, it is impossible to attempt an escape or to arrange any plot against the warders due to the absence of contact with other prisoners. More specifically, this is how it works:

> [. . .] at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out

precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions – to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide – it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap (FOUCAULT, p. 200)

With this in mind, Bentham reaches the conclusion that watching people in an individualized manner is the most effective way of controlling "crowds" which were a main political concern with the progressive urbanization of European life in the 18th and 19th centuries. Hence, Bentham's building serves as a model not only for prisons, but for any other location where the close control of people's activities might be fundamental to improve their performances or avoid any trouble. Not coincidentally, schools, hospitals and factories resemble very closely the structure of this panoptic prison: they make use of the same principal to control their inmates. Bentham based his architectural idea on the principle of panopticism, which means full visibility. According to this principal, in theory, there would always be someone supervising the subjected person, who would be inserted in a situation with no possibility of hiding and would also be examined, studied in details, which is allowed by the individualization of the subjects. The constant fear of being caught doing something wrong is in fact the main element of the system and the impossibility of verifying if they are in fact being watched is what sustains this fear.

And this invisibility is a guarantee of order. If the inmates are convicts, there is no danger of a plot, an attempt at collective escape, the planning of new crimes for the future, bad reciprocal influences; if they are patients, there is no danger of contagion; if they are madmen there is no risk of their committing violence upon one another; if they are schoolchildren, there is no copying, no noise, no chatter, no waste of time; if they are workers, there are no disorders, no theft, no coalitions, none of those distractions that slow down the rate of work, make it less perfect or cause accidents. The crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities. From the point of view of the guardian, it is replaced by a multiplicity that can be numbered and supervised; from the point of view of the inmates, by a sequestered and observed solitude (Bentham, 60-64). (FOUCAULT, p.200 – 201)

Foucault points out that Bentham's Panopticon is the ideal symbol for the project through which the disciplinary society was established. Certainly, to keep society under control, enclosing criminals has always been a solution to "purify" the population from any of the "abnormal", but the use of constant panoptic surveillance keeps most people from misbehaving much more effectively. Not that there is supposed to be a watchtower in every corner, every street, but society has its manners of keeping an eye on all individuals, such as thousands of registrations, reports, accounts, etc. In essence, people act "right" not because it is part of their nature or because they believe in the morals of society, but because they are virtually subjected to a constant inspection of their acts which might lead to a punishment if a break were discovered. Without this, discipline cannot be carried out, since the "normalization" of individuals comes from the definition of who is inside or outside the "norms". Without it, there would not even exist a justification to separate an insane person from a sane one, for instance. Hence, Foucault indicates how the analysis of individuals cannot be detached from the surveillance:

> [. . .]the examination has remained extremely close to the disciplinary power that shaped it. It has always been and still is an intrinsic element of the disciplines. Of course it seems to have undergone a speculative purification by integrating itself with such sciences as psychology and psychiatry. And, in effect, its appearance in the form of tests, interviews, interrogations and consultations is apparently in order to rectify the mechanisms of discipline: educational psychology is supposed to correct the rigours of the school, just as the medical or psychiatric interview is supposed to rectify the effects of the discipline of work. But we must not be misled; these techniques merely refer individuals from one disciplinary authority to another, and they reproduce, in a concentrated or formalized form, the schema of power-knowledge proper to each discipline (FOUCAULT, p. 226)

Though modern governments have their own tools for controlling and observing people, individual rights assure certain liberties that make everyone a subject and supervisor. This constitutes a system in which power is not in the hands of a single centralizing authority, but is kept in a web of power that has as its "parts" every level of society, with the "weakest" people being watched and watching all around them, while the most powerful are also under surveillance and are supervisors at the same time.

Power in Modern society is analyzed by Foucault in a manner which goes deeper into the subject than what Nietzsche does. Nietzsche regards power as originated in an instinct man has, the "will to power", that drives man to individually force his wishes regardless of others. Those who succeed in defeating or "bending" the actions of others proves to be stronger, therefore reaching happiness. Foucault does not approach power as an instinct or only a solitary fight man faces to impose himself, but states that power is present in every human relationship, whether there is control or subjection. Society without power relations is not conceivable to Foucault. According to him, the struggle against any attempt to exercise power reveals more clearly the presence of power in a relationship, but struggle and power are always present in a power relation, the first always causing the second, only at varied levels. Nietzsche's "Superman" is an appropriate theory to be applied on Foucault's power relations, since the mechanisms through which an individual have access to exercise and increase power are just as important as morals to define who is to be dominated in the confrontation with any other figure. So the "Superman", if aware of this mechanisms, should have an advantage considering his detachment from morals.. The panopticon concept is a huge example of a mechanism that dramatically increases the power of any individual over others, regardless the morals of the subjected.

Still, Foucault is aware that the differences that exist between men are created by them to establish a domination of a group over others. Discipline itself is built in a power relation where groups of people determine something as true through the access they have to a certain set of knowledge, which defines their domination over those who are excluded from this knowledge. These groups perform their dominance by creating rules for what is considered normal and what is not, thus excluding anyone or anything that does not fit into their categories. The panoptic control over society is important, but is not the only element to assure a controlled society in which power is intended to be unbalanced. Still, this is a fact that finds justification inside the very differences instituted by the 'human sciences':

> The minute disciplines, the panopticisms of every day may well be below the level of emergence of the great apparatuses and the great political struggles. But, in the genealogy of modern society, they have been, with the class domination that traverses it, the political counterpart of the juridical norms according to which power was redistributed. Hence, no doubt, the importance that has been given for so long to the small techniques of discipline, to those apparently insignificant tricks that it has

invented, and even to those 'sciences' that give it a respectable face; hence the fear of abandoning them if one cannot find any substitute; hence the affirmation that they are at the very foundation of society, and an element in its equilibrium, whereas they are a series of mechanisms for unbalancing power relations definitively and everywhere; hence the persistence in regarding them as the humble, but concrete form of every morality, whereas they are a set of physico-political techniques. (FOUCAULT, p. 223)

With regard to *Fight Club*, we can observe an "empirical" example of how important knowledge, power and discipline are in society, mainly with Tyler, who is the head of every creation inside the novel. We can start from the control of information he imposes on the members of Fight Club and Project Mayhem: Tyler empowers himself by being the only person who knows what his "monkeys" are supposed to do, what his plans are. He is the ruler and the judge inside his "institutions". His "Space Monkeys" are incredibly disciplined, which can be attested by the fact that the members watch each other and refer directly to the rules to justify their behavior Nevertheless, probably the most important element for Tyler to keep his "soldiers" obedient comes from the fact that most of them are not sure who Tyler Durden is: "*The guy's eyes get big and he asks, do I really know Tyler Durden?*" (PALAHNIUK, p.134). This allows him to keep sending orders to his "warriors" while he is among them. The narrator experiences Tyler's "surveillance machine" when he tries to stop Tyler's actions, but realizes that everywhere there is a man who possibly is a "Space Monkey" and this feeling is increased by the fact that Tyler's groups tend to have a "Space Monkey" or a former Fight Club member inside many organizations to "haunt" enemies: "[. . .]*the doorman says, "I can get you a cab, Mr. Durden. Free of charge to anywhere you want." The fight club boys are tracking you. No, you say, it's such a nice night, I think I'll walk.*" (PALAHNIUK, p. 194).

Also, Fight Club and Project Mayhem are able to exist because they are at the same time invisible and a threat to society. The anonymous members of Project Mayhem, who "only in death" have a name, use their civil jobs as a cover up for the group's activities. As already described in this paper, they manage to threaten authorities because of their almost "omnipresence" in society: "*The people you're trying to step on, we're everyone you depend on*" (PALAHNIUK, p.166). Therefore, the panoptic society that keeps everyone under close surveillance almost "full-time" has this same principle turned against itself when Tyler manages to spread his "monkeys" around in order to watch every action taken by his enemies. They even have a clear advantage in the "application" of their own

panopticism, since they are able to watch and examine the authorities that might be a threat to the groups. Since every public figure exposes himself much more than any ordinary person, it is possible for Tyler to analyze and watch these authorities in a manner that decreases their power before Tyler's groups.

Another element that helps Tyler's groups to fight society's institutions is that he counts on the support of "Monkeys" inside organizations, such as the police, that is supposed to be the most direct mechanism of control the State has to repress the population. By weakening the very strong mechanisms of control society places over people, though not completely canceling any of them, Fight Club and Project Mayhem manage to act at the margin of legality. This does not indicate that Foucault was wrong, but it shows that the power relations (which according to him constitute society) are so complex that neither the State, nor private companies, nor individual initiatives, can take complete control over this organism.

5. THE POSTMODERN HIT

Fight Club is a story about characters who are symbols of their time. In 1996, when the novel was first published, it was common to think that people had lost the sense of history, which dislodges them from power. Since they do not believe in improving society, because of the lack of trust they put in its values, there is a loss of perspective and awareness of the political implications of their actions. This perhaps comes from the fact that they have given up illusions about the promises of freedom or social justice defended by Modern ideologies, such as Liberalism and Socialism. Still, there was a general dissatisfaction with the idea of constant pleasure Postmodernism carried in its "colorful bag". Hence, "Marlas", "Big Bobs" and "Tylers" seemed to "run in circles" without finding answers to their problems and distrusting the ones they found. *"We are God's middle children, according to Tyler Durden, with no special place in history and no special attention."* (PALAHNIUK, 2010, p.141)

According to the Brazilian writer and essayist Jair Ferreira dos Santos (1997), Postmodernity was born, symbolically, with the end of the Second World War, when man created a nightmare instead of delivering to humankind the wonders that were promised by Modernity, such as "civilizing" the whole world by spreading the "truths" that were being "discovered". Man's creative capacity is overcome by his destructive one, frighteningly represented by the atomic bomb. Therefore, modern values and myths are more emphatically questioned than before.

Modern industrial society was built on the idea of a man that was certain of his identity and proud of his freedom. Modern man lived as much to earn money as to defend moral values and the belief in social progress. The connection between individual liberties of the capitalist bourgeois and science formed the modern project of moral and economical progress. However, the same "hand that fed" Modernity was the one that decreed its death, since advances in science revealed the flaws of these modern "illusions": Freud described man as a slave to his own subconscious; Marxism held man as just another piece of a social class game and Linguistics stated man's mind was a slave to words when he wants to create anything.

In addition, the horrors of wars, environment afflictions and economic crises during

the first 75 years of the 20th century completely transformed this bourgeois figure into a "character" that avoided ideals and fought the modern truths. The belief in reason, science order, law and God gives room to emotions, the subconscious, desire and the body. If in Modernity reason was the main "engine", Postmodernity would not only question reason, but turn its attention to madness, instinct and sensations. With this in mind, the 'postmodern' concept is first used by Architecture, in Italy, 1955, where a denial of modern structures takes place, in an attempt to recover past local features. Though this simple antagonistic posture does not represent a creation of a postmodern style, it does state an opposition to Modernity, in the same way a child would criticize (and sometimes deny) his parents, trying to find in his grandparents a better option. Postmodernity tries to find answers in a time when man had not yet chosen the way that would lead to these modern misconceptions.

However, this "child" really "grows up" when the computer and electronic industries take over, altering the kind of product the main industries sell: from the products in series that would last for a lifetime in Modernity, the main objective now becomes selling services and non-stop novelties (which starts happening more strongly in the 70's). Life becomes regulated not so much by state mechanisms, but advertising. All kinds of media control human behavior, mainly through their consumer habits. Everyday life thus is supposed to be a private show, with multi-color clothes and soundtracks where everyone might become the next movie-star. All of this spetacularization of life certainly leads to a constant impulse towards consumerism, which becomes one of the central features of Postmodernity. Moreover, this can be considered, in a way, a much more efficient method of what already took place in the Industrial Modern society, that started series production but focused on selling better products in terms of reliability, not of aesthetics or performance. This differentiates both modern and postmodern behaviors, since what people used to buy were products that had some usefulness. What is consumed now is the image, status or fun the product should grant to its owner.

The individual freedom man experienced during Modernity increases greatly when Postmodernity takes over. Man feels free to be a selfish figure who lives for the moment and dedicates his efforts to instant pleasures. Leaving aside ideals, man's priority is to define an identity for himself in a world where the loss of meaning is common and a sense of reality is undefined. Considering that everything is a projection originated from a reproduction of something else, from fashion to portable music, identities are formed through mere signs, for example: some clothes define a person, since they emulate the

reality referred to; the music someone listens to characterizes personality, though (most of the time) it is appreciated through records, not the actual performance.

Political identifications are uncertain in Postmodernity, since nobody wants to admit a position that might reveal itself flawed and contradictory as Liberalism and Socialism did in Industrial society. However, some scholars claim that this neutral postmodern posture is nothing more than a passive surrender to the victory of Capitalism-Liberalism. The media industry certainly profits with this apolitical mind since there is no resistance in a population that does not believe in revolutions or in any significant change and only aspires to financial power. Therefore, knowledge loses space to the latest information, and companies that hold this new power become not only the sources of information, but shapers of truth in society, motivating everyone, from the simple handyman to the most educated executive, to consume and, thus, reach the only power that is available in this "frozen" political mindset.

On the other hand, this apolitical mind is also harmful to society, since it destroys some structures that are necessary to keep this "system" running. The fact that this consumerist behavior affects not only uneducated people but all levels of society configures a nihilist posture that is very common and that limits the capacity of solving problems, since the modern beliefs that still support society, such as family, property and progress are supposedly discredited.

Considering that the postmodern mind questions Modernity in its every aspect and that Modernity was the climax of Western knowledge, there is also also a search for Eastern wisdom, as well as a recovery of the cultures of native peoples. This makes the postmodern culture a very hybrid one in which humans try to understand themselves through a number of sources and build their identities according to what is available to be acquired and added to their profiles.

The *Fight Club* characters are examples of how contradictory the postmodern mind can be. If modern man was a contradiction because he ignored many aspects of reality not contemplated by Western sciences, at least this scientific "fiction" allowed some self-assurance for the individual to be aware of the political importance of his actions. The *Fight Club* narrator is a postmodern character who is caught by advertisement to live as a constant buyer with his life transformed into a "private rock concert" and though he might be able to acquire a rockstar's lifestyle, he is never supposed to become the star. *"We are the middle children of history, raised by television to believe that someday we'll be millionaires and movie stars and rock stars, but we won't. And we're just learning this fact,"*

(PALAHNIUK, p.66). This certainly symbolizes how important an ordinary man can aspire to be in society, where his role always remains as that of the bystander, never reaching actual power.

Therefore, Tyler's emergence also represents a dissatisfaction with this postmodern situation where the apolitical posture means the absence of power to ordinary men. *"[. . .]The goal was to teach each man in the project that he had the power to control history. We, each of us, can take control of the world."* (PALAHNIUK, 2006, p.122). Not that a simple political definition can grant power, but the sense of immobility, in an assumed unchangeable society, crushes anybody's will to any aspirations. This is cultivated by a social structure that is, on purpose, much more abstract than the modern structure was, which is done through many mechanisms, but the most important is the postmodern disbelief in any political action inside society. Tyler Durden does not manage to fully understand the political situation he faces, but he reaches the conclusion that he has to take action. Tyler's power would be "visible" simply with his victory over society, that could come even after his death. Though the only way a person like him (or the narrator) might reach power would be by destroying everything, the remains of civilization would still be his creation.

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS (LAST ROUND)

Fight Club brings readers an hyperbolic metaphor of the contradictions Western society has created so far and some examples of what they can cause. The great investment made in search of truth through sciences has pushed men almost to the edge of an apocalypse, but the revaluations and challenges of the truths that followed were turned into a negotiable product in Postmodernity when the desertion of ideals becomes not much more than a very good field for breeding "loyal puppies" to Capitalism. As already mentioned in this paper, this lack of more profound desires also leads to the destitution of power, which is accompanied by a lack of meaning in life, thus creating an "unreal reality". This is what the narrator faces and this is the reason for Tyler Durden to exist and for their conflict. Since neither Tyler nor the narrator are interested in argument, they mostly represent a dissatisfaction with both the postmodern and the modern minds. Though Tyler is more idealistic than his creator, he is also paradoxically a nihilist for not believing in deep truths. This allows him to present the necessary detachment for the quest of self-destruction he determines for himself.

The mixture of modern and postmodern beliefs permeates *Fight Club.* For instance, the narrator finds in Buddhism (even if a bit ironically) a way of relaxing through "haikus", little poems that require a "zen", peaceful mind and the elimination of the "ego" in order to be written. "*I write little HAIKU things and FAX them around to everyone. When I pass people in the hall at work, I get totally ZEN right in everyone's hostile little FACE.*"(PALAHNIUK, 2006, p.63). This search for answers in other cultures is a characteristic of Postmodernity, due to the disbelief in Western truths. Moreover, there is the fact that Tyler is at the same time fighting Western civilization and is an apologist of some of its truths, which is discernible from the narrator's threat, in Tyler's name, to a man so he will quit his low-paying job and return to college. This represents that, while criticizing the madness in the pursuit of money, Tyler also supports institutions such as universities which, in a way, are responsible for reinforcing some modern truths (though they are also a field for questioning them).

This hybridism of ideas is a feature of Postmodernity, but we cannot label *Fight Club* as a plain postmodern novel, since it shows and focuses a good deal of its narrative in criticizing the results of what Postmodernity means to the characters. Thus, if we consider

that, on the one hand, Modernity built unimaginable utopias based on truths that were questioned or disproved, and that, on the other, Postmodernity intended to abandon ideals and make man live the present, though it creates an idealization of constant pleasure that frustrates and weakens men; Tyler Durden represents a time in which the utopias of Modernity and the utopia of forgotten ideals causes confusion and insecurity that, in its turn, causes the miserable lives the characters lead.

Nietzsche and Foucault, though in different historical moments, act according to a postmodern practice, analyzing and criticizing Modernity's creations and contradictions. In *Fight Club* their ideas match those the characters represent. For instance, the lack of power of the narrator comes from his postmodern nihilism and, though attacked by Nietzsche in its modern version, this nihilism also originates in the reliance on fictional worlds: while Modernity relied on science's constructions and ideals, Postmodernity is based on the illusions of a world ornamented with consumerist objects of desire. On the other hand, Foucault searches for the origins of discipline in society to understand the reason individuals act in a certain manner and finds out these actions come from a typically modern rationalization that has found the most efficient way to control people through constant surveillance. Nevertheless, we see in *Fight Club* that it is also an idealization, since society is not capable of fully watching all of its "citizens".

In short, *Fight Club* is a postmodern novel in many senses, since Postmodernity, ultimately, is not a defined concept, but characterized for being hybrid: at the same time it denies modern values, it has them at its basis, which is exactly what is represented by the narrator and Tyler Durden throughout the narrative. In a time when values are supposed to be questioned, these characters cannot find any truth around them, which is liberating, but also disorientating. Nietzsche would be probably pleased with the way modern values are revealed as being empty in Postmodernity, but this is evidently not true to a large number of people. Therefore, these values are still valid around the world and Postmodernity does not guarantee itself as reality as much as it does as discourse. Still, what would more likely alarm Nietzsche is that the creation of new values has not taken place until today, and though Postmodernity might have tried to approach ideas such as of sensualization of life, it became lost in the nihilism of giving up power. This lack of power is exactly what motivates attempts of tearing apart old values, such as what *Fight Club's* Tyler does, hoping that from there a better society would come up from the eventual destruction of the one he lives in.

Surely, the deflation of ideals makes every attempt of progress much more difficult,

since it is necessary that people have some new beliefs in order to build new values, though if this should be the way Nietzsche "prophesied" them to be is another question. Tyler Durden himself is not an idealist in the most profound sense of the word, because his project of the future is just a plot that intends to destroy everything that supports the society he knows. This positions him as a postmodern man that fights modern values, but it also shows that he fights postmodern values as well, which would characterize his attempt as only nihilistic. Still, Tyler has the ideal of people living naturally, without man-made resources. Hence, *Fight Club* brings us the paradox that the end of the 20th century raised: nihilism's coexistence with idealism is not done in a very peaceful manner.

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