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The Alienated Narrator in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*

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ABSTRACT

Pro gradu -tutkielmani käsittelee *Fight Club* (2006) -teoksen kertojan vieraantumista konsumerismista, työstä, maskuliinisuudesta, yhteiskunnasta ja kulttuurista. Teoksesta on myös nostettu esiin teemoja, joissa käsitellään postmodernismia, outoutta ja mielen jakautumista kahdeksi eri persoonaksi. Teoksen kertoja kuvastaa piirteitä, jotka ovat tyypillisiä 1900-luvun lopun ilmapiirissä, jossa yhteiskunta on muuttunut teknologiaa ja kulutusta suosivaksi, ja kertoja yrittää elvyttää kadotetun maskuliinisuuden tunteensa väkivallan ja kuluttamisen avulla. Kertojan mieli jakautuu lopulta kahtia, jolloin hänen jakautunut persoonansa Tyler Durden ottaa vallan ja alkaa tehdä asioita, jotka ovat kertojalle vieraita.

Tutkielmassani todetaan, että kertojan vieraantuminen korostuu hänen arkisessa elämässään, jossa hän muun muassa ympäröi itsensä sosiaalisten suhteiden sijaan tarpeettomilla tavaroilla. Kertoja vieraantuu myös yhteiskunnasta ja työstään muuttamalla autioon taloon jakautuneen persoonansa kanssa, ja hän kokee elävänsä postmodernissa ajassa, jossa ei ole yhteisiä tai pysyviä arvoja. Tarkastelen myös kertojan vieraantumista maskuliinisuudestaan, sillä hän kokee kuuluvansa naisten kasvattamaan sukupolveen. Kertoja yrittää korostaa maskuliinisuuttaan perustamalla taistelukerhon, jonka tarkoituksena on vahvistaa maskuliinisuuden tunnetta, johon miesten väkivaltaisuus läheisesti liittyy. Lopuksi kertoja vieraannuttaa itsensä myös jakautuneesta persoonastaan, mikä tutkielmassani tulkitaan kertojan näkökulmasta vapauttavaksi kokemukseksi, jonka avulla hän löytää itsestään uusia piirteitä ja alkaa arvostaa omaa elämäänsä.

1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis will explore the way in which the first-person narrator in *Fight Club* (2006) alienates himself from society, consumerism, work, Western culture, normative masculinity, and ultimately and most importantly, from himself as a result of his split self. The most prominent underlying motifs in the book are the narrator's growing dissatisfaction with his life and the challenges he faces while living in the 20th-century post-war American society. The narrator gradually alienates himself from society and ultimately creates an underground network of like-minded people and fight club members who ultimately aim at the destruction of the consumerist, superficial and feminine society they live in.

I will proceed to explain what kind of postmodern and uncanny qualities the narrator and his split self present in the novel and also explore the narrator's transformation from a dutiful worker and upper-middle class consumerist into an alienated anarchist and violent ascetic. The importance of the narrator's split self will be discussed with regard to his alienation. At first, the narrator does not understand that he has split himself in two, but he starts to experience certain events and feelings through his new friend Tyler Durden. Tyler has various jobs and roles, lives in an abandoned house and, like the narrator, has difficulties to find his masculine role in society. Rather abruptly, Tyler becomes the narrator's role model, friend and perhaps even a father figure, and transforms the narrator from a feminine 20th-century man into a rugged fighter who can vent his frustration at the fight clubs the two men have founded. The objective of this study is to explore the different types of alienation that the first-person narrator experiences, his postmodern view of life, and the changes and obstacles in masculinity that he encounters.

1.1 Theoretical approach

The most prominent scholars and authors in this thesis are Ignace Feuerlicht, Kenneth Keniston and Morton A. Kaplan, who offer tangible and general insights into the topic of alienation. Morton A. Kaplan (1976: 118) offers an elaborate definition of alienation in his book *Alienation and Identification* by explaining that "alienation occurs when an individual perceives an absence of meaningful relationships between his [sic] status, his identifications, his social relationships, his style of life, and his work". These meaningful relationships contribute to how an individual will function or is perceived in a society where these relationships are often close to each other or intertwined. According to Kenneth Keniston (1972: 171), with regard to the youth of today, the world now gives "the young a special restlessness, an increased impatience with the 'hypocrisies' of the past, and yet an open gentleness and a searching honesty more intense than that of youth in the past". In this sense, the youth of today may be regarded as becoming alienated from past generations more than ever before. More precisely, Keniston's view refers to the late 20th-century postmodern and post-war American society, which is also the era present in *Fight Club* (2006) and what I will focus on in this thesis. Woods (1999: 11) states that the concept of postmodern represents a decline of faith in the keystones of the Enlightenment, belief in the infinite progress of knowledge, belief in the infinite moral and social advancement and belief in teleology, and that postmodern seeks local or provisional forms of legitimation.

Apart from the gloomy undertone of the term alienation, Ignace Feuerlicht notes in his work *Alienation: From the Past to the Future* (1978: 8) that in life "man must alienate himself from many persons and things. He must give up, forget, suppress feelings in order to grow, to have more important relationships, more valuable experiences". Therefore, the alienation can also be voluntary or, for instance, the product of a culture that has recently shifted in ideology or status. The narrator in *Fight Club* (2006) seems to be alienated from the world he lives in, but the alienation also enables him to ultimately find a place of his own in a world that is not clear-cut.

Steven Miles (1998:1) suggests that consumerism and the consumption of products appears to have become an important part of modern life and that it influences how people construct their lives. In my opinion, consumerism deepens the alienation of the narrator in *Fight Club* (2006), as he surrounds himself with products he does not even need. Jean Baudrillard (quoted in Kellner 1989: 12-13) states that affluent individuals are no longer surrounded by other human beings but by objects, and these objects are never offered alone but as a collection that has a brand name and a coherent vision. The narrator in *Fight Club* (2006) cherishes his purchases and lists brand names like they were his children, which seems to exemplify his consumerist alienation. Further, I will present Baudrillard's (quoted in Woods 1999: 26) three key ideas, simulation, implosion and hyperreality, and combine them with the consumerism displayed by the narrator. The narrator also alienates himself from his work, and I will refer to Thomas F. Green (1976: 28) who describes work as a human necessity and job as a social role. The narrator replaces his social role and job as a product recall specialist with a work of his own, the fight club and Project Mayhem, of which the latter aims at destroying the bank system in the United States. Accordingly, Eva Taube (1972: 1) suggests that industrialization and the advent of the computer have alienated man from his work. The narrator fiddles around with computers and starts to become alienated from his job, as he feels that the computer is a more integral part of his job than he is.

This thesis will also explore gender issues, especially the loss of appreciation or the change in masculinity in the late 20th century. Michael S. Kimmel explores what is considered contemporary American masculinity in his article Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity (2009). This article will be used to explore the alienation of the narrator from the perceived norm of American masculinity and the eventual reassurance of it by acts of violence. Sigmund Freud mentions in *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (2013) that at puberty the son has to free himself from his parents so can he cease to be a child and free himself from the pressure of his father to become a man himself. These theories will be used to analyze the narrator and Tyler's difficult history with their fathers. Further, Morton A. Kaplan (1976: 120) states that women's liberation in contemporary society may become a threat to male identification. The narrator feels threatened by

women, especially a female called Marla Singer, with whom he has a complicated relationship, and this relationship increases his alienation from normative masculinity.

In order to focus more efficiently on the different types of alienation found in *Fight Club* (2006), I will also present theories on the postmodern and their relation to alienation with the help of Tim Woods, Jean Baudrillard, Terry Eagleton and Keith Crome and James Williams. Eagleton (1996: vii) explains that postmodernity is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity. The narrator expresses these themes explicitly and seeks his own solutions to his problems, which often deepen his postmodern alienation. I will also focus on Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny and also Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle's commentary on the same subject. Freud (2003: 123) argues that the uncanny belongs to the realm of the frightening and evokes fear and dread. There are certainly themes of violence and fear found in *Fight Club* (2006) and in the narrator's behaviour and they will be presented with regard to the concept of the uncanny. Theories on the split self and the double will be introduced with the help of Colin McGinn's book *Ethics, Evil and Fiction* (1997). McGinn's division of evil into two key types, *pure* evil and *instrumental* evil will be used in accordance with his division of people into G-types and E-types (good and evil) to explain the type of evil presented by the narrator and his double. More information on the split characters will be provided by Arnold Goldberg's *Being of Two Minds: The Vertical Split in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy* (1999), and Elena Semino and Jonathan Culpeper offer information on the fragmentation of identity in *Cognitive Stylistics: Language and Cognition in Text Analysis* (2002).

1.2 *Fight Club* (2006)

The award-winning novel *Fight Club* (2006), written by American author Chuck Palahniuk (b. 1962) was first published in 1996. Some people know *Fight Club* (2006) by the movie version which was released in 1999 and in the years after became a cult

classic in Western cinema for generations now in their 20s and 30s. The novel has also become a well-known classic by now, as the movie in turn popularized the literary work. The themes in *Fight Club* (2006) are highly definitive of the turn of the millennium and beyond that, which is why I want to explore the novel and point out what themes of alienation can be found in it.

Fight Club (2006) starts off as a story of an unnamed narrator who suffers from insomnia. He works as a "recall campaign coordinator" (2006: 31), travelling constantly all over the United States to pay visits to scenes of accidents that the automobile company he works for is somehow involved in or responsible for. On the scene, he evaluates whether the case might be settled out of court, which means he is always trying to search for the cheapest option which would result in his company saving money. The ceaseless travelling by planes, ever-changing hotel rooms, "the charm of traveling…tiny soap, tiny shampoos, single-serving butter, tiny mouthwash and a single-use toothbrush" (2006: 28) and the morally ambiguous work duties start to result in extreme sleep deprivation, which he tries to seek help to, but the doctor he pays a visit to only orders him more exercise and asks him to stop wasting his time. Drawing a comparison, the doctor claims that the narrator's pain is very minimal compared to that of men with, for example, testicular cancer, and that he should go see it for himself at a support group put up for such people. The narrator mentions that "my doctor said, if I wanted to see real pain, I should swing by First Eucharist on a Tuesday night" (2006: 19). Out of curiosity, the narrator tries out visiting the group that the doctor recommended. The end result is that soon the narrator claims that "This was freedom. Losing all hope was freedom. If I didn't say anything, people in a group assumed the worst" (2006: 22). He starts to enjoy the suffering of others.

As a result of following the doctor's ambiguous order, the narrator actually gets better and starts sleeping again at night. He is happy with the results: "And I slept. Babies don't sleep this well" (2006: 22). Of course, he does not actually have testicular cancer that would allow him to join the group to begin with, but he goes anyway, and the sight of seeing people in real pain makes him feel better and helps him focus his own suffering. But soon, there is another pretender that joins the same groups as him, and the

narrator can no longer cry in the pretender's presence, and because of this starts to suffer from insomnia again. Through much effort, the female pretender Marla agrees to split the groups with the narrator, so that theoretically they would never meet again, but after this split the insomnia does not go away. The method has been ruined, perhaps mainly because he has been spotted, if only by another pretender. His life goes on as usual, sleepless that is, until one day he meets a man who changes his life, Tyler Durden. Tyler is a witty and inventive soap salesman, who also has many side jobs. When not preoccupied with making and selling soap, he works as a waiter at a classy restaurant and has a night job as a projectionist at a local movie theatre. The narrator becomes fascinated by Tyler's interesting personality and his take on the world. Tyler even takes the narrator under his wing after the narrator's house happens to blow up, which renders him homeless.

The general theme in *Fight Club* (2006) is that the modern man has become a futile automaton that follows everyone else's rules and expectations, having no or very little say in their own life. Men's bosses, wives and parents tell them what to do and what to pursue, and their ideals are therefore quite often wholly materialistic and void of personal motives. Technology deprives the modern man of his internal instincts and makes him just part of the machine in the Western culture that is laden with capitalistic values and superficial entertainment. Tyler and the narrator feel that modern men are a generation raised by women who slyly engage men in effeminate household activities and raise their interest in petty hobbies such as decorating. The narrator claims that "then you're trapped in your lonely nest, and the things you used to own, now they own you" (2006: 44). The only way to make men feel good about themselves again is to restore their primal rage and trust in their instincts. The narrator and Tyler form the fight club to feel alive again.

In essence, a fight club is a place for men to gather and vent their anger. It starts out as a random fight between the narrator and Tyler Durden, who asks for the narrator to hit him. Both men feel they want to explore their mutual love for punching each other and soon form a fight club for other men to join, too. The characters form a fight club to feel better about themselves and to gain a masculine status in a society that barely needs

men at all anymore. They feel beaten up but mentally relaxed after the fight and enjoy the fact that there are no consequences to their mutual agreement to fight. They start the fight club so that everyone can feel free and good about themselves, because for a moment, everyone can feel like a warrior or a hero in a world of boring obligations and everyday duties. The narrator proclaims that by fighting "I felt finally I could get my hands on everything in the world that didn't work, my cleaning that came back with the collar buttons broken, the bank that says I'm hundreds of dollars overdrawn" (2006: 53). With the help of fighting, the narrator finds a way to feel better about himself and the society he lives in. However, "nothing was solved when the fight was over, but nothing mattered" (2006: 53). This is the leading thought in the novel that restores the narrator's self-confidence, as he also learns to not care about the consumerist world that he has immersed himself in to balance out the gradual loss of masculinity and contemporary values. There are specific rules to the fight club, perhaps the most important one and the first rule in general being that one must not tell speak about the club at all (2006: 48). This rule is made to keep their club secret and without interference from local authorities or landlords. Fight clubs are usually set up in abandoned warehouses or cellars where men can gather to fight. In general, fighting is important, but there are still rules to it. Hereafter, the novel essentially depicts both Tyler and the narrator living in an abandoned and crummy house with no heat or running water, constantly plotting and playing pranks on corporate businesses while honing their club to perfection and increasing its clientele. They also coin Project Mayhem, a plan to destroy of the bank system in the United States that will reverse their society to that of the Stone Age.

At the end of the novel, the reader understands that the narrator has been divided into two different characters: one representing an urban upper-middle class character (the narrator) and another a wild bohemian yet at times violent character (the split self presented as Tyler Durden). These two characters interact with each other throughout most of the novel. The split self of the narrator is, in this thesis, regarded as the ultimate consequence of his alienation. However, there have been numerous examples of this type of division into a good and bad character within a same person, such as in the case of the characters Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, but what makes *Fight Club* (2006) distinctive

is the social commentary that both characters engage in. The split of the narrator provides and saturates most of the plot and serves as a salient factor for emphasizing each of the two sides weaknesses and vice versa. The leading belief in the story at the beginning is that the characters are different persons who coincidentally meet each other on a nude beach, and by vague circumstances end up living and forming a fight club together. By the end of the novel it becomes apparent to the reader that despite being the same person, the narrator consists of the so-called good and bad character, the first one being a steady white-collar worker with a nice apartment and the other one being a wild maverick with no responsibilities and dubious morals. Plot-wise, the narrator initially envies Tyler Durden's fearless aura and shameless morals throughout the novel, but when the narrator realizes that the other person is his own double, eventually going too far with his actions and world-domination plans, he tries to end what he and his split self have created.

2 THEMES RELATED TO ALIENATION

The narrator in *Fight Club* (2006) gradually distances himself from society, materialism and consumerism, work, Western culture, the male norm and normative male sexuality, and ultimately and most importantly from himself via his split self or double. In this section I will introduce the theories used in this thesis and later combine them in the analysis with the narrative content in *Fight Club (2006)*.

The sources for the theories I will use are as follows: Kenneth Keniston has written on the American youth and their alienation. This serves as a good starting point for the analysis of the narrator in *Fight Club* (2006), as the narrator is a 30-something American male who has a lot in common with the themes of the restless and impatient contemporary youth explored by Keniston in *Youth, Change and Violence* (1972). I will compare Keniston's views on alienation with the themes Ignace Feuerlicht explores in *Alienation: From the Past to the Future* (1978). Feuerlicht analyzes, for example, the history of alienation and also the estrangement and isolation that alienated people often feel and are drawn to. My third source for the theme of alienation is Morton A. Kaplan's book *Alienation and Identification* (1976) in which he states that alienation happens when an individual perceives an absence of meaningful relationships and that social change may disturb male identification. The framework for the subject of alienation will therefore be created with the help of these three sources that sometimes overlap each other, but mainly corroborate a proper general view on alienation.

Further, I will first introduce Steven Miles' theory on consumerism and how the consumption of products appears to have become an important part of modern life and how it influences people's lives. Accordingly, I will refer to Jean Baudrillard's theory on individuals no longer being surrounded by other human beings but by objects. I argue that consumerism is an important part of the alienation of experienced by the narrator in *Fight Club* (2006). I will also present Baudrillard's three key ideas, simulation, implosion and hyperreality, and later present them in accordance with the novel. The narrator also alienates himself from his work, and I will refer to Thomas F.

Green (1976: 28) who describes work as a human necessity and job as a social role. This chapter will also explore gender issues, especially the loss of appreciation or the change in masculinity in the late 20th century. Michael S. Kimmel's article Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity (2009) offers an insight into contemporary American masculinity and the basis for the analysis of the narrator's alienation from normative masculinity.

2.1 Consumerism and Social Alienation

Alienation and consumerism are connected in the sense that people may seek to replace aspects of their social life with the consumption of products. Steven Miles offers an informative definition of consumerism in his book *Consumerism: As a Way of Life* (1998):

> Consumerism appears to have become part and parcel of the very fabric of modern life. Areas of social life that were previously free of the demands of the marketplace, including religion, have had to adapt to a world where the needs and desires of the consumer are apparently paramount. How we consume, why we consume and the parameters laid down for us within which we consume have become increasingly significant influences on how we construct our everyday lives (Miles 1998: 1)

Miles suggests that some areas of social life have been vastly affected by consumerism and that we now consume more products that exist in domains formerly free of consumerist overtones. Therefore, consumerism adds to the alienation of people, as it infiltrates people's social life and replaces social bonds with consumerism. People need and desire more than before and satisfy those needs via consumerism. Jean Baudrillard states that people are now experiencing a world that is founded upon materialistic ideals and values:

> We are surrounded today by the remarkable conspicuousness of consumption and affluence, established by the multiplication of objects, services and material goods, all of which constitute a sort of fundamental mutation in the

ecology of the human species. Strictly speaking, these affluent individuals are no longer surrounded by other human beings as they were in the past, but by *objects (*quoted in Kellner 1989: 12).

Therefore, at present human relationships often replaced with material objects that have started to take on a greater significance in the lives of people. People are no longer interested in how their fellow creatures are doing and are therefore alienating themselves from interaction with other people by means of materialism and consumption of goods. There are also more products available which makes it easy to people consume specific goods.

Miles states that consumerism is now regarded as the answer to all our problems and an escape from the mundane realities of everyday life (1998: 1). Consumerism can therefore be considered a way for people to escape their reality that confines them and, for example, to escape boredom. When people find their lives boring and mundane, they resort to consumerism as a way to distract them from reality. Further, Baudrillard (quoted in Kellner 1989: 14) also mentions that one should never forget that these goods are the product of a human activity and that they are dominated not by natural ecological laws but by the laws of exchange value. Therefore, the products we consume have not just fallen from the sky but are the result of carefully constructed activity that aims at selling the products to consumers.

In *Muse in the Machine: American Fiction and Mass Publicity*, Mark Conroy (2004: 117) quotes Jean Baudrillard who explains that even in primitive cultures "objects never exhaust themselves in the function they serve", but instead in their "excess of presence…take on their signification of prestige". Hence, these objects not only serve the needs of the possessor but also designate his being and social rank (2004: 117). Therefore, the introduction of an object into the rhetoric of a society does not solely function as a purchase but as a social act that gives the possessor of an object a certain prestige or status. This can perhaps differentiate the possessor from other people or connect him/her with people who possess the same object. Morton A. Kaplan (1976: 120) mentions in *Alienation and Identification* that "when the identifications of the individual appear to be subject to social or natural forces over which he has no control,

he perceives himself as alienated from important aspects of his personality". The consumerist viewpoint subject to forces other than the individual's own therefore alienates him from his personality, since he is affected by external forces that are not in his control.

Conroy (2004: 117) further explains that goods and media become instruments for the normalization of consumer patterns by providing a fantasy for the consumer to fulfill through purchase. To live according to this fantasy, society forces the consumer to make choices based upon the selection at hand and the social image which media have created. Symbolic values are what are attached to products and what gain their own meanings with regards to the product's image. Conroy (2004: 119) states that that is why a luster of value is retained from the social symbolization it draws on. However, like Conroy (2004: 119) explains, the administered world of commodity-signs uses those meanings as if they were products themselves, the better to attach them to products and the better to preclude the consumer from altering those meanings. Therefore, the consumer not only consumes a product but also a set of meanings and signs of commodity that help the consumer in gaining a sense of self-improvement of status in society.

Baudrillard states that these consumerist objects are never considered as plain objects and that there exists a *system of needs* that saturates the objects that a person desires:

> Few objects today are offered *alone*, without a context of objects to speak for them: And the relation of the consumer to the object has consequently changed; the object is no longer referred to in relation to a specific utility, but as a collection of objects in their total meaning. Washing machine, refrigerator, dishwasher and so on have different meanings when grouped together than each one has alone, as a piece of equipment. The display window, the advertisement, the manufacturer and the *brand name* here play an essential role in imposing a coherent and collective vision, of an almost inseparable totality (quoted in Kellner 1989: 13).

As people purchase certain objects, there is a myriad of external factors that rend the object of desire into a set of meanings within their place in the system of needs and the impression given by their brand name. In relation to consumerism and technology,

Keniston (1972: 176) suggests that "a revolt against technologism is only possible, of course, in a technological society; and to be effective, it must inevitably exploit technology to overcome technologism". The consumerist society relying on technology can therefore be exploited with the help of its own inventions that used to work in favour or consumerism.

2.2 Society, Youth, Culture and Alienation

Society stands for the totality of social relationships among organized groups of human beings or animals (Collins English Dictionary 2014). Therefore, a society consists of a group of people who share an area and a culture. Edward Burnett Tylor (1958: 1) states in *Primitive Culture* that culture, or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Culture is the product of people, whereas society comprises both the relationships and different cultures of people. The narrator in *Fight Club* (2006) seems to struggle finding his role in society. He tries to alienate himself from society by taking up residency in an abandoned house and plots against society by means of various pranks. In general, the narrator considers himself a 30-year-old boy who does not know what to do with his life.

Kenneth Keniston (1972: 171) states that we often feel that today's youth are somehow different, and that in today's world something seems to give the young a special restlessness. In that sense, the youth of today or the late 20th century are and were exposed to a different society and world than their parents. Keniston (1972: 171) continues to explain this by noting that the youth of today are impatient with the hypocrisies of the past and are more open to gentleness and searching honesty than the generations before them. It could be said that the contemporary youth want to find meanings behind things and that they are more open to new solutions that do not necessarily resemble those of their parents. Further, it is important to note in the context

of postmodern views that, according to Keniston (1972: 171-172), the difference between a late 20th-century hippie and a radical is that a hippie has dropped out of a society, considers it irredeemable and focuses on interior change, whereas a radical wants to change and redeem society. A hippie's alienation is therefore internal, whereas a radical focuses on changing the society that alienates people from it.

Morton A. Kaplan (1976: 118) offers us a proper general definition of alienation by explaining that "alienation occurs when an individual perceives an absence of meaningful relationships between his [sic] status, his identifications, his social relationships, his style of life, and his work". Therefore, the alienation of an individual works on different levels: the individual's life becomes alien not only to him/herself but to others as well. Friends and colleagues may become alien to an individual as the meaningfulness of these relationships related to his status and identity disappears and forces to perceive life from a different viewpoint. Ignace Feuerlicht (1978: vii) explains in his book *Alienation: From the Past to the Future* that "since World War II, the phenomenon of alienation apparently has engulfed many people and countries; and we are said to live in an age of alienation". This adds a 20th-century perspective to the question of alienation and further elaborates that the alienation of people has indeed grown in the last century. In the 20th century, many countries had recently been at war and faced horrible destruction and lost soldiers and families. Feuerlicht (1978: vii) mentions that the term alienation is used to explain not only conflicts and misery in one's personal life but also historical movements as the rise of fascism and Nazism and the worldwide youth rebellion of the 1960s. Therefore, alienation is closely intertwined with both personal and political revelations, and it can be looked upon as a catalyst for different types of social movements that have spawned the alienation of people.

Keniston (1972: 172) also touches upon the idea of postmodern youth and explains that "today's youth is the first generation to grow up with 'modern' parents; it is the first 'post-modern' generation". This generation has therefore had a different view on the world at large due to their upbringing which has been different from that of previous generations. This is not to say that the generation is automatically more radical than their parents' generation but that it has had a different background to observe social and

political matters from. Keniston (1972: 172) further elaborates that this postmodern upbringing helps create a mood born out of modernity, affluence, rapid social change and violence. These factors affected the development of a postmodern youth that were radically different from previous generations and therefore more prone to gravitate towards alienation, as there was no generation for them to look upon. This first so-called postmodern generation at the end of the 20th century had to create its own world view and ideologies.

Feuerlicht (1978: 4) explains that "there is no limit to the number of items that can be externalized (created) or the number of items (people, organizations, ideas, and so forth) from which one can become estranged". Therefore, alienation can gradually increase with the number or items present in one's life. However, Feuerlicht (1978: 4) also mentions that "[alienation] usually refers to one of the most widely discussed alienations – social, political or self-alienation – or less, often, work alienation, world alienation, or alienation from God". These themes of social, work and world alienation are the ones that will be investigated in this thesis, as the narrator in *Fight Club* (2006) seems to suffer from all these types of alienations and they serve as a good starting point for unraveling the plot.

The idea of alienation may seem rather gloomy and as having no positive effects on an individual. However, quite conversely, Feuerlicht (1978: 8) notes that in life "man must alienate himself from many persons and things. He must give up, forget, suppress feelings in order to grow, to have more important relationships, more valuable experiences". This citation focuses our attention on the issue that alienation is not solely a means of negatively distancing oneself from something but sometimes a catalyst for personal growth. Feuerlicht (1978: 8-9) continues that one can become estranged from one's family in order to find a new one or to become a stranger to some friends to make new ones, or leave a political party or give up ideals in order to find ties that serve him better. Further, it is rather odd to think that a person could maintain the same ties throughout a life. Therefore, sometimes it is only healthy for one to end certain relationships and ties and alienate oneself from other people to grow and become a new person.

Further, Clifford Geerts (1996: 5) explains in his article The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man that as culture accumulated and developed, a selective advantage was given to those individuals in the population most able to take advantage of culture, such as the effective hunter, the persistent gatherer, the adept toolmaker, the resourceful leader. Therefore, the ones who are able to control the environment have always been at the lead in shaping a culture and making huge advancements in it, whereas the ones with inferior talent became alienated from those with power and from the advancement of culture.

2.3 Work as Defence Against Alienation

Thomas F. Green (1976: 28) sums up the concept of work in his article The Work-Leisure Conflict in the American Tradition by saying that "work is a human necessity because escape from futility is". The idea of a necessity of the human condition is an intriguing one, since especially in the Western world people have a freedom of choice that allows them to pursue their dreams and build up their lives according to their own standards. Further, Thomas F. Green (1976: 28) explains that "the possibility that a human life might be spent in vain, without lasting effect, has always been a possibility that men have shrieked against. It is as though in that possibility they have recognized a violation of their very humanity itself". Ignace Feuerlicht (1978: 112) suggests that many young people often reject the work ethic of the older generation and that their main interest is in the present and the immediate future and may offend the aesthetic ideal or conventions of their parents. However, even these young people want to assure themselves of their lasting effect, whether materialistic or ideological, by taking up hobbies, work, education and projects that take them somewhere. Green (1976: 28) continues by explaining that "work is a human necessity not only because it offers escape from futility, but also because it is the principle vehicle for the expression of human capacities". By means of work, people can also express what they are capable of

and thereby create something that is a product of their own capabilities. Therefore, work can be used as a defense against alienation.

Green (1976: 29) elaborates that "a job is a social role. Work is not. Work is an activity. A job is a socially validated social role. Work often is not". Therefore, a job is something that a person acquires socially and what that person is hired to perform. Green (1976: 29) goes on to elaborate that "there are many who work hard, who have works to perform, but who do not do so in ways that are socially validated so as to confirm their own worth". Not all work is therefore validated in society, as the work may not have been validated by society at large or accepted as anything but serving the worker's own goals. Therefore, people may alienate themselves by taking up work that does not benefit anyone else than themselves, especially if it is not regarded as a job with a social role in society.

Moreover, Eva Taube (1972: 1) states that "rapid industrialization and the advent of the computer have alienated man from his labor". People are no longer needed to perform certain work but can be replaced with an apparatus that performs the it better and faster than them. Taube (1972: 1-2) continues to explain that work is no longer the creative product of one man but instead a fragmented and mechanical process. Often there are many middle men to a single work performed, and the individual may only be a single link in a longer chain of producers, thereby increasing the alienation of the worker.

2.4 Masculinity and Violent Alienation

Morton A. Kaplan explains that

> [alienation] occurs as social change disturbs identifications in ways threatening to the personality of some members of the society; for example, women's liberation in contemporary society becomes a threat to some male identification (1976: 120).

Some men may therefore become alienated from their social role as men when women gain more power within society. In *Masculinity in Male-Authored Fiction 1950-2000: Keeping it Up*, Alice Ferrebe (2005: 9) states that "though continually couched as rational, independent and isolated, masculinity as a project in fact involves an intense level both of emotional investment and of public performance and validation". Therefore, masculinity is not a given that exists without active participation but something that needs to be presented to the people around us and has to be validated by them. As women have gained more power due to social change, men need to present their masculinity in public perhaps more strongly than before, and the validation of masculinity is subject to public performance. John Beynon (2002: 129) states in his book *Masculinities and Culture* that men have blamed the influence of feminism for family breakdown and for women bringing up children alone. Currently, it is rather usual for women to bring up their children alone. For example, the father may be almost completely absent because of late working hours, or the relationship may have already ended and thereby resulted in single motherhood.

Feuerlicht (1978: 44) states about alienation in general that it "often means the withering away or the negation of the human potentialities and the near reduction of man to a thing". Therefore, for a man, alienation from masculinity also reduces him to a thing that has to cope with the distorted image of himself. Feuerlicht (1978: 44-45) continues that "parallel to this phenomenon or perhaps even identical with it is the fact that man is often dominated by external things instead of internal experiences". This observation sounds similar with the domination and validation of masculinity via public performance exemplified by Ferrere (2005: 9). The internal view of a man does not automatically guarantee him a masculine image in other people's eyes, but he must also seek validation from other people and allow his image to be defined by them.

Michael S. Kimmel offers great insight into masculinity and violence in contemporary America in Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity (2009). Kimmel (2009: 65) claims that the great secret of American manhood is that Americans are afraid of other men. He suggests that the masculinity in America is therefore founded upon the idea that men are afraid of each other. Kimmel

(2009: 65) elaborates that "the fear of being seen as a sissy dominates the cultural definitions of manhood". The culture that surrounds them does not allow men to act in a feminine way or in unmanly fashion. Further, Kimmel (2009: 65) states that "violence is often the single most evident marker of manhood. Rather it is the willingness to fight, the desire to fight". This suggests that men are more violent than women, as men are supposed to want to fight in order to present their masculinity. If a man does not want to fight, he is alienating himself from the manhood defined by American culture.

Kimmel (2009: 65) states that "as adolescents, we learn that our peers are a kind of gender police, constantly threatening to unmask us a feminine, as sissies". Therefore, as men grow up, other people have a say in the construction of the male identity. In his book *Language & Characterization*, Jonathan Culpeper (2001: 12) mentions that gender is a fundamental social category which people use in making sense of others and understanding the discourses that we face in our lives. However, Culpeper (2001: 12-13) also introduces the social constructivist approach that adheres to the notion that people have multiple identities and that their identities are not fixed. Therefore, men and women construct their identities socially and with self-reflection. Kimmel (2009: 65) mentions that "as young men we are constantly riding those gender boundaries, checking the fences we have constructed on the perimeter, making sure that nothing even remotely feminine might show through". Therefore, young men raised by their mothers are perhaps more prone to show a motherly influence that shows through in their behavior, and that is what these young men want to prevent from showing.

Further, Sigmund Freud studies in *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* the Oedipus complex and men's puberty:

> only after he has freed himself [from his parents] can he cease to be a child, and become a member of the social community. The task confronting the son consists of freeing himself from his libidinous wishes towards his mother and utilizing them in the quest for a really foreign object for his love. He must also effect a reconciliation with his father, if he has stayed hostile to him, or if in the reaction to his infantile opposition he has become subject to his domination, he must now free himself from this pressure…These tasks are set for every man; it is noteworthy how seldom their solution is ideally achieved, i.e., how seldom

the solution is psychologically as well as socially correct. Neurotics, however, find no solution whatever; the son remains during his whole life subject to the authority of his father, and is not able to transfer his libido to a foreign sexual object. (2013: 347).

The son must therefore alienate himself from his parents to experience a different social world and must separate himself from his mother to find an external object of love. A similar alienation applies to the son and his father, as the son must free and alienate himself from the father's domination. Freud is suggesting that neurotic people cannot distinguish themselves from their parents and are therefore chained to the roles that existed in childhood. However, the son's alienation from his parents is essential for him to find his own masculinity.

3 POSTMODERN, THE UNCANNY AND THE SPLIT SELF

In order to focus more efficiently on the different types of alienation found in *Fight Club* (2006), I will present in this chapter theories on the postmodern and their relation to alienation with the help of theories by Tim Woods, Jean Baudrillard, Terry Eagleton and Keith Crome and James Williams. I will also focus on Sigmund Freud's theory on the uncanny and also Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle's commentary on the same subject. Theories on the split self and the double will be introduced with the help of Colin McGinn's book *Ethics, Evil and Fiction* (1997) and also Arnold Goldberg's *Being of Two Minds: The Vertical Split in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy* (1999) with information on the fragmentation of identity provided by Elena Semino and Jonathan Culpeper in *Cognitive Stylistics: Language and Cognition in Text Analysis* (2002).

3.1 The Postmodern Self-Image

The concept of postmodernity is closely linked with the personal alienation of people. Tim Woods explores the concept of postmodern in *Beginning Postmodernism* (1999). Woods (1999: 11) summarizes the concept by saying that it represents, for example, a decline of faith in the keystones of the Enlightenment, belief in the infinite progress of knowledge, belief in the infinite moral and social advancement and belief in teleology. Woods (1999: 11) also states that postmodern seeks local or provisional, rather than universal absolute, forms of legitimation. The idea of the postmodern is thus saturated with a certain disbelief in a system that man is made to serve, as it is never fully absolute or infinite. Postmodern explores local and personal legitimation rather than trying to explain things through a carefully constructed, already existing ideology or belief system. Like in *Fight Club* (2006), the emphasis is on the personal experience of the narrator, clearly alien to the society and people around him, and he is not willing to cling to any existing system but wants to carve his own, if terrifying and violent, niche in the world.

Terry Eagleton introduces some of the ideas related to postmodernity by explaining that

> postmodernity is a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation (1996: vii).

Postmodernism is therefore something that is more interested in someone trying to find subjective points of view and ready to take any solution offered as universal or objective with a grain of salt. The focus is therefore on the subjective experience that frowns at the norms and regulations offered by higher authorities, which can lead to a person's alienation from prevalent values.

Keith Crome and James Williams (2006: 131) point out that the postmodern would be that which puts forward the unpresentable in presentation and that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. Postmodernity wants to explore themes and ideas further and wants to bring to our attention something that we have never seen or wanted to see before. It could at least partly be compared to a child who does not have the same inhibitions as an adult and who is thereby willing to tell more openly about something. This type of information cannot, in the classical sense, be presented to the public but is still brought to its attention.

Tim Woods (1999: 26) introduces Baurdillard's three interesting key ideas that postmodernity is founded on: "simulation, implosion and hyperreality". Woods (1999: 26) explains that "Baurdillard claims we have entered a new postmodern era of simulations which is governed by information and signs and a new cybernetic technology". Therefore, technology offers us new perspectives into simulation and new ways to look at simulation in a postmodern context. Woods (1999: 26) explains that simulation "is where the image or the model becomes more real than the real: as for instance, a television soap-opera actor receiving hate mail for his role in the show". This suggests that the image can be considered so strong that it can also be attacked as it if it

were real. As for implosion, Woods (1999: 26) continues by explaining that "Baudrillard argues that the demarcation between image or simulation and reality implodes, and along with this collapse, the very experience of the real world disappears". The new reality, therefore, is constructed of both simulation and real, and it is rather difficult to say what used to be real or simulation. Woods (1999: 26) explains that the hyperreal signifies what is "*more than real*, where the real has been produced by the model. Hyperreality is the state where distinctions between objects and their representations are dissolved, and one is left with only simulacra". Reality does no longer pertain to anything that is real, but can be considered as something born out of a world that does not even need a real-life model to exist, like advertisements on television that coax the viewers into believing they need something or have problems with themselves.

3.2 The Uncanny and the Unfamiliar

The uncanny is a concept originally developed by Sigmund Freud, and it was introduced in his 1919 essay *The Uncanny* (2003). The uncanny, according to Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle (2009: 35), "has to do with a sense of strangeness, mystery or eeriness". This means that the uncanny works as something that is not necessarily easy to pin down or focus one's eye on, but it relies substantially on what is left unsaid and unexplained. Bennett and Royle (2009: 35) further state that the uncanny "has to do more specifically with a disturbance of the familiar". Therefore, what we usually reckon as familiar and even safe becomes an unfamiliar variant that partially reflects its sameness to us, but at the same time contains a twist on itself that we are not always ready to comprehend. Freud (2003: 124-125) states that the uncanny, *unheimlich*, is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar, *heimlich*. According to Freud (2003: 124-125), *unheimlich* is the opposite of familiar, *heimlich*, and to him it seems obvious that something should be frightening precisely because it is unknown and unfamiliar. In this sense, the uncanny

alienates us from ourselves by shaking the foundations of what is perceived familiar and unfamiliar.

In his essay Freud explains that we may feel something that is both familiar and, at the same time, alien to us. The concept of the uncanny makes us feel a slight unease, evoking feelings of strange familiarity, and therefore it

> belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread. It is equally beyond doubt that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, and so it commonly merges with what arouses fear in general (Freud 2003: 123).

We may, therefore, apply the concept to virtually anything that evokes dread and horror, but the definition of the uncanny is not always clear-cut. It will be useful in presenting the subconscious of the narrator in *Fight Club* (2006) and how the character comes across as not fully understanding his own motivations, or even himself.

The uncanny also appears to rely heavily on our perception. Bennett and Royle take an example from our own perception, saying that sometimes

> you catch sight of someone who you think looks rather disturbing, and then you realize that you have caught sight of this person reflected in a window or a mirror and that this person is yourself (2009: 36).

This exemplifies that we are a species reliant on our own perception of ourselves and our surroundings, thereby being constantly able to modify our self-image and reflect on it with the help of cues we receive from outside. And when the self-image becomes distorted, it becomes an uncanny experience of oneself.

Freud states in his essay *The Uncanny* (2003) that

> not everything new and unfamiliar is frightening. All one can say is that what is novel may well prove frightening and uncanny; some things that are novel are indeed frightening, but by no means all (2003: 125).

Freud is suggesting that in spite of the fact that new things can appear frightening, they are not necessarily like that, but that people are more prone to experience something new as frightening. New things may create an uncanny effect if we do not have former experience of the subject and are suddenly exposed to it.

In *Discourse in Psychoanalysis & Literature*, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1987: 177) examines Freud's reasoning about the teleology of repetition in narration and suggests that repetition may serve the pleasure principle but also manifest a death instinct. The repetition of words, sentences or ideas may illuminate the story in a way that sheds light on the individuals' gravitation towards pleasure or, rather conversely, exemplify how repetition helps them cope with situations past, present or future or theoretically possible. Thus, repetition may mitigate the alienation felt by an individual, as it offers a way to focus one's attention on a fixed matter that prevents them from contemplating alienation. Rimmon-Kenan (1987: 177) mentions that when a child throws away a reel and then pulls it back it may be a process of trying to learn to cope with the absence and the return of the mother. The child channels his own expectations into a repetitive process that symbolizes something actual and learns to project expectations into things, simultaneously helping him/herself deal with emotions by combining real-life situations with mechanical processes. Therefore, alienation can be hidden in a mechanical process and in repetition.

3.3 The Split Self & The Double

The doubling of the protagonist is a prominent theme in *Fight Club* (2006). At the end of the novel, the narrator has to face the horrible truth and admit to himself that Tyler Durden is no one else but his own creation and his split self. The narrator has therefore become alienated from himself and created his own double by splitting his persona in two.

These split selves occur often in fiction and in medical life stories and are a pervasive theme in narrative texts, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's classic *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and also in modern science fiction stories such as the *Back to the Future* films (Semino & Culpeper 2002: 153). The split is therefore used to emphasize a change within the protagonist, and it can be devised to give the protagonist a dualistic personality that shifts from one character to another. Semino and Culpeper (2002: 153) also make mention that this kind of split often occurs at times of personal crisis. This is to say that a personal crisis affects our behavior in a way that may create us double identities that, for better or worse, allow us to survive the crisis and continue living our lives.

Universally speaking, the doubling or the split can be used as a vessel that represents the current world at large. The split may represent a sense of fragmentation of identity in postmodern society, and also offer first-person narratives a way of reporting of the self by contrasting between the current state of the protagonist and also including flashbacks that may any reflect previous states of an individual (Semino & Culpeper 2002: 153). These flashbacks offer us insight into what has changed in the personality or actions of the individual and allow us to explore how current events in the text or the life of an individual differ from anything that has happened previously.

Arnold Goldberg also explores the split of the character and people in his book *Being of Two Minds: The Vertical Split in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy* (1999). Goldberg (1999: 3) explains that the public is usually shocked to hear about the so-called good people that act criminally or immorally. The split, therefore, appears as something that does not represent the identity of the person in question but is motivated by external factors that may be considered shocking. Goldberg (1999: 3) further elaborates that the split is vertical when side-by-side individuals occupy a single mind, and the split is of a parallel and coexisting other, but the division into these pairs is not always equal in, for example, frequency or length of stay. Thereby, the split is not always identical or similar with a previous experience.

Further, Colin McGinn (1997: 61) explores the concept of evil character in his book *Ethics, Evil and Fiction* and divides the two types of people into two categories: the G-Beings and the E-beings. McGinn (1997: 61) states that G-beings thrive on experiencing similar feelings with different members of the same species, like experiencing pleasure when someone else is feeling it, whereas the E-beings work in a different way: pleasure in one causes pain in another and so on. The G-beings want to sympathize with others and feel what they are feeling, as the E-beings enjoy the dissonance between the two beings and want to experience the opposite of what someone is feeling. The G-beings could be regarded as wanting to maximize the pleasure of others, whereas the E-beings are more prone to become torturers, sadists and more willing to exploit the weak (1997: 62). As the split character may appear as two different characters, the personality can therefore lean towards either being and at times make the character stand out as either one, giving us hints of whichever character is in charge.

McGinn (1997: 63) divides the concept of evil into two key types: he introduces the concepts of *pure* evil and *instrumental* evil to separate innate *pure* evil from a goal-oriented *instrumental* evil that aims at succeeding at an aim. The concept of *pure* evil is used to exemplify the true nature of a person, whereas *instrumental* evil is used to refer to a method or way in which evil is used to take advantage of a person or situation that helps benefit the person using it.

Goldberg (1999: 5) explores how infidelity has affected the symptoms of the patients he has examined, and how the behavior of the person subject to the split can be socially accepted or socially condemned. In Western culture, infidelity is not generally accepted, so the symptoms seem to have rooting in socially condemned behavior that is in discordance with socially accepted behavior. Goldberg (1999: 7-8) further exemplifies the split by starting from a rather familiar situation: one has to choose between two equally appealing selections, like the pie or the cake, but takes the situation further by adding an onset of ambivalence that the goals and aims of the selection may produce, thereby making the end results stand in opposition with each other and in contrast with the two opposing personalities. The split is no longer that of a meaningless choice but that of fulfilling a certain aim.

Goldberg (1999: 9) makes mention of the vertical split being present in patterns following the loss of an important relationship, a loved person or perhaps even loss of a possession. The split thereby makes itself noticeable in the denial that the loss has not even happened or occurred (1999: 9). The individual who has been affected by the split will not even admit to the effects of the loss.

Ignace Feuerlicht (1978: 9) explains that "when a close relationship has given way to alienation, it can be replaced by different moods and attitudes. There can be a total indifference toward the former partnership or union". Thus, the relationship may become the complete antithesis of what it used to be and both partners may not want to see each other again. However, Feuerlicht states that

> there can also be a hopeful or despairing longing for restoration of the close tie or a grief that things have ended…the intimate tie can be followed by its opposite – by hostility, hate violent opposition, and destructiveness. And then again, the estrangement from a partner or a set of values can be succeeded by happiness, even exultation, by the feeling of freedom and joy gained through new experiences, insights and relationships. One may feel reborn or discover a new and better world (1978: 9)

The estrangement may therefore lead to longing or satisfaction, as the relationship may have affected the psyche of the partners so that they have not been able to grow into their own selves. However, the effect can also be totally converse and lead to a personal catharsis where an individual finds a wholly new realm after an intense partnership.

4 ALIENATED NARRATOR IN *FIGHT CLUB* (2006)

This is where I will start the analysis of *Fight Club* (2006) and apply the ideas and concepts to the novel's narrative content to examine the alienation of the narrator in *Fight Club* (2006). I will argue in this analysis that the narrator is presented as a man who battles with postmodern anxieties which in accordance with his insomnia and weak self-image lead to him splitting himself into a double that is presented by the character called Tyler Durden. The narrator gives the reader certain clues that enable to decipher what his motives are and is constantly making references to concepts that can be regarded as being of postmodern nature.

The splitting of the self the narrator engages in is his self-reflection on his condition. He seeks to destroy his former self and engage in a new role that is everything that he once was not. However, he does not realize the extent of his destructive aims until the end of the novel, where he is shocked to find out that everything that has been happening lately is founded on his distortions of himself and the world. This is where the theme of uncanny can also be attached to the narrator, since the narrator battles with inexplicable forces that in a way resemble his own intentions but that are not fully understood by him. There are also certain events and features in the narrative that give the reader hints about the split nature of the narrator which are exemplified for example by the use of repetition of certain phrases and suggestions about which the narrator knows more than he should. Still, the narrator is unable to comprehend why he is given this type of uncanny, which makes him receive somewhat peculiar amounts of external information that he should not even have access to. The alienation becomes more distinctive when it reaches the point of the narrator as being alien even to himself, leading him to trying to end his double's plans of destruction.

4.1 Alienation and American Consumerism

The setting of *Fight Club* (2006) is post-war American society where materialism and consumerism are ideologically prevailing and also affecting the choices an individual is ready or forced to make. Individuals are seen as consumers that build their lives on ideas and images fed upon them by the capitalist society. These ideas are not necessarily what make them better people but better consumers instead. *Fight Club* (2006) may therefore be connected to what Miles states about consumerism and that consumerism is regarded as the answer to all our problems and an escape from the mundane realities of everyday life (1998: 1). The narrator has surely been affected by the surrounding consumer society that virtually makes him fill every void in his life with materialistic objects and values. He often feels that his collections and apartment are never ready or fulfilling, but that he must instead consume even without any purpose whatsoever. He purchases objects like an automaton: "Then the right set of dishes. Then the perfect bed. The drapes. The rug" (2006: 44). The narrator rarely even uses the products and objects he has purchased, but he still wants more and is willing to go at any lengths to make his collections perfect and complete.

The narrator is constantly battling with the reality of American consumer society and its effects on himself and others. He claims that "I wasn't the only slave to my nesting instinct. The people I know who used to sit in the bathroom with pornography, now they sit in the bathroom with their IKEA furniture catalogue" (2006: 43). Like Miles (1998: 1) suggests, the narrator definitely lives in consumerist society where areas of social life have had to adapt to a world where the needs and desires of the consumer are apparently paramount. The narrator does not have a social life because his job consists of constant traveling. He mentions that "I go to meetings my boss doesn't want to attend. I take notes. I'll get back to you." (2006: 30). The narrator keeps buying things to satisfy something intangible and inexplicable, perhaps to make up for his non-existent social life.

The narrator mentions that "you buy furniture. You tell yourself, this is the last sofa I will ever need in my life" (2006: 44). He is clearly victim to the modest affluence ensured by his steady job and apartment where he can place these objects. He describes his apartment in the following fashion: "Home was a condominium on the fifteenth floor of a high-rise, a sort of filing cabinet for widows and young professionals" (2006: 41). It can be said that the life cycle of a product is therefore rather short and seem to echo a distinctive consumer fantasy mentioned by Baurdillard (quoted in Kellner 1989: 12) where affluent individuals are no longer surrounded by other human beings as they were in the past, but by objects. The narrator is not surrounded by a wife and kids or friends but by an apartment full of objects. Conroy (2004: 119) explains that a luster of value is retained from the social symbolization the product draws on. The narrator can be seen as building himself a nest of social acceptance that he wants to present to the rest of the world, but he only ends up alienating himself and substituting social ties and family for unnecessary objects.

Like Baudrillard (quoted in Kellner 1989: 13) states, brand names play an essential role in imposing a coherent and collective vision, of an almost inseparate totality, and the narrator seems to know every product he has purchased by its brand name, almost as if to show how precious and distinctive his collection has become. He mentions furniture and items like the "Johanneshov armchar" the "rislampa/Har paper lamp", "the Alle cutlery service", "the Vild hall clock" and "the Klipsk shelving unit" (2006: 43). It seems rather clear that, like Conroy (2004: 117) mentions, these objects take on their signification of prestige and not only serve the needs of the possessor but also designate his being and social rank. These objects do not only have a certain price tag but a social value, too. The narrator can therefore be seen as desperately trying to improve his social rank with cheap furniture and wanting to cheer up his otherwise dull and unimportant life "that [is] ending one minute at a time" (2006: 29). According to Conroy (2004: 119), this is how the consumer not only consumes a product but also a set of meanings and signs of commodity. The narrator is an ideal consumer that even dutifully memorizes the product names and thereby refers to them as signs of commodity. However, the narrator is not fully satisfied with his condition, as he mentions that the by-product of this kind of consumerism is that "the things you used to own, now they

own you" (2006: 44). He realizes that consumerism does not often make any sense, since in it there is no means to an end, as consumerism is just an end in itself, and this is where the narrator starts to alienate himself from consumerism. When the narrator becomes trapped in his "lovely nest" (2006: 44) and understands that the products now own him, Baudrillard's (quoted in Kellner 1989: 14) notion that these goods are the product of a human activity and that they are dominated not by natural ecological laws but by the laws of exchange value comes to life. The narrator being trapped in a nest full of items shows that when he consumes products he also ends up consuming and alienating himself.

In *Fight Club* (2006), the narrator simulates for example the furniture catalogues and wants to become what the images project, as he compliments his "clever Njuranda coffee tables in the shape of a lime green yin and an orange yang that fit together to make a circle" (2006:43). He allows himself to become a simulation of a model for living. Simulation, in this case purchasing furniture and items, therefore deepens the narrator's alienation from himself and becomes the narrator's reality that is "more real than the real" (Woods 1999: 26). The narrator's personality becomes an extension of an image created by the media and he judges himself according to standards made up by designers and advertising. The narrator realizes the effects of this simulation and mentions that "then you're trapped in your lovely nest" (2006: 44). When the narrator's apartment blows up he still mourns for the lost yet unnecessary items such the contents of his refrigerator where he had "collected shelves full of different mustards, some stone-ground, some English pub style" (2006: 45). Even though the narrator understands that the things used to own him, he feels that he has lost something important.

Similarly, the narrator's reality collapses and implodes as his apartment blows up and he loses all the products he has purchased. The narrator calls Tyler for help and keeps saying in his head: "Deliver me, Tyler, from being perfect and complete" (2006: 46). This is how he loses touch with the real world and how the "demarcation between image or simulation and reality implodes" (Woods 1999: 26). He feels that the products have made him perfect and complete, which is of course impossible, but it also indicates

how "the very experience of the real world disappears" (Woods: 26). He has become so immersed in a consumerist fantasy that is alien both to his own reality and the simulation created by the products that he no longer wants to know the boundaries between simulation and reality.

Finally, the hyperreality the narrator encounters is first created by the consumerist society he lives in and then his actions against it. He mentions that even their pranks no longer satisfy their need to act silly, as "doing stuff to the food got to be boring, almost part of the job description" (2006: 85). He replaces the former ad-ridden hyperreality with his own, evil version of reality, "Project Mayhem" (2006: 119), that is also *more than real*" (Woods 1999: 26). The narrator no longer cares for consumerism as he and Tyler start to plot against the nation at large. The narrator and Tyler aim at the destruction of the world and the alienation from the consumerist hyperreal "where distinctions between objects and their representations are dissolved, and one is left with only simulacra" (Woods 1999: 26). Further, the whole Project Mayhem and its effects on society may be regarded as the total reversal of the present values, but it is still born out of hyperreality where their images are still totally misplaced even from their own contextual viewpoint.

The narrator only starts to question his consumerist views when his apartment blows up and Tyler has to take him under his wing. The two then live in a crummy house together, where "stacks of magazines are about the only furniture" (2006: 58) and start plotting revenge on the world. Like Keniston (1972: 176) suggests that a revolt against technologism "must inevitably exploit technology to overcome technologism", the narrator in *Fight Club* (2006) ultimately attacks the consumerism around him by creating Project Mayhem that culminates in the narrator being trapped by Tyler and saying that "Tyler and I are up on top of the Parker-Morris Building with the gun stuck in my mouth...[and the building] won't be here in ten minutes" (2006: 203). The consumerist society relying on technology will therefore be overturned by destroying the technologies that aid consumerism and the alienation created by them.

4.2 Distancing Oneself from Society and Culture

As the narrator alienates himself from consumerism, he can also be regarded as alienating himself from the surrounding society and culture. The narrator in *Fight Club* (2006) seems to fit Keniston's (1972: 171) description of today's different and restless youth who are exposed to a different world than the generations before them. As soon as the narrator starts to go the support group meetings, he is prone to emphasize his alienation from society and the culture that surround him: "Anything you're ever proud of will be thrown away. And I'm lost inside" (2006: 17). His restlessness shows in this statement as he understands that his attempts at a so-called good life are only futile when everything he appreciates will ultimately be thrown away.

Morton A. Kaplan's (1976: 118) definition of "alienation [occurring] when an individual perceives an absence of meaningful relationships between his [sic] status, his identifications, his social relationships, his style of life, and his work" can be applied to the narrator distancing himself from other people and shifting towards a split personality, as he secretly starts to go to support groups with false motives and wants to cure his insomnia by abusing the suffering of others. The narrator claims that "I never give my real name at support groups" (2006: 19) and it serves as an interesting way to look at his identification and social relationships among the people he meets at the group sessions. He wants to remain alien to them and willingly wants to perceive an absence of meaningful relationships so he can be free and without moral obligations to the people he meets.

As Tyler and the narrator form the fight club, the narrator mentions that "it used to be enough that when I came home angry and knowing that my life wasn't toeing my five-year plan, I could clean my condominium or detail my car" (2006: 49). His new solution to the problem of being angry at something is not what the society and culture of the narrator expect him to follow. Therefore, the narrator resembles Keniston's definition of a member of a postmodern generation that is impatient with the hypocrisies of the past (1972: 171), When the narrator is angry at something, what Keniston calls "searching

honesty" (1972: 171) can be linked with the narrator going to the root of human emotions and matching anger with anger, as he does at fight club, not only as sublimating one's emotions into mundane activities at home.

In a sense, the narrator and Tyler's attempts at forming a nationwide fight club can be used to refer to the type of alienation described by Ignace Feuerlicht (1978: vii) who claims that "since World War II, the phenomenon of alienation apparently has engulfed many people and countries". Alienation can therefore be seen as a post-World War II phenomenon that has affected the American society and culture as well, as the people of the country had lost many soldiers and relatives when fighting enemies and therefore led to the alienation of its people.

Keniston's (1972: 171-172) division into a hippie and a radical is also an interesting thought, as the narrator in *Fight Club* (2006) seems to be a hybrid of the two. On one hand, the narrator, in Keniston's terms (1972: 171-122), drops out of a society, considers it irredeemable and focuses on interior change, since he moves into an abandoned house with Tyler and goes to support groups to fight his insomnia. On the other hand, he ultimately ends up as a radical that according to Keniston (1972: 171-122) wants to change and redeem society. However, as the narrator understands what his split self Tyler is up to, he does not want to follow his radical ideas, but instead states that "for a long time though, Tyler and I were best friends" (2006: 11). His radicalism is only born out of Tyler's aims, and the narrator's alienation is not willing to take a step too radical to let Tyler take ultimate command of his life.

Feuerlicht (1978: vii) explains that alienation is not solely personal but that it also explains such historical movements as the rise of fascism and Nazism and the worldwide youth rebellion of the 1960s. *Fight Club* (2006) exemplifies the spirit of both totalitarianism and youth rebellion by the narrator's plans to destroy society by means of infiltration of fight club members into important and everyday organizations and workplaces. At one point, when the narrator has already realized Tyler's hideous plans of world domination and tries to stop them from becoming reality, Tyler describes the people involved in what they call Project Mayhem: "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 guard you while you're asleep" (2006: 166). Project Mayhem indeed echoes a strong movement or secret society that has already started to affect the society they live in and feel aliened from. Further, similarities can also be drawn with Clifford Geerts' (1996: 5) point about the development of culture and how advantage was given to those individuals in the population most able to take advantage of it. Therefore, as the fight club members infiltrate the world they live in, they slowly become more effective in changing their culture to serve their own aims.

Keniston's (1972: 172) view of a postmodern youth can be applied to *Fight Club* (2006), as the mood born out of modernity, affluence, rapid social change and violence are all found in *Fight Club* (2006). In addition to traveling to scenes of accidents, the narrator works at an office filled with computers, "changing the overheads and slides" (2006: 49). He also has enough personal wealth to invest in useless items only to tell himself that "this is the last sofa I will need in my life" (2006: 44), belongs to "a generation of men raised by women" (2006: 50) and finally ends up forming a fight club that "gets to be your reason for going to the gym and keeping your hair cut short and cutting your nails" (2006: 50). His life is therefore an example of a postmodern mood that permeates his job, consumerism and preference for masculine violence. Like Feuerlicht (1978: 4) explains that "there is no limit to the number of items that can be externalized (created) or the number of items (people, organizations, ideas, and so forth) from which one can become estranged", the narrator in *Fight Club* (2006) virtually distances himself from everything he believes in to organize his life so that he is no longer dependent on anyone except Tyler. They live in a crummy house with no running water and barely any electricity, and Tyler wants to build himself an army of men who plot against the society. Ultimately by attacking banks and companies they want to return society into an anarchistic state where humans must fight for their existence.

However, Feuerlicht (1978: 8) also states that "man must alienate himself from many persons and things. He must give up, forget, suppress feelings in order to grow, to have more important relationships, more valuable experiences". As the narrator in *Fight Club* (2006) is alienating himself from society, he experiences a change that takes him

somewhere else in his life. In this sense, the alienation could be regarded as him trying to have important relationships, as Tyler seems to be his only true friend, and Marla ultimately becomes his difficult female obsession that he ends up caring for, as in "and if Tyler loves Marla. I love Marla." (2006: 199). Even if the experiences of the narrator are not valuable in the most accepted or common sense, they are still rather grand and interesting in nature. Therefore, he perhaps willingly gives up and suppresses his own feelings in order to be part of something bigger, and like Feuerlicht (1978: 8-9) states, he is willing to "give up ideals in order to find ties that serve him better". Ultimately, the love the narrator feels for Marla surpasses the needs of his split self and he becomes more intertwined with the society that he once considered himself alien to.

4.3 Replacing a Meaningless Job with Meaningful Work

In addition to alienating himself from society, the narrator in *Fight Club* (2006) particularly alienates himself from his job as a product recall specialist and starts to maintain a fight club with Tyler. The narrator has become so alienated from his job that when he is traveling for business, he even wants the plane he is on to crash. He mentions that "every takeoff and landing, when the plane banked too much to one side, I prayed for a crash" (2006: 25). The narrator seems to be extremely bored with his job and describes his typical workday in the following fashion: "my boss brings another sheet of paper to my desk and sets it at my elbow. I don't even wear a tie anymore. My boss is wearing his blue tie, so it must be a Thursday" (2006: 126). The narrator does not seem to care for his job and primarily focuses his attention on boring details that he encounters while preoccupied with it. Like Ignace Feuerlicht (1978: 112) suggests, many young people often reject the work ethic of older generations and may offend the aesthetic ideal or conventions of their parents, and the narrator even tells people sitting next to him on airplanes that "I'm working toward a career as a dishwasher" (2006: 31). He does not seem to be interested in the job he has, as he puts it down constantly. What Green (1976: 28) describes as the principle vehicle for the expression of human

capacities, the job the narrator has does not seem to lend itself to the expression of the narrator's capabilities, which increases his alienation from it.

What also seems to annoy and alienate the narrator is his computerized job. The narrator refers to his job as a place where his boss gets on his computer and fiddles with his DOS execute commands (2006: 53). As Taube (1972: 1) suggests, rapid industrialization and the advent of the computer have alienated man even further, and the narrator refers to his job as if were computerized so that it is not him but the computer that can perform it better. Like Taube (1972: 1-2) states, this kind of job is not the creative product of one man but a fragmented and mechanical process. Perhaps the most important factor is that the fight club offers a momentary release for him to be able to and perform a job he does not even like. The narrator uses the fight club as a way to fight the alienation that his computerized job causes.

For the narrator, the fight club becomes a place for the narrator where he can fight the boredom and alienation created by his boring job. The narrator proclaims that "who guys are in fight club is not who they are in the real world…Who I am in fight club is not someone my boss knows" (2006: 49). Therefore, the narrator wants to alienate himself from his job and tell the reader that at fight club he is a different person. To emphasize this difference, the narrator mentions that "in the real world, I'm a recall campaign coordinator in a shirt and tie, sitting in the dark with a mouthful of blood and changing the overheads and slides as my boss tells Microsoft how he chose a particular shade of pale cornflower blue for an icon" (2006: 49). Thomas F. Green (1976: 29) states that "a job is a social role. Work is not. Work is an activity. A job is a socially validated social role. Work often is not". The narrator alienates himself from his job that defines his social role as a product recall specialist and instead focuses on what can be described as his meaningful work and activity, which is maintaining the fight club, whose clientele is growing constantly. The narrator mentions that "every week you go and there's more guys there" (2006: 50), which indicates that the work he coined for himself is enjoyed by other people as well. Green (1976: 28) mentions that the possibility that a human life might be spent in vain and without lasting effect has always been a possibility that men have shrieked against. The narrator is willing to work to

prove his worth, and by engaging himself in the fight club he wants to create a lasting effect of his own and fight the alienation that his mundane product recall specialist job brings.

As Thomas F. Green (1976: 28) states that work is a human necessity because escape from futility is, the narrator does not quit working entirely, but wants to concentrate on the fight club to escape the futility and alienation created by his job. However, he mentions that "nothing was solved when the fight was over, but nothing mattered" (2006: 53). This suggests that the fighting itself is the most important way for him to escape futility and alienation, even if it does not have a tangible aim or provide a lasting solution. Green (1976: 29) elaborates that there are many who work hard, who have works to perform, but who do not do so in ways that are socially validated so as to confirm their own worth. In the same way, maintaining the fight club is not socially validated by anyone else but the fight club members, who fight in secrecy and against each other. In this sense, even though the narrator now engages himself in work that he enjoys, this alienates him further, as it is hard for him to confirm his own worth with work that is not socially validated.

4.4 Masculinity, Violence, Fathers and Alienation

Apart from the narrator being alienated from his job, both the narrator and Tyler seem to be fighting because they want to fortify their masculinity in a society where masculinity must now be concealed or be made to operate under another types of power structures. The narrator mentions that he is part of "a generation of men raised by women" (2006: 50). As Kaplan (1976: 120) states, the narrator thinks in a way that suggests that "women's liberation in contemporary society becomes a threat to some male identification". His masculinity is subject to women gaining more power in contemporary society, and he feels that his generation has been brought up by women. Beynon (2002: 129) points out that men have blamed the influence of feminism for

family breakdown and for women bringing up children alone. The narrator seems to blame women for raising him in a way that has alienated himself from his masculinity.

The public display of violence at the fight club is the narrator's way to reassure his masculinity and prevent his alienation from it by showing off his willingness to fight and validate himself as a true man. As Michael S. Kimmel (2009: 65) points out "violence is often the single most evident marker of manhood. Rather it is the willingness to fight, the desire to fight", the narrator claims in a similar fashion that "I just don't want to die without a few scars" (2006: 48). As Alice Ferrebe (2005: 9) suggests, "masculinity as a project in fact involves an intense level both of emotional investment and of public performance and validation". The narrator wants to show to other men that he is a true man, which he does by acting violently and fighting other men. Accordingly, as Kimmel (2009: 65), mentions that "*we are afraid of other men*", the narrator wants to show that he is not afraid of anyone, especially other men, and states that "after a few fights, you're afraid a lot less" (2006: 54). The men at fight club are not only fighting each other but their fears, too. Therefore, it can be stated that these men fear that they will become alienated from their masculinity, if they are not willing to fight.

Further, both the narrator and Tyler seem to have complicated relationships with their fathers. This comes up more than once with mentions such as: "Tyler never knew his father. Maybe self-destruction is the answer" (2006: 49). The narrator's references to his father are rather prevalent in the novel, as he seems to seek for a male role model or father figure. The narrator mentions that his father never really provides him with any answers, which is exemplified in the following quotation: "when I got a job and turned twenty-five, I called him long distance, I said, now what? My dad didn't know, so he said, get married" (2006: 51). The narrator seems to resemble a person that Freud (2013: 347) defines a neurotic who finds no solution and remains subject to the authority of his father. Thus, the narrator feels alienated from his masculinity, as he has not been able to separate himself from his father and still considers himself a "thirty-year-old boy" (2006: 51). At one point, the narrator asks Tyler about their first fight: "I asked Tyler what he'd been fighting. Tyler said, his father" (2006: 53). This proves that the father

issues go as deep as to men fighting their fathers, even if in an imaginary sense. Like Freud (2013: 347) suggests, the son must seek reconciliation with his father, if he has stayed hostile to him, or if in the reaction to his infantile opposition he has become subject to his domination, he must now free himself from this pressure. Fighting liberates the narrator and Tyler from their past experiences and helps them solve the still-present developmental problems that sprout from the absence or disinterest of their fathers. The narrator also mentions that "maybe we didn't need a father to complete ourselves" (2006: 54). Ultimately, he does not even want a father, but he has not been able to detach himself from the idea of some kind of father figure. Like Feuerlicht (1978: 44-45) suggests, we are often dominated by external things instead of internal experiences. The construction of the narrator's self-image also lies on external factors, one of them being that he is supposed to have a father figure or a male role model. Tyler's dominant presence in the narrator's life suggests that Tyler has become his father figure. Thus, Tyler helps the narrator fight the alienation from masculinity that has been deepened by the inability to separate himself from his father.

In a certain way, the reassurance of masculinity also affects the sexuality of the narrator by keeping him rather alienated from women and especially Marla. When Marla Singer joins the testicular cancer group, the narrator mentions that "the next time we meet, I'll say, Marla, I can't sleep with you here. I need this. Get out" (2006: 24). Therefore, the narrator feels threatened by a female present in a group aimed at men and wants to retain a solely masculine environment to help him cure his insomnia, which is the reason he goes to these support groups. The narrator still seems to suffer from what Kimmel (2009: 65) points out: "as adolescents, we learn that our peers are a kind of gender police". Even if the narrator is among other men and cries against their shoulders to cure his insomnia, he does not want a woman to see him act in such a way. As Culpeper (2001: 12) mentions, gender is a fundamental social category, and the narrator desperately wants to fortify his masculine role. However, Culpeper (2001: 12-13) also points out the social constructivist approach regarding multiple identities and that identities are not fixed. The narrator goes to support groups to cry, and he explains that: "Bob's hand palms my head against the new tits sprouted on his barrel chest" (2006:

16). Such examples show that the narrator can voluntarily alienate himself from masculinity and even resort to crying to cure his ailment.

Marla ultimately ends up having sex with Tyler. Oddly enough, the narrator dislikes their relationship and may even seem a bit jealous of the two, as he still tries to assure himself that he dislikes Marla. However, the narrator seems to have dreams about Marla, as in: "All night long, I dreamed I was humping Marla Singer. Marla Singer smoking her cigarette. Marla Singer rolling her eyes" (2006: 56). Freud (2013: 347) states that the son must free himself from his libidinous wishes towards his mother and utilize them in the quest for a really foreign object for his love. The narrator clearly wants to have sex with Marla, but is unable to love her. Feuerlicht (1978: 44) states that alienation "often means the withering away or the negation of the human potentialities and the near reduction of man to a thing", which can be applied to the narrator's jealousy of Tyler's masculinity which Tyler is able to present by having sex with Marla. Tyler can be regarded as alienating the narrator from his masculinity by presenting a more masculine role model for the narrator to live up to.

4.5 The Alienated Postmodern Narrator

Not only is the narrator at odds with his masculinity but also with his time and his late 20th-century postmodern generation. Right at the beginning of *Fight Club* (2006), the narrator alienates himself from the idea of persistence and has gloomy prophecies about the future as he goes to the support groups and contemplates the cruel world he lives in:

> Crying is right at hand in the smothering dark, closed inside someone else, when you see how everything you can ever accomplish will end up as trash. Anything you're ever proud of will be thrown away. And I'm lost inside. (2006: 17).

This indicates that the narrator wants to cleanse himself of any false ideals or hopes, which resembles Tim Woods (1999: 11) definition that the postmodern represents the

loss of belief in the keystones of the Enlightenment, belief in the infinite progress of knowledge and in the infinite moral and social advancement. The narrator clearly does not believe that it is of any use in holding on to one's accomplishments or social advancement in general, as they will only offer temporary and subjective satisfaction. Further, as for moral and visiting the support groups, the narrator reveals that "strangers with this kind of honesty make me go a big rubbery one, if you know what I mean" (2006: 21). This example demonstrates how questionably postmodern his morals are, as he takes advantage of the group members and makes fun of them by saying that their honesty gives him an erection. He certainly wants to alienate himself from the group members and focus on his postmodern and subjective reality.

The narrator continues: "It's easy to cry when you realize that everyone you love will reject you or die. On a long enough time line, the survival rate for everyone will drop to zero" (2006: 17). The aforementioned theme coincides with Terry Eagleton's (1996: vii) remark about postmodernity being suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation. The narrator does not want to cling to what Eagleton defines as reason or universal progress, because the narrator abandons reason and knows that it really does not matter he decides to do something or love someone, as he will only end up losing everything he has, which cannot lead to any kind of progress. The world, therefore, feels wholly alien to him in terms of love or survival in general. He only wants make life easier for himself by admitting that there is really no reason to be ecstatic or proud of anything, since his postmodern view of life has only rendered these things futile and meaningless.

The narrator wants to explore whether there is an alternative to the life he is currently living. He asks: "If I could wake up in a different place, at a different time, could I wake up as a different person?" (2006: 33). Like Crome and Williams (2006: 131) suggest, the narrator uses the postmodern to "put forward the unpresentable in presentation and that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable". The narrator does not seem to clearly know what he wants to present, but it is still important for him to contemplate

whether there is an alternative to the life he is living and a way to find a solution to his postmodern alienation.

4.6 The Uncanny Alienation

The theme of the unpresentable can also be linked with *Fight Club* (2006), as the narrator presents many episodes and that may be regarded as uncanny and adding to his alienation. After the narrator meets Tyler at a nude beach, "Tyler was naked and sweating, gritty with sand, his hair wet and stringy, hanging in his face" (2006: 32) and has spoken with him for the first time, he shows the first signs of him not fully realizing what is happening to him. The narrator also states that "sometimes, you wake up and have to ask where you are" (2006: 33). This is how the narrator starts to wonder if he has been awake or not for the entire duration of the episode, since he mentions that "I had to know what Tyler was doing while I was asleep" (2006: 32). This eerie feeling echoes the insomnia that the narrator has suffered from, and somehow he starts to wonder whether his own persona could be altered when he goes to sleep. This episode certainly echoes what Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle (2009: 35) call "a sense of strangeness, mystery or eeriness". For the first time, the narrator starts to wonder whether he might become someone else and therefore alienate himself from the persona he has become to associate himself with.

Later, the narrator ultimately ends up in a rather bad condition: his cheeks are punched in and he is full of scars and bruises. His physical appearance is therefore something that is regarded as something unpleasant and also horrifying, especially to his co-workers and supervisors, which resembles Freud's (2003: 123) statement that the uncanny "commonly merges with what arouses fear in general". Further, being scarred and deformed, he is not allowed to give any official presentations to companies or to take command of important meetings. The narrator mentions that at one meeting his boss won't let him show the material "with a black eye and half my face swollen from the stitches inside my cheek" (2006: 47). In this sense, the boss does not want the

expose the audience to what in Freudian (2003: 123) terms may be considered uncanny and "what evokes fear and dread". Thus, the fear that is linked with the uncanny can be regarded as another type of alienation experienced by the narrator.

Further, repetition of certain events and phrases is an important part of the narrator's idiosyncrasies. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1987: 177) mentions the teleology of repetition in narration and suggests that repetition may serve the pleasure principle but also manifest a death instinct. In *Fight Club* (2006), this type of uncanny behaviour is found in the narrator's repetition of certain phrases. The narrator repeats sentences such as "I know this because Tyler knows this", providing uncanny and alienating clues, and he also mentions airport names, "You wake up at JFK", to emphasize that he is yet in another place (2006: 12, 31). The narrator gives the reader certain signs of repetition that are supposed to have a meaning, yet are still relatively opaque and in relation to the actual plot may be disregarded by the reader as just pure gobbledygook. These mannerisms bring to mind what Rimmon-Kenan (1987: 177) mentions about the child throwing away a reel and then pulling it back to learn to cope with the absence and the return of the mother. The uncanny repetition of certain phrases and events may be regarded as the narrator's way to learn to cope with the alienation from himself that he has started to experience but has yet to grasp.

Bennett and Royle (2009: 35) explain that the uncanny "has to do more specifically with a disturbance of the familiar", and in *Fight Club* (2006) a good example of this is illustrated in the following excerpt:

> You're a projectionist and you're tired and angry, but mostly you're bored so you start by taking a single frame of pornography collected by some other projectionist that you find stashed away in the booth, and you splice this frame of a lunging red penis or a yawning wet vagina close-up into another feature movie (2006: 30).

The projectionist, Tyler, gets bored and starts to disturb the familiar and ends up creating an uncanny movie presentation within a new context. The narrator continues: "Nobody complained. People ate and drank, but the evening wasn't the same. People

feel sick or start to cry and don't know why" (2006: 31). This is how people start to feel uncanny alienation when they see an object that does not belong somewhere but subconsciously reminds people of its existence. Also, as Freud (2003: 125) states, "what is novel may well prove frightening and uncanny", the presentation of an new object in a different context may disturb people so that their experience of it becomes that of uncanny nature.

4.7 The Split Self in *Fight Club* (2006)

The first signs of the narrator's growing need for or shift towards an alter ego is presented when he starts to go to support groups for ailments and conditions he himself does not suffer from. This can also be regarded as the first sign of the narrator's alienation from himself within the storyline, as he needs a new identity to improve his life and step away from it.

The narrator mentions that "I never give my real name at support groups" (2006: 19). The narrator changes his name for every group and does not want to reveal his true identity, so he can escape himself, cure his insomnia and experience another states of existence. This development resembles Semino and Culpeper's (2002: 153) point that a split of a character often occurs at times of personal crisis. The narrator's insomnia has definitely become a personal crisis at this point, and he claims that "I went to my first support group two years ago" (2006: 18), and he is still trying to cure his insomnia by means of an alienating split into different and anonymous characters. According to Goldberg (1999: 3) the public is shocked when so-called good people act criminally or immorally. The narrator actually enjoys that other group members treat him as a so-called good person who only happens to have "brain parasites" (2006: 19). The narrator even mentions that "losing all hope was freedom. If I didn't say anything, people in a group assumed the worst. They cried harder" (2006: 22) to demonstrate how he fully understands what he is doing, but he still enjoys the immoral attention his alienated self is getting from other group members. When his alter ego is revealed by another faker,

Marla Singer, he can no longer sleep nor function normally at the groups. The narrator cries out: "To Marla I'm a fake. Since the second night I saw her, I can't sleep." (2006: 23). And, "worse than that," the narrator mentions, "I can't cry with her watching" (2006: 18). Crying has provided a certain catharsis for the narrator, but with Marla watching, he can no longer pretend that he suffers from the same problems as the people whose shoulders he cries against. Just like the narrator, Marla seems to have an alter ego, even if for different reasons.

It occurs that the narrator in *Fight Club* (2006) is actually split between the two minds right after his apartment is blown up, as the narrators immediately calls Tyler and wants to move in with him. This is once again reminiscent of Semino and Culpeper's (2002: 153) statement about the split occurring at times of personal crisis, and the narrator even mourns his lost "shelves full of different mustards" (2006: 45). Thereafter, as Goldberg (1999: 3) explains, the split of the character slowly becomes vertical as "side-by-side individuals occupy a single mind, and the split is of a parallel and coexisting other". The loss of a possession triggers the tangible split of the character and confirms it at the vertical level, even though his double Tyler has already appeared earlier on "a nude beach" (2006: 32). This time the loss of the apartment fortifies the split as the narrator has nowhere to go and must resort to his only friend, if one that only exists at an imaginary level. However, like Goldberg (1999: 3) states, in the case of the vertical split the division into these pairs is not always equal in frequency or length of stay. The narrator still keeps going to work and seeing Tyler only when they share the same space. The split becomes rather interesting when Marla starts to have sex with Tyler and the narrator finds a "dead jellyfish of a used condom floating in the toilet" and mentions that "this is how Tyler meets Marla" (2006: 56). The narrator therefore regards Tyler as a totally different person who starts to have sex with Marla, therefore even channeling his sex life into his vertically split twin, Tyler. Only later does the narrator realize that "Tyler and Marla are never in the same room. I never see them together" (2006: 65). He starts to wonder who is actually having sex with Marla. Tyler's actions are closely linked with what Goldberg (1999: 5) describes as socially condemned behavior. This type of infidelity experienced, even if on a friendship level, starts to annoy the narrator who wants to keep Tyler to himself.

As for *Fight Club* (2006), a good example of what Semino and Culpeper (2002: 153) define contrasting between the current state of the protagonist and including flashbacks that may any reflect previous states of an individual is right at the beginning of the book where the narrator mentions 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" (2006: 10). This focuses the plot on the end of the story where Tyler has already been discovered by the narrator as a product of his own imagination. Here the narrator reports from a latter point of view, telling how they used to be friends, so the flashback element is included by informing us that the friendship has changed over time and creates an expectation of a future explanation as to what drove the narrator and Tyler to this confrontation.

In *Fight Club* (2006), at first there seems not to exist what Colin McGinn (1997: 61) describes as a G-being that, for example, likes experiencing pleasure when someone else is experiencing it. The narrator has become alienated from experiencing the pleasure of others and has instead started to take advantage of their suffering by going to support groups. The narrator thereby illustrates the characteristics of Goldberg's (1997: 62) E-beings who are more prone to become torturers, sadists and more willing to exploit the weak. Further, his split self Tyler also enjoys watching other people suffer, and this even applies to the suffering of the narrator. Tyler even uses lye to burn the narrator's hand and says that "it will hurt more than you've ever been burned" (2006: 74). Tyler is also the E-being who starts pulling pranks on corporate America and the one creates Project Mayhem to attack the American bank system.

Focusing on McGinn's (1997: 63) division of evil into two key types, *pure* evil and *instrumental* evil, where *pure* evil is innate and *instrumental* evil is goal-oriented evil, his evil types may be used to explain the type of evil presented by the narrator and his double. Further, the narrator is not a pure G-being even at the beginning of the novel, as he himself exploits the suffering of others by going to support meetings to cure his insomnia. The *instrumental* evil is apparent, for example, when the narrator claims that by watching other people suffer he found a cure: "And I slept. Babies don't sleep this

well" (2006: 22). The alienation of the narrator results in him trying to improve his life by means of instrumental evil. On the contrary, it may be stated that the double of the narrator, Tyler, is closer to being a *pure* evil being in his attempts to take advantage of the narrator and turn him into a purely evil character that even resorts to killing people to reach his aims. When the narrator claims that "I didn't kill anybody, I say. I'm not Tyler Durden" (2006: 196), he tries to explain that he is not a purely evil character who resorts to killing people to reach his aims. This is when the narrator understands that the split, like Goldberg (1999: 7-8) mentions, has different end results that in contrast with the two oppositing personalities. The narrator will not kill to reach his aims, even if Tyler will, which clearly indicates the struggle of good and evil.

Later, when the narrator finds out that Tyler is actually his double, he tries to alienate himself from his split self, only to find out that it is virtually impossible, as everyone thinks that the narrator is Tyler. The narrator mentions that "I'm not Tyler Durden. He's the other side of my split personality" (2006: 196). Like Ignace Feuerlicht (1978: 9) states, when close relationship has given way to alienation, there can be a total indifference toward the former partnership or union". When the narrator realizes that his former partner Tyler is actually his split self, he does not want to have anything to do with him and tries to alienate himself from the partnership they had.

Ultimately, the narrator's alienation from himself turns into alienation from his split self. The narrator starts to sympathize with other people and Marla, resulting in an almost total reversal or the character from an E-being into a G-being. The narrator wants get rid of Tyler completely and mentions that "I have to take care of Tyler Durden" (2006: 197). He wants to alienate himself from his split self once and for all. This resembles Feuerlicht's (1978: 9) observation that the intimate tie can be followed by opposite feelings like hostility, hate, violent opposition and destructiveness, but also happiness and even the feeling of joy gained through new experiences. The narrator starts to hate Tyler for the situation he has put him in and even wants to kill himself, as he explains that "I'm not killing myself…I'm killing Tyler" (2006: 205). Later, when the narrator has survived the shooting and wakes up in a heavenly place, he states that "Tyler died" (2006: 206). The narrator starts to contemplate the world and mentions that

"this was better than real life. And your one perfect moment won't last forever" (2006: 206). The feeling expressed is rather similar to Feuerlicht's (1978: 9) statement that when a close relationship has ended, "one may feel reborn or discover a new and better world". The narrator says that "we are not special. We are not crap or trash, either. We just are." (2006: 207). This observation is rather different from what the narrator felt before. If the estrangement from his split self and partner is not clearly "succeeded by happiness, even exultation, by the feeling of freedom and joy" (Feuerlicht 1978: 9), the feeling the narrator has is definitely more positive when Tyler is gone. Feuerlicht (1978: 8) also mentions that man must alienate himself from many persons and must give up, forget, suppress feelings in order to grow and to have more important relationships and more valuable experiences. The narrator's final alienation from Tyler seems to have been a catalyst for his growth and change of perspective in life. Goldberg (1999: 9) mentions that the split sometimes makes itself noticeable in the denial that the loss has not even happened or occurred. The narrator instead cherishes the loss of Tyler and wants to focus on what is ahead.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this thesis was to investigate the different types of alienation experienced by the narrator in *Fight Club* (2006). His gradual alienation from consumerism, society and culture, work and masculinity were conceptually intertwined with Jean Baurdillard's theories on the postmodern and Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny. It is clear that the narrator abandons the consumerist values that he pertains to at the beginning of the novel and eventually with the help of his split self Tyler Durden shifts towards an ascetic lifestyle that abandons everything that is considered materialistic. He also becomes alienated from society by taking up residency in an abandoned house. He even proceeds to attack the society he was once part of with the help of Project Mayhem. The narrator also alienates himself from his work as a product recall campaign coordinator and starts to contemplate the meaningfulness of work. He wants to replace his computerized and mechanical job with an anarchistic plot against society, Project Mayhem, whose aim is to take over the nation. Further, the narrator also alienates himself from masculinity and tries to restore it by means of violent behavior, and his father issues come up constantly in the novel, as he lacks support from his father in the decisions he wants to make. His sexuality is also questionable, as he at first neglects Marla Singer and then has sex with her via his split self Tyler.

The American consumerist views of the narrator were analysed with the help of Steven Miles' (1998: 1) theory on consumerism being regarded as an answer to all of our problems and an escape from everyday life. The narrator tries to replace his non-existent social life with the consumption of unnecessary products. However, he ultimately realizes that "the things you used to own, now they own you" (2006: 44) and ends up alienating himself from consumerism by moving into a crummy house with Tyler and engaging himself in Project Mayhem. The consumerism presented in *Fight Club* (2006) coincides with Baurdillard's (quoted in Kellner 1989: 12) notion that affluent individuals are no longer surrounded by other human beings as they were in the past, but by objects. Further, it was also stated that the narrator's life becomes a simulation of the images projected by the furniture catalogues, but it implodes when he loses touch

with both the real world and the consumerist fantasy world he lives in as his apartment blows up, and the hyperreality created by Project Mayhem offers the narrator and his double Tyler a way to take revenge on the consumerist world. It was also pointed out that consumerism is a symptom of his alienation from other people, but he ultimately realizes that consumerism is a dead end and therefore abandons it.

The narrator's alienation from society and culture was exemplified with Kenneth Keniston's (1972: 171) description of today's different and restless youth and referred to in correlation with the feelings of the narrator, who mentions that he is "lost inside" (2006: 17). The narrator's fondness of the support groups was referred to as a key factor in the emergence of his split self, as he coins himself an alter ego and claims that "I never give my real name at support groups" (2006: 19). This coincides with what Morton A. Kaplan (1976: 118) refers to as an "absence of meaningful relationships", as the narrator wants to alienate himself from society and ultimately forms the fight club with his split self Tyler. Keniston notes that the postmodern youth are more prone to "searching honesty" (1972: 171). It was shown that the narrator wants to search honesty in his life by means of venting his anger at the world at fight club. The narrator's character was also analyzed according to Keniston's (1972: 171-172) division into a hippie and a radical, and it was noted that the narrator is a hybrid of the two. On one hand, the narrator wants to focus on interior change by going to support groups, which suggests that he resembles a hippie, but on the other hand he violently wants to change and redeem society like a radical. It was also stated that *Fight Club* (2006) contains themes that resemble Feuerlicht's (1978: vii) point about alienation and its connection with the rise of fascism and Nazism and the worldwide youth rebellion of the 1960s. The narrator and Tyler's Project Mayhem was shown to have similarities with Clifford Geerts' (1996: 5) theory about the development of culture and how advantage was given to people who could take advantage of it, as the narrator and Tyler want to change the world to serve their own aims. Ultimately, as the narrator alienates himself from society, his alienation is met with a similar catharsis introduced by Feuerlicht (1978: 8) where "[man] must give up, forget, suppress feelings in order to grow, to have more important relationships, more valuable experiences". The narrator starts to contemplate the possibility of love and cherishes the feeling that indicates his personal growth.

As for the narrator and his job, his behavior was considered to indicate what Ignace Feuerlicht (1978: 112) states about young people often rejecting the work ethic of older generations, as he makes fun of his job and tells people that he is "working toward a career as a dishwasher" (2006: 31). The narrator was also presented as trying to escape the futility created by his job and what Green (1976: 28) mentions as dying "without lasting effect". The narrator was presented as focusing on the fight club to trying to find a meaningful work and activity for himself and not wanting to be subject to his boss's commands or a socially validated job to be able to prove his own worth.

The narrator and Tyler were demonstrated as being alienated from American masculinity and wanting fortify it, as the two regard themselves as belonging to "a generation of men raised by women" (2006: 50). This reference was combined with Kaplan's (1976: 120) theory on women's liberation in contemporary society and how it may become a threat to male identification. The two men were shown to demonstrate how "violence is often the single most evident marker of manhood" (Kimmel 2009: 65) and that their masculinity is still subject to the authority their fathers. The sexuality of the narrator was shown to be of a peculiar nature, as his double Tyler ends up having sex with their female friend Marla which alienates the narrator further from his masculinity.

The narrator's gloomy world views were then connected with Tim Woods (1999:11) definition of the postmodern and its loss of faith in infinite progress of knowledge and in infinite moral and social advancement and further with the narrator's postmoden alienation. The narrator was also presented as contemplating what Crome and Williams (2006: 131) call "the unpresentable in presentation" and starting to seek a solution to his postmodern alienation.

The narrator's alienation from himself was analyzed with the help of Sigmund Freud's theory on the uncanny which can be connected with the strange, violent and fearful behaviour of the narrator. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's theory on uncanny repetition was used to illustrate the narrator's repetition of certain phrases that help him cope with his

alienation from himself. Bennett and Royle's (2009: 35) notion of the disturbance of the familiar was demonstrated in parallel with how the narrator's split self alters the movie projections and creates an uncanny alienating effect.

The split self and alienation of the narrator were stated to be a symptom of his insomnia and to be occurring at the time of a personal crisis. When the narrator moves in with Tyler, it results in what Goldberg (1999: 3) describes a vertical split where "side-by-side individuals occupy a single mind, and the split is of a parallel and coexisting other". A study of Goldberg's division of people into good and evil, G-beings and E-beings, resulted in finding that there is no G-being present in the split, as narrator and Tyler both enjoy the suffering of others. Further, Goldberg's two types of evil, instrumental evil and pure evil, were found as follows: the narrator presents instrumental evil by exploiting the suffering of others, whereas Tyler presents pure evil as he is willing to kill to reach his aims. Ultimately, the alienation of the narrator from himself turns into alienation from himself as he starts to sympathize with other people and feel love for Marla. The narrator's final alienation from and the killing of his split self was found to be a relief for him, as it enabled him, in Feuerlicht's (1978: 8) words, "[to] grow and to have more important relationships and more valuable experiences". The alienation of the narrator from his split was studied to be a hopeful wish for a better future.

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