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"Mr. Xerox," the Domestic Terrorist, and the Victim-Citizen

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"Mr. Xerox,"[1] the Domestic Terrorist, and the Victim-Citizen

MASCULINE AND NATIONAL ANXIETY IN *FIGHT CLUB* AND ANTI-TERROR LAW

Ruth Quiney

Abstract. *This article analyses* Fight Club, *a cult film and novel about angry, disoriented and commodified North American masculinity, against the background of the current "War on Terror" and the new British and American law in which this deterritorialised battle is inscribed. Recent literature and cinema has portrayed an often violent emptiness at the heart of Western masculinity: the disillusioned, usually young and white male is depicted as outsider within. This configuration is explored in fictions of the serial killer or psychopath, but remains suppressed in the Western political lexicon, despite the recent history of domestic or "home-grown" terror in America and Britain. In the new terror legislation, foreign males are represented as the prime threat to life and nation while, simultaneously a global, moral, and martial law is promulgated which makes potential criminals of unprecedentedly large numbers of "native" citizens.* Fight Club, *a late 1990s "pretext" of the "War on Terror," illuminates the psychic and political manipulations which "alienise" threats to Western masculine and national hegemony, shoring up the myth of a tightly-bordered, combative state, while creating a powerful victim-identity for citizens portrayed as traumatised by the shocks of the post-9/11 world order. The new-exceptionalist identification of national and personal hegemony, security, and control with manly militarism establishes an increasingly authoritarian and exclusionary nationhood. This sets the scene for fractured subcultures that, as in* Fight Club, *are doomed to replicate the rigid binaries of the dominant culture. I suggest that* Fight Club's *conflicted fusion of homoerotic, consumption-driven, and militarised masculinities allows examination of relationships between paranoid, nationalistic constructions of the legalised state and changing constructions of gender and sexuality.*

Keywords: *Fight Club, anti-terror law, domestic terrorist, domestic terrorism, Patriot Act, war on terror, militarized masculinity, marginalized masculinity, domesticated masculinity, consumer culture, gender identity, trauma*

During the "War on Terror," an open-ended battle whose multiple fronts combine the transnational and the domestic, the territorial and the imaginary,[2] attention has been drawn to a new type of terrorist, who translates his personal dissatisfaction and powerlessness into political violence. Since the crises of 9/11/2001 and, later, the July 2005 bombings in London, there has also been some disruption to deeply embedded, even automatic Western identifications of the terrorist with the foreigner. This occurs just as the ideological operations of the "War on Terror" aims to shore up national identifications for "docile patriots"[3] at home. The terrorist has become a highly topical cultural actor, imagined as both representative and causative of massive global upheaval and insecurity, whose nationality, pathology, and sexuality are frequently debated. In this context, fictional and popular cultural representations of the terrorist offer intriguing insights into certain evolving imaginary constructions of terror and its proponents which are influencing legal and political formations of a post-9/11 New World Order. This article proposes *Fight Club*,[4] the story of a depressed American office-worker and his anarcho-terrorist alter-ego, as a useful text through which to explore the apparent fracturing of domestic, and domesticated, masculinity into terroristic violence. *Fight Club* has been described by one critic as a "pretext"[5] for the new manifestations of terrorism which enact protest against changing global conditions, and attack those nation-states which appear to enforce a new global citizenship of increasing economic insecurity, decreasing civil liberties, and demands for workforce "flexibility" alongside high levels of consumption. *Fight Club*'s narrative foregrounds an evacuated and apparently marginal masculinity, confused and angered by consumer culture and its encroachment upon masculine privilege. Terroristic rebellion, in this story, offers a comprehensible mission and identity to men gripped by longings for national and even imperial power and belonging, the signifiers of a lost, dynamic, complete masculinity. I explore here how *Fight Club*'s narrative of a divided masculine consciousness reflects the paradoxes and evasions of that increasingly tight dialectic of victim-citizen versus outsider-terrorist which has been foregrounded by the rhetoric and law of the "War on Terror." I read *Fight Club* alongside recent anti-terror laws, some of the primary texts of the "War on Terror," in order to delineate a particular contemporary metamorphosis of concepts of gender and the nation which positions the terrorist male as doppelganger, "Mr. Xerox," or intimate alien.

Fight Club,[6] originally published in 1996, is a "cult" narrative made into a multi-million dollar film by David Fincher, positioned at what might be termed the outlying cultural mainstream. The narrative follows a young man in contemporary America and his descent into a "psychogenic fugue state,"[7] in which he becomes enthralled by his charismatic, rebellious alter, Tyler Durden. The narrator is an insomniac office-worker, a disillusioned, fragmented, and dissociated young man. (He is nameless throughout, but I will refer to him here as "Jack," as per the *Reader's Digest* guide to anatomy which he quotes according to his mood: "I am Jack's raging bile duct," and "I am Jack's enraged, inflamed sense of rejection.") This unhappy postmodern citizen's charming and fearless doppelganger, played by Brad Pitt in Fincher's film, is a keen barefist fighter and "guerrilla terrorist[ ] of the service industry."[8] The narrative explores troubled negotiations of gender positioning and the boundaries of the self within Western cultures which foster a myth of (self-)empowerment through (self-)commodification. *Fight Club*'s tale of masculine breakdown has inspired diverse recent readings: it has been analysed as postmodern gothic,[9] as an exploration of the contemporary crisis of masculinity,[10] and as a blackly ironic, flawed anti-capitalist manifesto.[11] I want to develop here the critique of *Fight Club* as a narrative of contemporary masculine dissidence offered by, for example, Bulent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen, by relating it specifically to the contemporary gendered cultural and legal construction of terrorism, and its complex relationship with the nation-state, which legislates and pronounces against it.

Fight Club depicts a domesticated, relatively affluent, white office-worker as "radicalised" by socioeconomic and cultural, rather than religious, influences. The story provides an intriguing perspective upon terrorism as a cultural and gendered phenomenon rather than (simply) as a manifestation of racial or religious difference. At present, anti-terror law and the cultural debates around it tell some of the most powerful stories about the gendered and national associations of particular citizen- bodies, and it is for this reason that I read *Fight Club* alongside British and American anti-terror legislation. Though I write in awareness of the dangers of conflating the cultural politics of the leading members of the "War on Terror's Coalition of the Willing," united shoulder to shoulder against an enemy who cannot be identified with any nation or ideology,[12] the cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary reading of American narrative and British law will, it is hoped, help to highlight the

complex, denationalised and deterritorialised construction of the contemporary terrorist as he is currently being imagined.

DOMESTIC TERRORISM AND THE LAW

Walter Benn Michaels writes that, according to current anti-terror law and policy, "we are at war with [terrorism] and only incidentally at war with some nation."[13] Domestic terror, originating from activists born or resident within national territory, is now a global threat:[14]

> we must now understand the enemy as a kind of criminal, as someone who represents a threat not to a political system or a nation, but to the law. . . . Regarded as a criminal, he or she testifies to the existence of laws that would govern not just one nation but the entire world, and thus to the triumph (imagined if not yet consolidated) of world citizenship . . .[15]

Slavoj Žižek, however, differentiates the "unlawful combatant" of "War on Terror" rhetoric from the legal criminal: "the al-Qaida terrorists are not enemy soldiers, nor are they simple criminals," but "the political Enemy excluded from the political arena."[16] Such outlawing and alienising of the global terrorist encourages his portrayal, in a national context, as strictly foreign; the very uncertainty which attaches to the deterritorialised terrorist creates a national and legislative need to expel him figuratively beyond national borders. Domestic terrorism is nonetheless specifically included in the very wide definition of "terrorism" in the United Kingdom's Terrorism Act 2000, Section 1, though the consultation paper on the Act focused on examples of animal rights and anti-abortion activism rather than that less definable, general alienation of certain native male citizens from the nation-state which appears to have motivated the 7/7 attacks in London. In the United States Patriot Acts[17], swiftly enacted in the wake of 9/11, Section 802 specifically makes domestic terrorism a crime, defining it as acts "dangerous to human life" which are intended to influence government policy by intimidation or coercion. [18]The legislation, as described, criminalises such acts, but as an addendum to the "alien" threat more readily and sensationally associated with terror and the primary object of the war against it.

Inconveniently for architects and propagandists of the "War on Terror," the alienness of the terrorist can no longer be relied upon: since 9/11 and the

declaration of war, the British "threat profile" of the terrorist has shifted, from enraged foreign ideologue to impressionable, "radicalised" outlaw within. The new "threat" is a depressed, marginalised loner, possibly with links to gymnasiums and macho "bonding" activities.[19] For instance, one current inmate of Guantanamo and former British resident, Bisher Al-Rawi, appears to have come under surveillance in the U.K. partly because of a taste for extreme sports activities and stunts such as, at one point, abseiling up a motorway flyover.[20] Commentators have described a new and dangerous type of working-class and usually minority-ethnic male, the "radical loser"[21] who, perceiving himself as marginalised by vast, global networks of power, turns to symbolic acts of large-scale destruction to make his ideological points.[22] Following the arrest of 24 terrorist suspects in Britain in the summer of 2006 on suspicion of planning to cause explosions on transatlantic flights, particular press attention was paid to two apparently atypical alleged participants, "sons of the stockbroker belt," both converts to Islam from "ordinary" British backgrounds: Don Stewart-Whyte (son of a Conservative party agent) and Brian Young (reported to have "shunned" the Christian values of his British African-Caribbean family.)[23] The "ordinary," disaffected, politically motivated mass killer is hardly a post-9/11 phenomenon: Timothy McVeigh carried out his bombing of the Murray Federal Building in Oklahoma in 1995, the year before the U.S. publication of Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, in protest against what he saw as a widening federal grasp of power and a series of betrayals of the American working man and his ideals, including U.S. conduct in the Gulf, where he had previously fought and been decorated.[24]

Fight Club, in which a middle-class white male is "radicalised" by the moral vacuum of a repetitive life of office work and consumption, certainly depicts domestic terrorism as based in ideological opposition to the status quo, albeit that its protagonist has no religious or political creed to which to adhere. Out of his overwhelming emptiness and disillusionment, Tyler/Jack creates his own anarchic network-politics, inspiring men who feel abandoned on the scrapheap of history to violently remake their world (along the lines, as I explore later, of an ill-defined and melancholic primitivist ideal, harking back to early British imperialist and American notions of a rough-hewn frontier masculinity which could halt the moral and physical decay encouraged by excessive consumption and urban living). The one-to-one fight, initially Jack's thrilling escape from humdrum domesticated life, spirals into mass organised violence against the economic forces of feminisation (such as multinational

corporations and financial markets) and eventually against "history" itself. The informal fight clubs at which men engaged in consensual barefist fighting develop into an anarcho-terrorist network, named Project Mayhem, which aims to destroy civilisation and start again at "year zero." Jack, the unwitting founder, has important features both of the contemporary terrorist "threat profile" and also of the victim-citizen. He is a depressed and isolated every-man; a fatigued mid-level corporate employee, only gradually and ineffectu-ally aware of the existence and violent intentions of his radical doppelganger. The "normal," invisible terrorist who appears in both *Fight Club* and in the new British threat profile also has more than a little in common with Mark Seltzer's description of the serial killer: "Mr. Xerox," a thoroughly evacuated, uncannily detached and utterly inauthentic masculine self, "abnormally nor-mal."[25] Various real-life and fictional masculine monster-figures share features of this vacant, look-alike monster, this murderous replicant. Timothy McVeigh was, according to his biographers, "the boy next door."[26] "Blank" fiction,[27] the genre of hyper-consumption and hollow masculine despair which emerged in the U.S. after the 1980s, contains multiple versions of "Mr. Xerox"; Seltzer takes this name from Denis Cooper's blank fiction novel, *Frisk*,[28] in which it describes the characterless, compulsive contemporary killer who typifies the genre. The fictional mass killer Bobby Hughes, Brett Easton Ellis's terrorist male model in the novel *Glamorama*, is a style-obsessed killer recruited by an international terrorist network precisely because he does *not* "have an agenda."[29] The "threat profile" which can be put together from these cultural sources is of a man who terrorises not with a specific ideological aim, but out of a despair or vacuity from which political anomie is inextricable. The "passion for abolition"[30] of this anonymous, empty male subject can be read as a sort of violent mourning for a deceased "Law of the Father," includ-ing the nation, his failed "Fatherland," which features as strongly in Michel and Herbeck's autobiographical account of McVeigh as it does in *Fight Club*, first published in the U.S. the year after the Oklahoma bombing.

THE TERRORIST AS OUTLAW INSIDER

Before embarking upon a more detailed analysis of *Fight Club*'s doppelganger form of terrorism, I want to look at the construction of a reinforced insider/ outlaw dialectic in the post-9/11 British and American legislative regimes.

The dominant and politically useful association of terrorism with foreignness has produced a legislative anti-terror response which strongly associates immigrant persons with terrorists, and allows for summary and harsh treatment of the suspect immigrant. The British Anti- Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, which followed hard on 9/11,[31] introduced indefinite detention in cases of immigrant persons suspected of terrorism, thus emphasising a besieging foreign threat to the nation and citizenry.[32] In the U.S., too, the "War on Terror" has sparked a powerful new anti-immigration discourse.[33] The Patriot Act codifies new state powers against "aliens,"[34] allowing deportation of non-citizens who consort, even unknowingly, with "terrorist organisations,"[35] and of others deemed by the attorney general to constitute a threat to national security.[36] In Britain, the reification of the "foreign threat" to national borders and the government's deliberately aggressive response to it (in the teeth of the right to liberty set out in Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights)[37] evoked certain comforting fantasies of domestic homogeneity, predicated on the elusive unifying effect of shared national values and reinforcing dominant political and legal associations of dissidence with foreignness. Before this, the Terrorism Act 2000 had already aimed to strengthen national boundaries against terrorism, during a period in which Western nations were coping with multiple and increasingly controversial sites of foreignness and dissidence within their borders. A world of rigid national boundaries was legislatively invoked, even as global "network capitalism" continued to facilitate increasing transnational mobility and exchange.[38] In Britain, the Terrorism Act 2000, Section 1, expanded the definition of terrorism to include almost any destructive action or threat of such, including property damage, extending the reach of anti-terror law to an extremely broad range of acts, particularly any political or other public protest.[39] As Michaels notes, the equation of terrorist with criminal in the globalised "War on Terror" ensures that "enemies are always outlaws, a world divided into those who follow the law and those who break it."[40] It now appears, for example, that with the increasing use of anti-terror powers to suppress peaceful protest (in conjunction with the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, deployed to outlaw "organised crimes" such as Brian Haw's anti-war vigil in Parliament Square), British protestors must now differentiate themselves completely from domestic terrorists, or face possible legal consequences. (This may not be easy, since characterisation as a terrorist threat may result from, for instance, "excessive" activity near any "sensitive" "non-military" site.)[41]

Just as increasing numbers of citizens at home can now be legally earmarked as potential "unlawful combatants resisting the forces of universal order,"[42] anti-terror legislation and the public debates around it inflame popular fears of the alien "Other," strongly imaginatively linked with the demonic asylum seeker, whose encroachment appears to make a besieged, deprived victim of the previously privileged native citizen. Paul Gilroy links this violent new hatred, in the British context, with a loss of "English cultural confidence", and the postmodern, post-national "problem of not being able to locate the Other's difference in the commonsense lexicon of alterity."[43] The anonymousness of the asylum seeker and the "homegrown" terrorist are clearly productive of this anxiety around compromised national borders: the unassimilable "Other" is being presented as colonising and infiltrating the fallen imperial power, growing within it. Safe, unimpeachable national territory, the protective fatherland in which clearly defined citizen bodies might remain unassailed, is harder than ever to define during a period of neo-imperial "deterritorialisation,"[44] when nation-states exist in uneasy tension (and collaboration) with globalising forces.[45] America, which often stands accused of enforcing its own, new form of global economic imperialism, becomes perhaps the archetypical empty national signifier in these circumstances. Cloned symbols of U.S. consumer capitalism can perhaps be read as the new flags of a commercial empire, as when fast food franchises open in Middle Eastern cities soon after their "liberation" by U.S. forces. (After the first Gulf War, in 1994, Kuwait City gained a McDonald's; there have been, it appears, plans to raise the Golden Arches in Baghdad as British and American governments encouraged powerful Western corporations to consider "investment opportunities" in Iraq.)[46] Simultaneously, the Western nation-state, advocate of multinational global expansion, is adopting the mantle of a global, moral (and universally martial) law: in Britain, the 2000 Act, Sections 1 and 59, for instance extends the definition of terrorism to "actions outside the U.K." for the first time. The nation at "war" appoints itself as "mediating agent of peace and global order."[47]

What is to be added to the understanding of these global and national developments by an analysis of the narrative of terrorist as shadow-self in *Fight Club*, and its fantasy of masculine protest against domestication? Lauren Berlant has argued that currently, as the structures and powers of nation-states are continually threatened and undercut by global change, "the dominant idea marketed by patriotic traditionalists is of a core nation whose survival depends

on personal acts and identities performed in the intimate domains of the quotidian."[48] Thus, certain imaginary citizens function as indices of "natural/national rights with respect to which adult citizens derive their legitimation."[49] In her "intimate public sphere," where crises of national and gendered identification are enacted, "[male citizens] 'claim…to be traumatised—by progressive social politics, for example, such as feminism and affirmative action."[50] Such citizens "sense that they now have *identities,* when it used to be only other people who had them."[51] After "exposure to mass-mediated identity politics," the previously "unexceptional citizen" (straight, white, middle class) experiences himself as "suddenly embodied and therefore vulnerable."[52] In *Fight Club*, as in the anti-terror legislation, the unmarked citizenry has become an unstable site, a space colonised by multiple competing commercial, political, and cultural claims to authenticity and moral rectitude, creating a traumatic confusion in which terror may secretly foment. The fictional and legal texts represent particular (negative) reactions to the demand of a globalised, postmodern, and supposedly post-feminist world to "develop more tolerance for . . . differences, ambiguity, and ambivalence."[53]

THE PATERNAL SYMBOLIC VACUUM

Perhaps the central trauma of the previously unexceptional American male in *Fight Club* is the loss of the individual and symbolic father, and with him a history of apparently secure gendered cultural and national identification: what Žižek calls "the demise of symbolic efficiency, or the fall of the father."[54] Jack addresses potential viewers in a promotional clip for the film: "I know you. You're a young guy with clear skin and perfect teeth and the kind of job you're proud to write the alumni association about. You're too young to have fought in any wars, and if your parents weren't divorced, then your father was probably never at home. . . ." Tyler Durden and Project Mayhem, his national paramilitary network, fill the paternal vacuum historically occupied by the state, the "Fatherland."[55] Tyler is an almost parodically patriarchal, dominating and totalitarian figure, increasingly so as the narrative veers toward terrorist apocalypse (in Project Mayhem, there are "no questions…you have to trust Tyler").[56] He is strongly identified with the unattainable, secure, and loving masculine model, identified by Jack with his own lost father: "I am Joe's Broken Heart because Tyler dumped me. Because my father dumped me.

Oh, I could go on and on."[57] The familial father, including Jack's, appears in the narrative only as a missing person, a gap: Jack's father moved from family to family, "setting up franchises." Jack notes that such paternal deprivation is common, a generational characteristic: "what you see at Fight Club is a generation of men raised by women."[58] Anger at the missing, abandoning father accompanies mourning for him throughout the narrative, and accordingly Tyler also represents a supreme anti-authoritarian being, recalling Žižek's "obscene father."[59] This creature is a shadow of the "Father of the Law" within the superego, commanding transgression so that the "Law" is perversely reaffirmed.[60] It could be argued that the Tyler/Jack personality split reflects ambivalent desires to destroy and to serve both the obscene father and the "Father of the Law," reflecting the narrative's inescapable and ambivalent paternal focus. For example, Jack mourns his murdered boss, whom Tyler decided to assassinate:

> The problem is, I sort of liked my boss. If you're male, and you're Christian and living in America, your father is your model for God. And sometimes you find your father in your career.
> Except Tyler didn't like my boss.[61]

Tyler prefers to declare war on all (other) patriarchs, including God himself: "our fathers were our models for God. And if our fathers bailed, what does that tell you about God?" This strategy will at least gain the attention of the paternal Almighty: "getting God's attention for being bad was better than getting no attention at all."[62]

CONFUSIONS OF SYMBOLIC, SUBJECTIVE, AND NATIONAL BORDERS

The new anti-terror regimes established legally and culturally after 9/11 can be read in one sense as reconstructions of the imaginary national fatherland, enacting and simultaneously concealing post-patriarchal confusions and reifications of "traditional" notions of power and security. For instance, it has been part of the cultural subtext of recent British anti-terror policy to attempt to fix (imaginary, and gendered) national parameters against the threat of semiotic incoherence, shoring up "robust" identities assimilable into the "core nation" of patriotic men (and protected women). Thus, also, the American "War on

Terror" media machine has generated propaganda, operating in the imaginary registers of romantic drama, such as the "made-for-TV" special, "Saving Private Lynch."[63] The presentation of a deterritorialised war as a battle for "hearts and minds" colonises the subjectivity of Western citizens as well as those of the potentially "liberated." Thus, divisions between political protest and violence, liberation and destruction are confounded (to give just one British example, the recently enacted Terrorism Act 2006 renders it a potential offence to express support for any political cause outside Britain which might be classed as using violence to achieve political ends,[64] while "docile patriots" may safely endorse terrors inflicted by Western governments in the Middle East). The boundary-line between the internal bad apple and the foreign outsider is thus increasingly blurred in legislative terms, just as the legal boundaries of the nation defending itself against terrorism appear to extend themselves throughout the world. Jack and Tyler's protest in *Fight Club* is specifically against this sort of loss of territorial and subjective boundaries. Such losses, subjectively experienced, lead both to the adoption of a passive victim-identity, and to the radicalising of this identity in the form of the violent alter.

TRAUMA, WOUNDING, AND THE "PASSION FOR THE REAL"[65]

The victim-identity and the subjective impact of trauma are of particular importance to any post-9/11 critique of terrorism law and its narrative "pretexts." The traumatic impact of 9/11 in America, and later, of the July bombings in Britain, have been repeatedly invoked as excusatory of severe curtailments of human rights and draconian public order measures of the kind already discussed. The Western nation is portrayed as a mass of potential victims, requiring robust political management of their alternately vulnerable and suspicious bodies. *Fight Club* intriguingly prefigures this construction, drawing on cultural perceptions of a growing addiction to self-revelation during the 1990s—particularly the revelation of repressed or concealed suffering, such as the "scars" of child abuse and addiction. Significantly, the revelation of vulnerability as foundational of the identity of the subject, and as necessary to "self-knowledge," has increasingly become a means for men as well as women to achieve public presence or collective acceptance.[66] Jack, before Tyler, is a support group junkie, addicted to what Roger Luckhurst has christened "traumaculture."[67]

In psychiatric narratives of trauma, the injured subject is taken over, colonised by the shocking experience which repeats itself in his memory:[68] a paradoxical identity for the supposedly clearly bounded and rational male subject. When Jack seeks medical help early in the film, feeling that he is about to die of insomnia ("the bruised, old-fruit way my face had collapsed, you would've thought I was dead"),[69] he is wearily dismissed by his doctor, who refuses him the drugs he wants. Jack is told to "hang by First Methodist on a Tuesday night and see the guys with testicular cancer. *That's* pain." Jack does not argue overlong with the doctor about the authenticity of his emotional and mental suffering—perhaps because he cannot articulate it except through the bodily symptom of sleeplessness. What, however, are the motivations of his quest to experience an authentic, justified pain? By attending the support group meetings, he seeks, I would argue, not to "experience pain at a safe distance," as Diken and Laustsen suggest,[70] but to immerse himself in it, thereby to become a true member of victim-culture. Hugging and sobbing in the arms of "fellow" cancer sufferers, he participates in the traumaculture of the suffering and fractured contemporary subject. As Luckhurst suggests, a subject's occupation of the space of trauma represents multiple paradoxes: the traumatic subject is defined by an "absence or gap,"[71] a vacant existence of relived moments, in which the only *authentic* instant was/is that of the shock which dislocated the subject in the first place. Jack, for whom life is experienced as a "copy of a copy of a copy," yearns for that authentic suffering experienced by bodies in pain or facing death. He fantasises about experiencing plane crashes and cancer, because "dying people are so alive."[72] His own, nebulous "trauma," originating in "that mass experience of economic insecurity . . . class conflict, and sexual unease," which Berlant[73] ascribes to the citizen-victim in the U.S., takes expressible form in relation to others' pain. Jack's addiction becomes thoroughly problematic when he is forced to recognise its "symptoms" in another support group junkie, Marla, whom he condemns as a "big tourist." Marla and the sexual desire she inspires in Jack are immediately disavowed in favour of his increasingly intense, hero-worship relationship with his other-self, Tyler. Jack himself suggests that it is his simultaneous obsession with and repudiation of Marla which marks the genesis of Fight Club and Project Mayhem, causing the misogynist, rebel doppelganger to emerge: "the gun, the anarchy, the explosion is really about Marla Singer."[74] Tyler, the handsome leader who functions as object of both desire *and* identification in a way that Marla, as woman and fellow-sufferer, cannot, is clear about the place of women in

his world: "we are a generation of men raised by women. I'm wondering if another woman is what we need?" Significantly, it is through Tyler, icon of virility, that Jack begins a casual, "sport-fucking" relationship with Marla, proving unable to follow up the emotional connections which emerge between them on certain rare occasions (usually related to traumatic experiences, as when Marla is convinced that she has developed breast cancer).

Rather than longing to experience and share trauma, Tyler inflicts it on others, urging his followers to "hit bottom." In one particularly shocking scene, when he and Jack are making soap with fat they have just stolen from a liposuction clinic, he takes and kisses Jack's hand and immediately pours lye onto it, causing a chemical burn. "What you are feeling is premature enlightenment. This is the most important moment of your life," he preaches, insisting that Jack "stay with the pain" and acknowledge that

> God does not like you. He never wanted you. In all probability, he hates you. . . .We don't need him. Fuck damnation, man, fuck redemption. We are God's unwanted children? So be it!

The same kiss-shaped scar is seared into the flesh of all Project Mayhem's acolytes. They are branded by Tyler, in a complex parody of commodification, tribal initiation, and sadomasochistic ritual which marks them as part of Tyler's mass human sacrifice: "first, you have to give up. You have to *know*— not fear—that some day you are going to die." Tyler also recites an origin-story of soap which recalls the mass consumption of human bodies by industrial capitalism:

> Ancient peoples found their clothes got clean when they washed them at a certain point in the river. You know why? Because human sacrifices were once made on the hills above the river. Bodies burned, water seeped through the wood and ashes to create lye. This is lye: the crucial ingredient. Once it mixed with the melted fat of the bodies, a thick white soapy discharge crept into the river . . . the first soap was made from the ashes of heroes, like the first monkey shot into space. Without pain, without sacrifice, we would have nothing.

The "space monkeys," as Tyler christens Project Mayhem's obedient foot-soldiers, are his personal worker-drones, voluntary human sacrifices "for the greater good." The story of soap is also a grim prophecy of his plan to

"cleanse" civilisation. "With enough soap," he comments, "we could blow up just about anything."

WOUNDING AS MANHOOD

In the quest for authenticity, the "genuine act,"[75] Tyler/Jack turns to the infliction of bodily pain and scarring. The ritual wounding enacted in the soap-making scene serves both as rite of initiation into a traditional "masculinity" marked by the endurance of physical pain, and also as a gateway to "real" experience. "The most important moment of your life" is one of extreme physical sensation, and a similar feeling is obtained by brawling with another man: "you weren't alive anywhere like you were alive at Fight Club." This narrative provides an enlightening new dimension to concepts of "macho bonding activities," such as those apparently beloved of the new Western terrorist. What does this male-bonding through pain, the sharing of trauma, mean for the political collectivities which begin as a result of it? As Žižek describes, "the aim of postmodern sado-maso practices of bodily mutilation is . . . to guarantee, to give access to the pain of existence," "the minimum of the bodily Real in the universe of symbolic simulacra." Self-inflicted pain serves "to designate the body's resistance against submission to the socio-symbolic Law."[76] Jack/Tyler's Fight Club allows for the mythical re-embodiment of an elemental, lost masculinity which entails the choice to inflict upon softened service-industry bodies the wounds and scars of the rock-hard warrior male: "I don't want to die without any scars," Jack claims. Tyler insists that membership of Fight Club, and the adoption of its "line of flight"[77] from dominant ways of Western life, must be written on the male body in scar tissue. As he burns Jack's hand with lye (a wound which, of course, is inflicted by Jack on himself, as we see happening in flashback later in the film), he momentarily represents the punishing, abusive face of the paternal superego, or "Father of the Law." He is also the instigator of that authentic bodily experience of "real" pain so desperately sought and perversely enjoyed by the traumatised subject of victim-culture. Ownership of the body through pain is a way to stake a claim on this increasingly commodified object of commercial value and critical (self-)surveillance: the hard, athletic body beloved of advertising and marketing can, according to Fight Club, be rewritten as entirely one's own.[78]

THE TERRORIST AS WORKING CLASS HERO

The post-9/11 terrorist has been portrayed as a marginal man struggling to maintain a sense of masculine prowess or potency in circumstances of deprivation and reduced life chances.[79] Tyler purports to represent the mass of dispossessed blue-collar Western males: while his foot-soldiers (dressed as waiters) threaten a middle-aged executive with castration in a restaurant toilet, he insists that "we cook your meals. We haul your trash. We connect your calls. We drive your ambulances. We guard you while you sleep. Do not fuck with us." Jack, however, is thoroughly white-collar, a "recall campaign coordinator" for a car company, who has longed to be delivered from his "Swedish furniture, clear skin and perfect teeth." Fight Club and Project Mayhem as class-struggle are in fact part of Jack's *fantasy* of the "authentic" masculinity of the working man, with Tyler as postmodern Che Guevara, the photogenic poster-boy for violent victimhood. In *Fight Club,* Tyler is himself a service-industry "space monkey," working nights as a cinema projectionist (an opportunity for him to splice family films with subliminal shots of pornography) and as a waiter in an expensive restaurant, where he laces the soup with urine. However, he is also an entrepreneur: his "luxury" soap, made from human fat and sold at an enormous profit, represents the primary source of funding for Project Mayhem—along with the "corporate sponsorship" obtained by Jack's blackmailing of his boss. Tyler's other jobs (done while Jack is "asleep") are opportunities for guerilla terrorism, rather than employment necessary for his day to day existence: *he* is the "big tourist," merely posing as a member of the working class.

Thus, the body of the "working man" (Tyler's body, Brad Pitt's chiselled torso) is a fetishised object of desire for Jack, emblematic member of the demasculinised, unmuscular middle classes. This fetishisation can be seen at work in other areas of popular culture, such as mass-market music, in which the body of the male idol encourages and reflects particular cultural views of classed and gendered bodies: in the case of the male icon, there is often a difficult play of poses of sexual virility with romantic availability and visual objectification (the highly marketable look of the "tough" guy in the boy band). It is, for instance, interesting to compare the positioning of white rap star Eminem, a vocal homophobe, as object of desire for both women and men, with the visual positioning of the much-desired actor, Brad Pitt, as Tyler in Fincher's film. Pitt is conspicuously shot as an icon of bodily perfection in

Fincher's film, with the camera frequently lingering on his heroic muscula-ture. He wears conspicuously fashionable designer gear and his hair is always perfectly coiffed (except when impressively mussed and bloody from the fight). As he boasts to Jack, he is an idealised emblem of masculine (homo-erotic) desire and identification: "I look like you want to look; I fuck like you want to fuck."

Both Eminem and Tyler foreground a strutting, phallic manhood while maintaining a sulky prettiness which speaks the wish to be seen and desired (as well as fulfilling, no doubt, the wishes of record and film company marketing executives to market a lucrative personal product, or better, a brand).[80] How-ever, both these ambiguously sexual icons actively repudiate the possibility of desire *for* other men: Eminem with his trenchant lyrics and public pronounce-ments of absolute heterosexuality, and Tyler/Jack in one particular extraor-dinary outburst of violence against another male object of desire, discussed further below. Intriguingly, Eminem, who is pervasively marketed in Tyler Durden style as a fashionable anarchist, can be seen in the video for his 2002 single "Without Me" performing the terrorist as cult anti-hero and symbol of American working-class anomie, wearing a Bin Laden beard and turban embellished with the stars and stripes, and dancing merrily with the American forces who have come to capture him.[81] In Zizek's formulation, such rebellious performance might be read as a sort of homage to the "obscene father," achieved through identification with the most famous terrorist hate-figure of the Fatherland. The same video shows Eminem playing the all-American cos-tumed superhero, rescuing a young boy from a CD labelled "explicit lyrics." The play with extremes of paternal authority and rebellion, here as in *Fight Club,* suggests that it is a certain passionate attachment to the patriarchal nation which actually provokes the longing to attack it, to perform the role of its "public enemy number one."

FAILURES OF MEANING

The male citizen/terrorist alter-ego split in *Fight Club* is thus one reflection of a general instability of structures of normative Western identification and the foreclosure of alternative (perhaps even queer) means of self-identifica-tion. *Fight Club*'s themes of male dissociation and loss of placement in West-ern symbolic structures are echoed in other contemporary "blank" fictions.

This recently identified genre[82] offers narratives of decadence, violence and emotional dissociation steeped in mass-cultural references; and as such *Fight Club* can clearly claim a place in it. One popular work of blank fiction, Douglas Copeland's *Generation X*, tells of highly educated young men and women trapped in endless and ultimately meaningless administrative tasks, and assailed by "sick building syndrome" emanating from their office walls. These worker drones enact the orders of corporations which exploit and underpay them, and dream of escape to a simpler life.[83] *Generation X* provided the anomic young Western office worker with a link to victim culture[84] and outlined a peculiarly empty generational identity for Western youth of the years after the 1980s, one based on losses of meaning and cultural positionality and characterised by nihilism, lethargy or hedonism, reactions to the subject's subjugation to dispersed, impersonal networks of power.[85] *Fight Club*'s Jack clearly owes a good deal of his characterisation to Copeland's work, while his alter-ego pays tribute to other, more violent blank fictions. The most celebrated of these remains Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, in which the hyper-commodification and personal vacuity of rich young professional Americans mirrors the empty flows of market capital which shape their "lifestyles."[86] The "psycho" of the title, Patrick Bateman, is an investment banker obsessed with branded consumer products and cannibalism, who earns an inflated salary doing something indefinable in financial futures. Fight Club's project seems initially geared toward flight from the enclosing, dehumanising logics of market capital; the "homework" projects Tyler sets for his men begin as (relatively) minor acts of subversion, such as starting fights with strangers in the street and molesting performance artists. However, as Project Mayhem develops, "homework" transmutes into an organised attack on credit card companies. These are the sources of the empty money which fuels the desperate, murderous overconsumption of evacuated subjects like Bateman. Since it provides currency divorced from the material overproduction which powers it, the credit industry represents some of the darkest aspects of advanced Western capitalism, its accelerating and unsustainable conversion of material resources to consumable artefacts, and finally to waste and pollution.[87] Fight Club, with characteristic perversity, embraces waste: "you are the all-singing all-dancing crap of the world," Tyler chants at his space monkeys. For Tyler, accepting relegation to the "compost heap" of existence means freedom from the endless, deforming commands of the consumer economy.[88]

MASCULINE PROTEST AS TERROR

Why, then, is not enough for Fight Club's human waste to rot quietly on the global compost heap, opting out of mainstream social and economic participation? Why the narrative's drastic shift "from inward pain to outward terror?"[89] The banishing of Tyler's murderous activities to the subconscious of his bewildered alter mimics wider cultural denials, those of the violences embedded in strained contemporary national and gendered identification. It also demonstrates that opting-out is an illusion, since the network-subject is embedded, consciously or otherwise, in the systems he opposes and hates. *Fight Club* poses significant questions about the attraction or even compulsion of violent victimhood and microfascism for young men in the contemporary West. A few commentators have argued for a gendered perspective on the acting-out of political violence, though most analyses of the gendering and sexuality of the terrorist have focused narrowly on his propensity for homosexuality (see the analysis in Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai), or for frustrated sexual violence:[90] Kimmel argues that a psychoanalytic analysis of known domestic and international terrorists reveals a common and predominantly male fantasy of purification and empowerment through destruction, linking rightwing white nationalists, like Timothy McVeigh, to foreign, immigrant and ethnic-minority "Others." British anti-terrorism and anti-immigration policies of course implicate the same "outsider," the poor Islamic male of Pakistani, Somali or Moroccan origin. Ziauddin Sardar has commented on the appeal of Islam to marginal males in the U.K from, for example, poorer Afro-Caribbean backgrounds; Islam, he remarks, is "a natural religion for underdogs," a masculinity-affirming refuge for isolated, disadvantaged men who view themselves as "under siege" from emasculating national and international forces.[91] Thus, then, the working class, young, British male from a deprived and probably non-white background takes refuge in his "macho bonding activities" alongside his comrades. Sexual fear, a fear of feminisation and its projection onto others who must be portrayed as already-feminised (the "monster-terrorist-fag") is a powerful undercurrent of the "War on Terror." Puar and Rai, in their analysis of the sexual coding of Western imagery of the Islamic terrorist, describe a poster which appeared on the streets of New York shortly after 9/11, showing a caricatured Osama Bin Laden bending over with an American missile aimed directly at his anus. The "monster-terrorist-fag" is here constructed as deserving and even desiring his imminent

sexual humiliation by the defenders of "freedom." The threat to make a faggot out of the foreign terrorist enemy has since been chillingly fulfilled at Abu Ghraib, where the punishment and sexual humiliation of the body of the enemy has been translated into pornographic spectacle.[92]

FAILED ESCAPES FROM COMMODIFICATION

For the Western male, then, fears of physical, sexual feminisation may be combated with fantasies or enactments of aggressive phallic domination over the "faggot" enemy. *Fight Club* uneasily tracks the projection of disturbing manifestations of sexuality, particularly the troubling experience of desire for other men, beyond the boundaries of the heteronormative male self in the violently homosocial environment of Fight Club and Project Mayhem. In one especially brutal fight scene, Jack pulverises the handsome face of a blond boy whom Tyler has been favouring, saying afterwards that he "felt like destroying something beautiful." His own affection and desire for the boy, the intimation of a relationship between men which might go beyond violence, has to be brutally destroyed lest Tyler/Jack experience the shattering of his own tightly heteronormative subjective boundaries;[93] Jack's passionate admiration for, and jealousy of, Tyler, his avatar of desirable, powerful masculinity, constantly threatens to reveal the phantasmatic nature of Jack's heterosexual masculine identification. There is a great deal of discomfort in the film version of *Fight Club* regarding the gaze at male bodies as objects of desire, a gaze which the film itself, particularly its presentation of the body of Brad Pitt, invites: in one scene, Tyler points at a poster of a taut male torso advertising designer underwear and asks Jack sarcastically, "is that what a man looks like?" In the next scene, at Fight Club, the film focuses at length on Pitt's own designer torso, albeit that it is blood-spattered by the fight (though it is perhaps all the more desirable for that: see, for example, Steve Neale's analysis of wounded masculinity as cinematic spectacle). Jack's anxious response to an advertisement featuring an airbrushed male body part reflects his perception of fragmentation and disembodiment, a self-evacuation which incorporates his denial of desire for other men. Anonymous, empty, consumption-obsessed Mr. Xerox can only speak as "Jack's inflamed, enraged sense of rejection" when he perceives Tyler favouring another. The threatened shattering of the masculine self effected by the pressures of commodification and feminisation

seems to require the violent expulsion of that otherness which is found, like the "homegrown" terrorist (or the asylum seeker), to be battening treacherously within the supposedly impenetrable, masculine national self. As such, Jack's violent expulsion of the desired and dangerous otherness within himself resonates with the legal tactics of the historical/mythological Fatherland for whose clean and well-defended boundaries he longs.

(NEO-)IMPERIALIST MASCULINE FANTASIES

Bersani's delineation of homosexuality, and of the shattering of heternormative masculinity which it represents, as a signifier of self-destruction seems particularly applicable to the explosive Jack/Tyler, who projects his subjective breakdown and sexual/political rage onto the world. Tyler enacts his apocalyptic fantasies of "going back to zero," and "blast[ing] the world free of history."[94] The ultimate moment of self-sufficient isolation for which Tyler longs to sit "for one perfect minute . . . in the palm of a perfection he'd created himself "[95] is continually associated with death and sacrifice, through which the world will be remade in the image of an all-powerful self without vulnerabilities, relationships or needs. Tyler also briefly sketches a future, beyond the zero moment, which connects the sacrificial ethic he embraces with historical concepts of an ideal national and imperial masculinity. He fantasises about a return to a premodern world, where men might rediscover a lost natural integrity:

> In the world I see, you're stalking elk through the damp canyon forests around the ruins of Rockefeller Center. You wear leather clothes that will last you the rest of your life. You climb the wrist-thick kudzu vines that wrap the Sears Tower, and when you look down, you'll see tiny figures laying strips of venison on the empty carpool lanes of some abandoned superhighway.

This primitive idyll, translated to a post-apocalyptic setting, fuses certain Victorian and pre-Victorian[96] ideals of national and imperial masculinity with contemporary dreams of escape from the excesses of consumer capitalism, the "corroding ease and morbid excitements of Western civilisation."[97] The "man of character" envisioned by British imperialists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the ideal representative and emissary of the nation, was imagined in the imperial period to be forged in a healthy, natural environment,

far from the enervating distractions of urban consumerism.[98] Ideal formulations of British imperial masculinity and citizenship have also strongly influenced emergent concepts of a dynamic U.S. national character, epitomised by the frontier-spirit of the founding fathers. Tyler's ethic of anti-materialism and sacrifice, intended to conquer mass cultural degeneration, enacts mourning for lost days of empire and conquest, and attempts to revive a new spirit of valour:

> Generations have been working in jobs they hate, just so they can buy what they don't really need.
> We don't have a great war in our generation, or a great depression, but we do, we have a great war of the spirit. We have a great revolution against the culture. The great depression is our lives. We have a spiritual depression.
> We have to show these men and women freedom by enslaving them, and show them courage by frightening them.[99]

Tyler's speeches from the helm of Project Mayhem, with its quasi-imperial plans for world domination, betray what Paul Gilroy has called "postcolonial melancholia," a dangerous nostalgia for more expansive times, long gone, in which a man might identify himself fully with a dynamic, robust nation/empire.[100] Faced with the late twentieth-century's vast, decentred "empire of capital,"[101] a "new global form of sovereignty"[102] which transcends the nation, Tyler builds his own quasi-imperial network of hearts and minds. The Club and Project are, like the project of empire, "a discipline, an inspiration and a faith"[103] for men who have lost all three. To be owned and colonised by the all-powerful nation is no longer possible for the post-war generation: to be "the first monkey shot into space," trusting only in Tyler while knowing not what he does, is the satisfyingly nihilistic alternative which Tyler offers. Longing for the idealism and possibilities of a decisively lost history, Tyler decides to destroy all traces of it:

> I wanted to burn the Louvre. I'd do the Elgin marbles with a sledgehammer and wipe my ass with the Mona Lisa. This is my world, now.
> This is my world, my world, and those ancient people are dead.[104]

Tyler's primitivism, enforced with terrorist tactics, also recalls the Unabomb Manifesto, Unabomber Ted Kaczynski's wordy demand for the destruction of the techno-industrial complex: "a series of clichés, dead

words."[105] In Tyler's symbolic struggle to give back gendered and collective identity to the denationalised and feminised male, only dated, dead signifiers of masculinity seem to be available: and thus one critic[106] mocks Tyler's clichéd speech for its tired fantasies of imperial, warrior masculinity. Nonetheless, the very tiredness, the clichés, signify something important: *Fight Club* renationalises the male by recycling the "dead signs and tired plots" of the "core nation,"[107] and thus, Tyler is a sort of deterritorialised patriot, in angry mourning for his dead fatherland and its masteries. The transnational power-networks which he and his "space monkeys" aim to fight are vast and delocalised, embodying Haraway's "informatics of domination,"[108] or as Jack wearily puts it, "the IBM Stellar Sphere, The Philip Morris Galaxy, Planet Starbucks." Tyler becomes a service-industry guerrilla terrorist, the better to subvert the many-centred "system" of advanced capitalism at various nodal points: restaurants, where the rich become vulnerable to his pollution of their food, and cinemas, where he can play with splicing images of "towering" erections into family films. "Slippery red and terrible"[109] though the phallic snapshot is, its subliminal impact is not enough to destabilise the feminising forces of advanced-capitalist civilisation, and Tyler must strike further afield. His attempt to break the circuits of hyperconsumption and waste represented by the credit card company towers will inflict economic chaos (which the film audience does not see), and presumably, widespread death, a further sacrifice of innocents "for the greater good." Violence in *Fight Club* is the symbolically vacuous response of an evacuated, traumatic subject to the disorienting rules of the (post-)national game.

Timothy McVeigh, a Gulf War veteran who turned on his government for betraying the arms-bearing men of America and the vision of the "Founding Fathers," saw himself as mirroring his country's terroristic foreign policy. McVeigh aimed to expose the perversity of government by reproducing it in random acts of "war," whose final aim was spectacular destruction: his famous and reviled claim that the children killed in his attack were "collateral damage"[110] borrowed a chill phrase coined by the Pentagon to indicate civilian deaths and injuries during the massive bombing campaign against Iraq in 1991. During this time, McVeigh was fighting in Iraq as a gunner, killing for his country: a personification of the evanescent dividing-line between lawful and unlawful combatant. The extent of this failed Special Forces entrant's identification with his deeply disappointing fatherland is clear from his quotation at his trial of a U.S. Supreme Court

Justice, Louis D. Brandeis: "our government is the potent, the omnipresent teacher. For good or ill, it teaches the whole people by its example."[111] The aim of the domestic terrorist in *Fight Club* goes beyond the transmission of political messages through terror, aiming to destroy systems of public communication altogether. Project Mayhem, says Tyler, will bring on "a cultural ice age. A prematurely induced dark age."[112] In this imaginary era, the terrorist, or "unlawful combatant," would finally become completely indistinguishable from the citizen: Tyler's "year zero" would institute a new biopolitical regime, in which collective life would make a "fresh start." This fantasy of renewal remains, however, predicated on conflicted desires for an originary masculinity, paternity, fatherland, and empire, which Tyler/Jack fails to disentangle from his romantic longing for social regeneration. Such desires also reflect the remaking of the New World Order written into anti-terror laws which aim to fix national borders within the hearts and minds of citizens, equating the nation with global morality and terrorism, or "unlawfulness" with disobedience to its unquestionable absolutes. The persistent political and legal association of a violently expulsive, rigidly masculine character and sexuality with a nation now permanently at "war," to which *Fight Club* also attests, ensures the continuing dominance of the destructive dialectic of victim-citizen versus outsider-terrorist.

Fight Club makes it clear that the anti-patriotic domestic terrorist cannot "blast free" of a traumatically gendered national history or of global economics. According to this narrative, there is no line of flight for the marginal man from that intimate experience of the self as "Othered" and objectified which characterises feminisation, or for the anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist "rebel" from the impress of dominant values. Tyler/Jack's emptiness, loneliness, and anomie can thus be read as symptomatic of national and cultural melancholia: "Mr. Xerox" reproduces the symptoms of hyperconsumption and the imperial longings of the traumatised nation. As Diken and Laustsen note, *Fight Club* itself, a "cult" narrative taken up and filmed by the multinational film giant Twentieth Century Fox, is an example of the ingenious mining of "subcultural" forms by mainstream corporate culture; and similarly, Jack/Tyler's fight clubs and soap-making become "big business."[113] This association of business enterprise with "culturally literate"[114] terrorism provides some of *Fight Club*'s most disturbing resonances, drawing attention to close relationships between military territorial domination and global capitalism. Tyler/Jack enacts the impossibility of "pure" ideological protest in transnational

conditions, implicating both the rigidities of heteronormative masculine gen-
der identification and the pervasiveness of market "values" in the reproduc-
tion of the domestic destroyer who ultimately stands for nothing. *Fight Club*
shows how the evacuation and gendering of the citizen effected by the capital-
ist nation at "war" can give rise to unexpected doppelgangers: unlawful com-
batants, intimate aliens within the hearts and minds of the Xeroxed citizens
imagined and produced by the law.

1. See Denis Cooper, *Frisk* (New York: Grove, 1991), cited in Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998), at 10.

2. See Douglas Kellner, *From 9/11 to Terror War: The Dangers of the Bush Legacy* (Lanham, MD: Row-man and Littlefield, 2003); David Frum and Richard Perle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror* (New York: Random House 2004); Slavoj Žižek, "Are We in a War? Do We Have an Enemy?," 24.10 *London Review of Books* 3–6 (May 23, 2002), available at http://www.lrb.co.uk/v24/n10/zize01.html, last visited July 12, 2006.

3. See Jasbir K. Puar and Amit S. Rai, "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots," 20.3 *Social Text* 72, 117–148 (2002).

4. See Chuck B. Palahniuk, *Fight Club* (London: Vintage, 1997); David Fincher, dir., *Fight Club* (20th Century Fox, 1999).

5. According to Per Petersen, "9/11 and the 'Problem of Imagination': *Fight Club* and *Glamorama* as Terrorist Pretexts," 60 *Orbis Litterarum* 133–144 (2005), at 138, Fincher's film version of *Fight Club* is "a case study of home-grown post-modern . . . terrorism," an "apocalyptic pretext . . . crying out for translation into a proper terrorist text." Petersen wrote this after 9/11, but before the 7/7 London bombings by "homegrown" terrorists; his analysis of the film as "pretext" for the new, culturally lit-erate terrorism, targeted at the image-world of the West as well as its people and assets, focuses partic-ularly on the film's final scene, in which a series of skyscrapers occupied by credit card companies are blown up and crumble slowly to the ground in what Petersen suggests is a kind of pre-vision of 9/11.

6. This paper refers both to Chuck Palahniuk's book (1997) and David Fincher's film of the same name (1999). Where there is no page reference given for quotations, I am quoting directly from the film (screenplay by Jim Uhls).

7. See Palahniuk, at 168.

8. *Id.*, at 81.

9. See Kirsten Stirling, "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Jackass: *Fight Club* as a Refraction of Hogg's Justified Sinner," *Postmodern Studies* 35.1, 83–94 (2004).

10. See Jethro Rothe-Kushel, "Fight Club: A Ritual Cure for the Spiritual Ailment of American Mascu-linity," *Film Journal*, Issue 8, February 2004. Available at http://www.thefilmjournal.com/issue8/fightclub.html, last visited April 1, 2006.

11. See Bulent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen (2002), "Enjoy Your Fight! *Fight Club* as a Symptom of the Network Society," *Cultural Values* 6.4, 349–367.

12. On the facelessness of the terrorist Enemy, see further Žižek, "Are We in a War? Do We Have an Enemy?". Although the "War on Terror" may certainly be read as aiming to "destroy" Islamic terror-ism, specifically the shadowy global network of al-Qaida, the elusive nature of this enemy and the exceptionally wide reach of the legislation enacted in Britain and America under the war's aegis sug-gest a broader line of national attack—the war representing a change in the whole constitution of the

conceptual nation, the reification of the boundaries of an increasingly authoritarian yet globally extended (and challenged) state.

13. See Walter Benn Michaels, "Empires of the Senseless: (The Response to) Terror and (the End of) History," *Radical History Review* 85, 105–113 (2003), at 106.

14. I am excluding from this analysis the U.K.'s long and violent history of Northern Irish domestic terrorism and its attempted suppression, because of the very specific (and specifically territorial) nature of this dispute.

15. See Michaels, at 107.

16. See Žižek, "Are We in a War? Do We Have an Enemy?", at 4.

17. Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT Act of 2001), Pub. L. No. 107-56, 115 Stat. 272 (2001) [hereinafter Patriot Act].

18. Patriot Act §802, 115 Stat at 376, amending 18 U.S.C. 2331.

19. See Alice Miles, "Where Have We Got To in the Fight Against Terrorism? We're Lost in a Fog," *Times Online*, December 28, 2005. Available at http://www.timesonline.co.uk, last visited May 3, 2006.

20. See Robert Verkaik, "I Am Writing to You from the Seaside Resort at Guantanamo," *The Sunday Review*, *The Independent*, Sunday, April 30, 2006, 18–25.

21. See Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "The Radical Loser." Available at Sign and Sight Online: http://print.signandsight.com/features/493.html, last visited May 3, 2006, trans. Nicholas Grindell (Originally published in German in *Der Spiegel*, November 7, 2005).

22. See Michael Kimmel, "Gender, Class and Terrorism," *The Chronicle Review*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 8, 2002. Available at http://chronicle.com/free/v48/i22/22b01101.htm, last visited 30 June 2005.

23. See Steve Bird, Lucy Bannerman, and Nicola Woolcock, "Sons of the Stockbroker Belt who Converted to Islam," *The Times*, August 12, 2006. Available at http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article606831.ece, last visited 25 September 25, 2006.

24. For a biographical account of Timothy McVeigh, see Lou Michel and Dan Herbeck, *American Terrorist: Timothy McVeigh and the Oklahoma City Bombing* (New York: Regan Books, 2001).

25. See Seltzer, at 9 and 10.

26. See Michel and Herbeck, at 7.

27. See James Annesley, *Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture and the American Novel* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).

28. See Cooper, at 53.

29. See Brett Easton Ellis, *Glamorama* (London: Picador, 1999), at 327; and Michaels, at 108.

30. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia II* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), at 229, as quoted in Diken and Laustsen, at 356.

31. For details of the speedy and controversial passage of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill through Parliament, see Conor Geary, "11 September 2001, Counter-Terrorism, and the Human Rights Act," 32.1 *Journal of Law and Society* 18–33 (2005), at 22. See also Liberty's paper on anti-terror legislation, *Anti-Terrorism Legislation in the United Kingdom* (London: Liberty, 2002), for a summary of human rights issues raised by the post-9/11 rush of anti-terror laws in Britain.

32. Part 4 of the Act allows for the indefinite detention, without any need to press criminal charges, of a person certified by the Secretary of State to be "a terrorist" or "risk to national security" (section 21(1)). In sections 21(2)–(5), the word "terrorist" is defined very broadly, encompassing "far more than is popularly understood to be within the meaning of the term." (Geary, at 24) Only persons subject to immigration control are also subject to this section; such persons are theoretically free to leave Britain, but incarceration follows if they are unable to leave either because no country will accept them or they fear for their safety under the regimes of those that will. *Id*.

33. See, for example, David Cole, *Enemy Aliens: Double Standards and Constitutional Freedoms in the War on Terror* (New York: New Press, 2003), and the calls for tighter controls on U.S. immigration in order to prevent terrorism as presented in Frum and Perle.

34. Patriot Act §411, 115 Stat at 345–348, amending 8 U.S.C. 1182 (a) (3).

35. Patriot Act §411 (c) (2), 115 Stat at 348.

36. Patriot Act §412 (a) (3), 115 Stat at 351, amending 8 U.S.C. 1101 et. seq.

37. As Geary explains, at 25, the British government derogated from the Convention under Article 15, which authorises such action where the executive judges this "strictly required" on account of a public emergency "threatening the life of the nation."

38. Diken and Laustsen, at 363.

39. There have at the time of writing already been several instances of section 44 of this Act, which provides broad police powers to stop and search within areas designated as sites of potential terrorist activity, being used to detain peaceful protestors. See, for example, Nigel Morris and Jonathan Brown, "Helen and Sylvia, the New Face of Terrorism," *The Independent*, April 6, 2006, A1–A2.

40. See Michaels, at 107.

41. See Morris and Brown, at A2.

42. See Žižek, "Are We in a War? Do We Have an Enemy?," at 3.

43. See Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), at 137.

44. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

45. According to E.M. Wood in *Empire of Capital* (London: Verso, 2003), far from disappearing beneath the onslaught of globalisation, nation-states actually play vital roles in the political management of global capitalism, ensuring its local dominance through nationally-mediated narratives of competitiveness and progress.

46. See Ewan McAskill, "Firms Get Ready for Business in Iraq," *The Guardian*, October 14, 2003. Available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,3604,1062315,00.html, last visited July 13, 2006.

47. See Žižek, "Are We in a War? Do We Have an Enemy?", at 4.

48. See Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), at 4.

49. *Id.*, at 104.

50. *Id.*, at 2.

51. *Id.*

52. *Id.*, at 88.

53. See Jane Flax, "Multiples: On the Contemporary Politics of Subjectivity," *Human Studies* 16.1–2 (1993), 33–49, at 107.

54. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (London: Verso, 1999), at 322.

55. Seltzer, in his study of American serial killing, describes the Unabomber as an evacuated subject of information and commodity culture, struggling to destroy "the social machine" (at 135) which was "soul-murder[ing]" him (at 18).

56. See Palahniuk, at 125.

57. *Id.*, at 134.

58. *Id.*, at 50.

59. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute* (London: Verso, 2000), at 132.

60. See Diken and Laustsen, at 351.

61. See Palahniuk, at 186.

62. *Id.*, at 141.

63. See William Merrin, "Total Screen: 9/11 and the Gulf War Reloaded," *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* 2.2 (2005). Available at http://www.ubishops.ca/baudrillard studies/vol2_2/merrinpf.htm, last visited October 24, 2005, at 15.

64. Section 1(1) of the Terrorism Act 2006 criminalises statements "likely to be understood by some or all of the members of the public to whom it is published as a direct or indirect encouragement or other inducement ...to the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism." The definition of terrorism is international (section 17) and subject to the same very broad definition set out in Terrorism Act 2000, section 1. See further Liberty.

65. See Alain Badiou, *Le Si_cle* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 54–61, cited by Petersen, at 140.

66. It could, however, be argued that the "confessional" and "consciousness-raising" cultures of 1970s feminism were the primary starting point for a later, more general adoption of personal confession and verbal or written "sharing" as acceptable methods of public communication, or of forming communities. See also Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1989); Ruth Quiney, "Confessions of the New Capitalist Mother: Twenty First Century Writing on Motherhood as Trauma," *Women: A Cultural Review* 18.1, 19–40.

67. See Roger Luckhurst, "Traumaculture," *New Formations* 50, 28–47 (Summer 2003).

68. *Id*., at 28–29.

69. See Palahniuk, at 19.

70. See Diken and Laustsen, at 357.

71. See Luckhurst, at 28.

72. *Id*., at 37, argues that in the 1990s, illness narratives became an increasingly common public mediation of the "private" self.

73. See Berlant, at 1.

74. See Palahniuk, at 14.

75. See Diken and Laustsen, at 357.

76. See Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, at 372, as quoted in Diken and Laustsen, at 358.

77. See Gilles Deleuze and C. Parnet, *Dialogues* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), at 140, as quoted in Diken and Laustsen, at 349.

78. Here, *Fight Club*'s discourse of the hard body as mark of rebellion, and the paradoxical communication of this body by nomadic, cool-hunting capitalism, connects with issues raised by the increasingly popular pastime of "extreme sports." Marketing for products associated with extreme sports such as snowboarding combines notions of masculine protest against "the norm" with a great deal of display of the hard male body and fantasies of boyish rebellion. For a cinematic version of this kind of advertising, see, for example, the film *XxX*, directed by Rob Cohen and starring Vin Diesel, in which a freewheeling extreme sports "rebel" is recruited by government intelligence to work for his country. On the paradoxes of masculinity embodied and regulated through sport, see Michael Thomson, *Medicine Man: Regulating the Male Sexed Body* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming 2007).

79. See Michael Elliott, "The Shoe Bomber's World," *Time*, February 16, 2002. Available at http://www.time.com/time/world, last visited May 3, 2006; see also Enzensberger.

80. See Tom Peters, "The Brand Called You," *Fast Company* 10, 83 (August/September, 1997). Available at http://www.fastcompany.com/online/10/brandyou.html, last visited June 29, 2006.

81. See Merrin, at 13.

82. See Annesley.

83. See Douglas Copeland, *Generation X* (London: Abacus, 1996). Copeland's work lacks the routine violence and explicit sex which Annesley lists as characteristic of blank fiction, but his work encapsulates the genre's pervasive anomie and its association of indolence, disillusionment and consumer alienation with late-capitalist youth.

84. Ruth Holliday and Graham Thompson cite first-world corporate office workers as a new subjugated population, representative of the anonymous mass of the post-modern disempowered (see Ruth Holliday and Graham Thompson, "A Body of Work," in Ruth Holliday and John Hassard, eds., *Contested Bodies.* (London: Routledge, 2001), 117–134).

85. Timothy McVeigh also identified with "Generation X," if only with one of the brand slogans used to define it as a market segment: "Look up the dictionary definition of the Gen-X slogan "No Fear," McVeigh quipped, and you'd find his picture beside it." Michel and Herbeck, at 358.

86. Brett Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (London: Picador, 1991).

87. See Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 40–41.

88. See Diken and Laustsen, at 362.

89. *Id.*, at 357.

90. See Ian Buruma, "Extremism: the Loser's Revenge," *The Guardian*, February 25, 2006. Available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1717676,00.html, last visited June 29, 2006.

91. Sardar quoted in Elliott, no page reference.

92. See further Joseph Pugliese, this volume.

93. See Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" in Douglas Crimp, ed., *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*, (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1988), 198–222.

94. Palahniuk, at 124.

95. *Id.*, at 33.

96. Imperialist thinkers such as John Ruskin (who attacked Victorian capitalism in *Unto This Last: Four Essays on the First Principles of Political Economy* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1862), available at http://forget-me.net/Ruskin/untothislast.pdf, last visited July 24, 2006, noting at 42 that "the material value is apt to undermine the manly character"), and the historian J.A. Froude (in *Oceana: Or England and Her Colonies* [London: Longmans, Green, 1886]), imagined a nation of "sound human beings, healthy in body and strong in limb," (Froude at 133), formed through a "vibrant, pre-capitalist, agricultural economy and society," Peter J Cain, "Empire and the Languages of Character and Virtue in Later Victorian and Early Modern Britain," *Modern Intellectual History* (forthcoming, 2007).

97. See George Nathaniel, Marquis of Curzon, *Frontiers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907) at 56, quoted in Cain (forthcoming).

98. See Cain (forthcoming).

99. See Palahniuk, at 149.

100. Cain notes that the masculine "character" associated with empire, in the Victorian elite context of the British "ultra-imperialists" who commonly deployed the term, "was a multifaceted concept," including "energy, industry (in its broad meaning), thrift, prudence, perseverance, honesty—all qualities associated with economic advance and wealth creation and with the good habits and self-discipline associated with capitalist business practice." *Id.*

101. See Wood.

102. See Hardt and Negri, at xii.

103. See George Nathaniel, Marquis of Curzon, "The True Imperialism" (1908), in Peter. J. Cain and Mark Harrison, eds., *Imperialism: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies*, vol. 1, (London: 2001), 142–156, at 155.

104. See Palahniuk, at 124.

105. See Seltzer, at 18.

106. See Giroux.

107. See Berlant, at 2 and 4.

108. See Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), at 161.

109. See Palahniuk, at 30.

110. Michel and Herbeck, at 331.

111. *Id.*, at 351.

112. See Palahniuk, at 125.

113. See Diken and Laustsen, at 350.

114. See Petersen, at 133.