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Unreliability in Fight Club

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1. ABSTRACT

The main aim of this dissertation is to analyse one of the most criticised films of the movie director David Fincher that count with the outstanding performances of Eduard Norton and Brad Pitt as main characters. *Fight Club* (1999) is a complex movie that deals with a wide range of different topics that affects our postmodern society. Far from being an educative movie, it satirises all different aspects of modern life, including the process of creating a movie. Nevertheless, I focus my attention on the main narration of the movie in terms of characters, dialogue, narratological devices and editing process. Moreover, I also pay special attention to the unreliability of the main narrators and the clues and misreported events that appear all along the movie that unfolds the final plot twist.

RESUMEN

El objetivo principal de esta disertación es analizar una de las películas más criticadas del director David Fincher, que cuenta con la espectacular participación de Eduard Norton y Brad Pitt como personajes principales. *El Club de la lucha* (1999) es una película compleja que trata un amplio abanico de temas que afectan a nuestra sociedad postmoderna. Lejos de ser una película educativa, es una sátira sobre todos los diferentes aspectos de la vida moderna, incluyendo incluso el proceso de creación de una película. Pese a ello, centro mi atención en la narración misma en cuanto a personajes, diálogo, elementos de la narración y el proceso de edición. Además, también presto especial atentación a la poca fiabilidad de los narradores principales, a la falta de información por parte de la cámara y a las pistas que aparecen a lo largo de la película que ayudan a desvelar el giro inesperado final.

INTRODUCTION

2.1 Introduction and justification

> *The first rule about the Fight Club is: you do not talk about Fight Club*
> *The second rule about Fight Club is: you DO NOT TALK ABOUT FIGHT CLUB!*
> (*Fight Club* 1999)

I am going to break the first rule and talk about Fight Club. Since the very first moment I started thinking about my final dissertation, cinema came to my mind since I have always considered myself a cinephile. However, choosing a film was not as easy as it seems and I finally decided to pick up not only a film that I liked but also one that was worth analysing.

Fight Club was released in 1999 and directed by the Golden Globe winner David Fincher. He is considered to be one of the best directors of our time and he has directed really well-known films such as *Seven* (1995)*, The Game* (1997), *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008) *or The Social Network* (2010). Thus I do not only consider myself a *Fight Club* fan but also a David Fincher lover. The American director creates a neo-noir cinema that focuses the attention on insane characters that are developed within a disrupted narrative.

In reference to the movie itself, while watching the film, the spectator can enjoy several minutes of gore and violence; however, this is not the central part of *Fight Club*. In fact, the movie goes further on and does not only criticise our current society but also disregards it in a highly satirical and humorous way. Therefore, the purpose of the film is not to please the spectator, on the contrary, its main purpose is to disgust and displease the watcher by portraying several exacerbated life events of its protagonist.

Due to this fact, the reviews of the film are divided in two different groups, the people who enjoy the film and people who are disgusted by it. As Xan Broonks claimed in an interview with David Fincher:

> Fight Club is a turbulent genius movie that polarised the public and ranks (alongside Being John Malkovich) as arguably one of the most daring studio films of the past 10 years. Detractors labelled Fight Club as "Macho Porn" that teetered on the verge of fascism. Fans hailed it as a savage deconstruction of bogus notions of western masculinity. For Fincher, the film is "an attack on all those things that complicate and

confuse our sense of maleness. It's a condemnation of the lifestyle seekers and the lifestyle sellers and the lifestyle packagers." (Brooks: 2002)

Therefore, as we can see the movie is a masterpiece that portrays an average character of our current times suffering an existential crisis as a result of the consumer society he is living in. He develops an identity crisis that deals with topics such as: masculinity, love, trauma, death, consumerism, religion, violence, etc.

Nevertheless, the topics previously mentioned are not what make the film appealing; on the contrary, one of the things that call the watcher's attention is the narration of the story and the final plot twist. Thus, *Fight Club* is a great example of a movie where the spectator enjoys a different experience when they watch it for the first, second or even third time. It is the little details that make this movie worth studying. As the director claimed "A movie is made for an audience and a film is made for both the audience and the film-makers" (Brooks: 202) meaning that the spectator has to play an active role in order to go beyond the surface of *Fight Club.*

In addition, what strikes me the most is the fact that the film is based on a Chuck Palahniuk's book. Moreover, it is a great example of a highly regarded book-to-film adaptations. In the words of the author, "I was sort of embarrassed of the book, because the movie had streamlined the plot and made it so much more effective and made connections that I had never thought to make." (Fincher 1999)

Furthermore, Palahniuk employs several techniques of unreliable narrator that are further developed in the film. Thus, I would like to focus my attention on the unreliability narrator and techniques used in Fincher's movie taking into consideration that the narrator in cinema and literature differ from one another. As a matter of fact, David Fincher, in order to create an accurate adaptation, includes the voice over of the main character played by Edward Norton, however this character should not be misunderstood as the narrator of the film because in cinema characters do not narrate the story, they just take part of a bigger narrative.

"They wanted to make 'Fight Club' without a voiceover," Fincher revealed. "So I fired that producer." (Brooks: 2002). Therefore, the movie goes beyond what the book develops in terms of narrative and creates things that cannot be done in literary writing. Consequently, the voice over and the main character play a core part on the unfolding of the film. Nevertheless, the editing of the movie plays an important role too because all along the movie the director introduces several clues or hints that allows the reader to

realise the unreliability of the narrator and makes us realise that the characters played by Brad Pitt and Edward Norton are the same person.

Therefore, single frames of Tyler Durden, flashbacks, pauses, rewinds, constant cuts, montage editing, slow motion scenes, etc. added to the narrative and voice over of the main character hints toward Edward Norton's true identity before the final plot twist where the truth is revelled. Consequently, the spectator is tricked by the unreliability of the 'inside narrator' of the movie and the cinematic narrator, allowing the watcher to experiment the movie in two different ways: when seen it for the first time and once you already know they trick.

2.2 Objectives of the analysis

The main objective of my final year dissertation is to devolve into the analysis of David Fincher's movie *Fight Club,* one of the most ambitious projects of the neo-noir genre that deals with a wide range of topics that affect our current society. However, the principal aim is to analyse how the story is narrated taking under consideration, not only the dialogue or narrative of the film, but also the technical aspects.

In addition, according to Internet Movie Database (IMDb) *Fight Club* is rated with 8,8 stars and belongs to the top rated movies. The movie has been accused several times of being a 'Macho Porn' movie and it has been analysed in terms of masculinity and from a sociological and psychological aspect. Therefore, my dissertation focuses its attention on a whole set of different aspects of the movie from what has already been analysed. The main aim of this dissertation is to show the difference between literary and cinematic narration and the complexities of the unreliable narrator and unpredictable characters in *Fight Club.*

Following a text-based analysis of the film, I introduce the basic notions of narration in literary and cinematic that afterwards are applied to the analyses of the movie. In order to carry out the analysis I use the narratological theories of Seymour Chatman that are developed in the book *New vocabularies in film semiotics* (1992)*.* In addition in order to have an approach to unreliable narration in film I focus my attention on Volker Ferenz's theories in his book *Don't Believe his lies: the unreliable narrator in contemporary American Cinema* (2008)

The study is divided in two different sections, on the one hand I analyse the main character as the unnamed narrator (commonly called 'Jack')[1] of the movie, focalizer and voice over. On the other hand I provide a detailed analysis of the cinematic narrator dividing it in two separate groups of sequences. Firstly the unreliability of the camera that is misreporting events and secondly the clues that hints the spectator to acknowledge the unreliability of the narration itself. In order to do it, I introduce my own interpretation of the movie and events that are shown on the screen as well as support form second sources and specific sequences of the film.

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[1] See in 2.1 Differences between literary narrator and character narrator

Finally I conclude with my own interpretation of the purpose of the unreliable narrator in this fiction film taking into account the editing process and the main character's state of mind.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE FILM

3.1 Differences between literary narrator and cinematic narrator

In order to analyse a movie in terms of narration, first of all, differences between the literary and cinematic narration need to be taken under consideration.

On the one hand the narrator of the literary works is divided in two most basic different possibilities: homodiegetic and heterodiegetic. Therefore, the main character of the book can be the narrator of the whole story, following this idea the reader only has access to the narrator's point of view as he or she is describing the story. Moreover, the heterodiegetic narrator tends to be a neutral narrator that tells the story 'from the outside' and therefore, has access to all the information and points of view and decides how to tell the story without being part of it. All along history, these two kinds of narrator have been developed and it is possible to find both in the same literary work.

Nevertheless, the narration in films differs from what is developed in literary works. The main reason is because it is capable of showing events, using the visual device which is another source of communication with the audience. However, it also follows the same basic narratological division. The homodiegetic narrator in films also focuses its attention on the character point of view, feelings, events and thoughts. In cinematographic terms I will also refer to it as character-narrator. This is the clear case of movies such as *Titanic* where a character narrates her own story. Nevertheless the difference with literary work is:

> "In literature, a character-narrator's discourse may comprise the whole of the story. But in film, the character-narrator always has his or her story embedded within the larger narration produced by the ensemble of cinematic codes, the overarching discourse of the external, impersonal cinematic narrator, who renders the text in non-verbal form" (Stan, R; Burgoyne, R and Flitterman-Lewis, S 1992: 98)

Hence, although a homodiegetic narrator can be found, it always depends on a heterodiegetic narrator; consequently, the character-narrator becomes a point of view or a focalizer of a bigger narrator that I refer to as cinematic narrator.

Generally, the heterodiegetic narrator is understood as "a concrete perceptual fact linked to the camera position" (Grodal 2005: 168), which means that the narrator is the camera which shows the audience what is wanted to show, however, this camera is controlled by, what is called, the extra diegetic narrator. This kind of narrator is

understood as the 'auteur' or main director of the film. "It inscribes another level of "commentary" in the film in the form of cross-cutting, rhyming images, superimpositions, manipulation of point-of-view, and expressive interpolations" (Stan, R; Burgoyne, R and Flitterman-Lewis, S 1992: 95)

Hence, in *Fight Club* I will analyse the three different kind of filmic narrators that I have briefly introduced. Additionally, in the film those narrators become unreliable and misreport the events of the story. The technique of unreliability has been further explored in literature and film by focusing the attention on the narrator as the unreliable source of knowledge, a device that tricks the spectator into believing events that have not happened. In most of the cases this technique is use to engage the reader and in most of the cases the truth is revealed at the end of the works with a final plot twist.

This is the case of most of the books and movies. In fact, one of the most well-known examples of this in literature is Amboise Brice's "An Occurrence in Owl Bridge" (2008). The common resource used in order to create the unreliable story is the shift between a third person narrator into a first person narrator by going into the mind of the main character. Once this is done, it reports events that only happen in the character's mind, dreams or hallucinations of a character that is in a moment of crisises, in the case of Brice's short story, in an execution.

Following this idea, the same technique is used in *Fight Club* because from the very beginning it is shown how the camera, the heterodiegetic narrator, goes inside Edward Norton's mind, a person with insomnia that eventually develops an alter ego, a new character of the story. Hence, as Celestino Deleyto points out:

> Whereas in the novel the two kinds of focalization (internal/external) alternate, in film several internal and external focalisers can appear simultaneously at different points inside or outside the frame, all contributing to the development of the narrative and the creation of a permanent tension between subjectivity and objectivity (Deleyto 1996: 217)

Additionally, the voice over plays an important role in terms of unreliability because it provide personality to the character and gives authenticity to the character as it is straightforward narrating its own story. Moreover, it is the case of most movies when the voice over and character narrator takes control of the dialogue and visual

images in order to provide a more accurate story telling. In this specific way, the narrator is called pseudo-diegetic because, although he is part of the diegesis, it is in control of how the fictional world of the movie is shown.

> "Once we face a pseudo-diegetic narrator in the form of a clearly identifiable character who relates her/his own story, we deal with a strongly personalized kind of narrator whom we can make the scapegoat for the contradictions in her/his unreliable narrating" (Ferenz 2009: 265)

Therefore, in the specific case of *Fight Club* the character narrator will also be the pseudo-diegetic narrator. However, as he, the character of Eduard Norton suffers a personality split; it will eventually be his alter ego Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) the real pseudo- diegetic narrator. Consequently, if we take into account the two personalities as different characters, the audience faces three kinds of unreliable narrators: Eduard Norton (homodiegetic-character-narrator) Tyler Durden (pseudo-diegetic) and heterodiegetic cinematic narrator.

3.2 Jack, 'the narrator'

Jack is the main character of *Fight Club,* played by Eduard Norton. Although the protagonists is referred to with the name of Jack, it is only mentioned once in the movie and it has been commonly used by the director and film critiques in order to give the character a name, however, the name of the character remains hidden on purpose all along the movie[2].

As has been mentioned before, the character of Jack is the homodiegetic narrator of the movie or character-narrator, he takes part of the diegesis and the main story line is narrated by him supported by the voice-over of the film. Since the beginning of the movie, it is clearly shown how he is going to dive the audience through the narrator of the story, sharing events, conversations, thoughts and dreams that he had.

Therefore, there are different features that allow the reader to understand him as the homodiegetic narrator and, in a first seen of the film; he could be taken for the only narrator of the movie or a character- narrator dependent on the external cinematic

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[2] This idea is further explained later in this section

narrator. Following this idea my purpose is to analyse Eduard Norton's character and his narratology techniques.

Firstly, we need to take a look to the opening credits at the very beginning of the film. The credits last from minute 00:30 to 02:02, in this process the camera quickly moves in a space where cells, nerves and other substances can be seen. This movement goes backwards and it clearly shows a sequence where the camera is coming out from the mind the character, moves from the gun that is pointed at him and we finally see Eduard Norotn's face.

F01

F02

F03

F04

F05

F06

F07

F08

"Estos títulos de crédito son visualizados como palabras presentes en el interior de ese cerebro que, nada más aparecer, una y otra vez se deshacen, disolviéndose en breves y vagas nebulosas que se extinguen casi inmediatamente" (González Requena 2008: 24)

Thus, as we can see, only with the first words of the opening credits, the audience is already able to see the main character's thoughts or ideas that he has inside his own mind. Afterwards, once the name of David Fincher is vanished, the voice-over substitutes the images and Jack starts talking. As we can see, the subjective camera plays an important role in the movie and captures impossible movements for a human being or camera, as it is the case of this sequence of shots. In this sense, the camera is no longer a physical object. Later on in the movie, the camera moves through different objects such as an office block and into the window of a parking van, and garbage bin. Moreover, when the spectator knows that there was a gas explosion in Eduard Norton's house, the camera plays the role of the gas that runs all around the surface of the objects of the apartment until the final explosion.

Therefore, this impossible movements of the camera hints towards the idea that the main character is in control of the images and, moreover that it shows what is inside his mind, as the camera transmits the barrier of psychical movement and also shows his dreams, imagination or images that he creates in his head. Consequently, if we take under consideration that it is claimed that the heterodiegetic of the movie is the camera or what the camera shows, the subjectivity of its movement is trying to blur the boundaries between both hetero diegetic and homodiegetic narrators, emphasising the idea that Eduard Norton is the main and only narrator of *Fight Club*.

Secondly, another important feature is the use of the voice-over that starts in the very first minutes of the movie and gives voice to our main character that is having a conversation with Tyler Durden while he is explaining directly to the audience who he is and illustrating the whole situation where they are in. In this moment, Jack is looking and speaking directly to the camera/spectator, this highlights the idea of challenging the camera pretending that he has the control over it.

F09

"And suddenly I realize that all of this: the gun, the bombs, the revolution…has got something to do with a girl named Marla Singer"

Additionally, there are different moments where Eduard Norton looks directly to the camera in a close up and therefore establishing a direct connection with the spectator of the movie.

F10

F11

"Please, return your seat backs to their full upright and lock position" (Fincher 1999). This sentence enunciated in voice-over in figure 11 as we can see is an example of how the main character openly talks to the audience, having the notion that he is part of the diegesis of a movie and that the watcher is seated in a movie theatre.

Moreover, there is a chapter in the movie where this idea of the main character being aware that he is inside a movie is shown really clearly because they main character have a conversation about projecting movies, which is one of Tyler Durden's jobs.

F12

F13

[voice-over] Let me tell you something
About Tyler Durden
[Tyler] Go ahead, tell them

F14

F15

In Figure 12, Jack has paused the narration of the events and starts giving the spectator an explanation of the different jobs of the co-protagonist Tyler Durden. However, Tyler who is watching him talking to the audience does not participate in the narrator, until the last moment in figure 14 when he said, "go ahead ,tell them" and openly showing how he knows that Eduard Norton is explaining directly to the audience what he is doing.

This cinematographic technique is called meta-cinema and it consists in how the main character of the movie show the process of creating a film and therefore unfolding its creation and reminding the spectator that what they are watching is a fictional act and not real life.

However there are two different ways of understanding this meta-cinema technique On the one hand, as William C. Siska claims:

> It is a practice that evinces the essence and structure of the film proper and not the subject or the story: the production and reception apparatuses are shown in the films in order to break the audience's empathy with the characters and the action (Chinita 2016: 28)

On the other hand, it is a method of enriching the narration of the movie itself, in words of Nicholas Schmidt "such artefacts can be embedded narratives, depicted as film showings or shoots, as well as a critical portrait of the agents of production. In these cases the narrative result is paramount" (Chinita 2016:28).

In the particular case of *Fight Club* this technique works both ways, in a first view of the film, the meta-cinema works as a device that improves the narration of the story, as well as once again, it serves as a device that highlights the power that the main narrator has over the narration of the main story. Nevertheless, on the other hand in a second view of the film, this technique becomes a crucial part of the story that hints towards the end of the film and unfolds the later editing process of the movie and also makes the audience understand the characters and their main place in the narration[3].

Thus, as we can see, at this point of the movie, Jack has the control of the narration of the story, involving, dialogue, time and space. Therefore, he uses a flashback in order to make the viewer understand the story. The flashback is a very well-known technique that appears in many films where the main narrator is telling a story. This is the case of the very recognised movie *Titanic,* for instance, where an old

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[3] Idea further developed in the section 2.3 cinematic narrator

woman is narrating what happened when she was young. This technique creates a circular form of narrative where the homodiegetic-voice over narrator sets the present at the beginning and end of the story and make use of a flashback in order to explain previous events that has led him to the position in which he is now. Consequently, the voice-over can become part of the flashback but also it can comment from the present perspective.

The first narrator, Jack in present time, is already aware of the fact that Tyler and him are the same person. On the other hand, the second narrator, Jack in the flashbacks, still does not know that he has a double personality. Therefore, in *Fight Club* the spectator is able to find different narrative frames or different narrating situations that increase along with the development of the movie. By using the flashback technique the main characters creates a set of narratology parts dividing the narration into a 'big' flashback that catches up with the present moment and also includes several flashbacks within flashback. The second type of flashbacks increases along with the development of the film and along with the characters illness.

In order to let the spectator follow the development of the first flashback and let them know when it ends, different elements are used. For instance, keeping track of the time of the main frame. The movie starts with Tyler Durden counting down of 3 minutes while he is pointing at Jack with a gun and the flashback catches up in the same moment when he says again: "Three minutes, this is it, ground zero" (Fincher 1999). In this moment, the main character talks directly to the spectator saying:

JACK: I think this is about where we came in
TYLER: last few words
JACK: I still can't think of anything
TYLER: flashback humour (Fincher 1999)

Thus, the character-narrator makes very clear that he, who used the flashback on purpose in order to let us understand why he was there, has come back to the present time, knowing that time has passed in the real life but not in the diegesis of the movie.

If we take a look into the main flashback it contains five different flashbacks within the flashback, being the fifth one a continuous sequence of several flashbacks. In the moment that Jack realises that Tyler and him are the same person, during these

flashbacks, he rewinds some events that the audience has already seen in order to show the absence of Tyler Durden and therefore, giving meaning to the movie.

Consequently, the main outline of his narration, as Emily. R. Anderson points out is:

    A: Frame

        B: Primary Flashback

            C: Flashback (insomnia)

        D: Primary Flashback Continues

            E: Flashback (Tyler rescues Marla)

        F: Primary Flashback Continues

            G: Flashback (Marla talks to Tyler)

        H: Primary Flashback Continues

            I: Flashback (Bob gets shot)

        J: Primary Flashback Continues

            K. Flashback (Jack remembers everything)

        L: Primary Flashback Continues

    M: Frame

    N: Conclusion

(Anderson 2010: 93)

Nevertheless, the fact that the main character shows to have the power of the narrative and all the techniques he uses in order to make the spectator believe him does not make our narrator a reliable one. The use of flashbacks is one of the most common sources that make the narrator reliable and that is the reason why they are used in order to trick the spectator. One of the most significant examples of this use is Alfred Hitcock's movie *Stage Fright* where the character-narrator has flashbacks that cover him up of a murder. However, at the end of the film the movie shows that the flashback was a lie, an invention of the main character, there is where his unreliability relies. The common viewer tents to empathise and believe what the main character is narrating, but this movies demands a more active role of the spectator than needs to pay attention in order not to be fooled, however, even though the narrator openly says that he or she is mentally unstable it is impossible not to believe what the camera is showing us.

In the case of *Stage Fright,* the character is purposely using a fake flashback and hence choosing to be unreliable, however, there is other chases where the narrator's

unstable state of mind make him unreliable without him noticing, thus he is just another victim of his own mind game. This is the case of films such as *Shutter Island, Memento* or *The Machinist.* These three movies depict characters that have been traumatized and therefore are mentally ill. In these movies, it never seems clear whether the main character is aware or not of his unreliability.

Therefore, two kinds of unreliability can be found. On the one hand, the character is aware of his lies and keeps on misreporting events. On the other hand, the heterodiegetic narrator, external from the diegesis is misreporting events or hiding clues along the development of the movie and it is not until the character is aware of his problem where the truth is shown.

Additionally, in most of the cases, the unreliability is unfolded at the very end of the movie, creating, therefore, a final plot twist or suspense in order to call the audience attention. However, in unreliable narratives there is always a second version of the film where there are clues or another version of the events of the story where it is shown that, although the main character might be lying or unaware of the whole truth, the real events can still be seen. This is for instance the case of the film *Sixth Sense* where in a second view of the film the audience is able that there are slight details where it is clearly shown that the main character is not seen by other people, which means that the spectator can know that he has been death all along the movie, since he was shot. As James Berardinelli points out:

> Without going into specifics, I can state that there is a structural similarity to *The Sixth Sense.* Here, however, the twist is not the whole point of the movie, and it is integrated more effectively into the overall story. If you figure out the so-called "surprise" in *The Sixth Sense* before the director wants you to, it's difficult to see that film as more than an overlong, uneven example of overt manipulation. The opposite is true of *Fight Club*, which possesses the depth and breadth to command the attention and respect of anyone who unveils the central conceit before it is explicitly revealed. It's also worth noting that this doesn't happen at the very end, so, while it is an important aspect of *Fight Club*, it does not dictate the movie's success or failure. (Berardinelli: 1999)

In the specific case of *Fight Club,* the narration is different from other movies and the clues and misreported events are more clear than in other films such as *Sixth Sense*. Moreover, the main narrator of the movie seems to be unaware of his own unreliability

and it is only shown at the very end of the movie although he knows that he is unreliable form the very beginning.

As Volker Ferenz points out:

> In *Fight Club* the character-narrator's unreliability is merely alluded to intermittently in the film and exposed only towards the end. Because the clues and signals pointing to narratorial unreliability are dropped rather sparsely in the form of well-hidden Easter eggs, the viewers is not necessarily poised to question the character-narrator's mimetic authority, his judgements or his characterizations of other characters. The viewer knows the character-narrator to be irrational and even amoral, but because he will not find out about his unreliability until the end of the film, much of what we see and hear goes unchallenged and is reassessed only in retrospect. In such a way, the viewers are likely to grant the character-narrator more narrative authority because the guideline goes that he is "reliable "until he's shown to be "unreliable". (Buckland 2009: 267)

As we can see, Jacks is presented as a very intelligent man who tries to have the control of his life and emotions and always have an answer to all the questions that are present in the story. However, in his intelligence is where the unreliability relies because he is able to persuade the spectator into thinking that he is a victim of society and making the audience empathise with him. However, as the spectator eventually knows, he is an unreliable character that has been lying to the spectator on purpose: "unreliable narrator demands the viewer to actively engage with the film in question because of its potential to evoke sympathy […] we grant her or him the liberty to speak rather positively about her of himself" (Buckland 2009: 266). Thus, this is the reason why the unreliability is so well made in this movie because the character allows the audience to sympathise with him by also victimizing himself and treating him as a mere victim of the contemporary society. As a consequence, most of the unreliable narrators appear as victims or underdogs of their own reality, in order to be less pathetic and more empathic.

Additionally, apart from all the given clues by the cinematic narrator that will be analysed further on and the dialogue of the movie, the main plot itself hints towards the instability of the main character. He appears to be in control of the narration as if he was playing a movie to us, moreover, as it is shown, the audience has access to his subjectivity, a very subjective reality where he has dreams, hallucinations and above all, insomnia.

"Insomnia can cause daytime sleepiness and a lack of energy. It also can make you feel anxious, depressed, or irritable. You may have trouble focusing on tasks, paying attention, learning, and remembering"[4]. In most of the films that deal with characters suffering of insomnia also portray unreliable characters that have blurred the line between dream and real life. For instance, some of the best well-known movies are *The Machinist* by Brand Anderson 2004 or *Taxi Driver,* Martin Scorsese 1976.

In the case of *Fight Club* the main character tells us about his incapability of sleep. "For six months I couldn't sleep. With insomnia nothing is real, everything is far away, everything is a copy of a copy of a copy" (Fincher 1999).

F16

F17

F18

"What about narcolepsy? I nod off, I
wake up
in different places I don't even know how
I got there"

As we can see, the insomnia affects his real life and he falls asleep without even noticing.

Thus, as we can see the main narrator does not even know where he is most of the time or who he is talking to and the reader is able to see all the effects that the deprivation of sleep is having in him. Moreover, in the film the boundaries between dreams and reality are blurred. For instance, when he is seated in the airplane, he dreams about having an airplane crush and he shows his subjective point of view that

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[4] "Insomnia." National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/insomnia.

seems to be another part of the film, there is no difference between the crush and the rest of the events of the film because while the character is saying:

F19

F20

"every time the plane banked too sharply on take-off or landing,…I prayed for a crush or a mid-air collision"

If we take a look to the window, we can see that already when he is enunciating this words the red light of the airplane is visible. And after saying it is when finally we see the plane that provokes the crush.
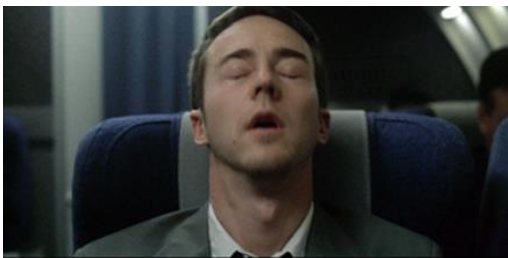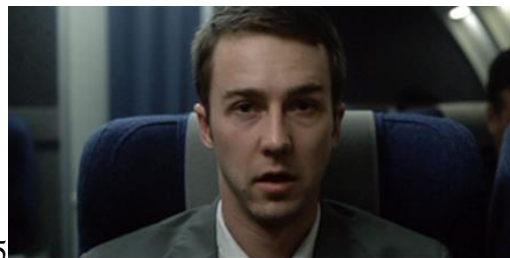

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Suddenly, the spectator is able to see how he wakes up and Tyler Durden appears in the seat where the woman used to be, consequently, all the conversation with the woman

and the airplane crush was all part of a dream the spectator was not able to differ from real events. This is a perfect example of how the insomnia of the character is affecting him and his incapability of staying asleep or awake, thus, here is where his unreliability is clearly visible.

What is more, this is not the only case where the narration cannot be trusted, in fact, as Bob Graham claims:

> Norton ("American History X") has as rich a fantasy life as someone can have and still function in the real world, and we see all of it. He fantasizes the cave where the guided-meditation leader takes him at one of his support groups, he fantasizes his condo furnished from decorator catalogs and he fantasizes what being inside his blown-up condo must have been like. The fantasies don't stop there. (Graham: 1999)

Thus, the main character who allows the viewer to see his own trouble mind, takes pleasure on fantasising while he is awake although sometimes it is not clear if he is showing as a dream or a fantasy, as it is the case of figures 21-24.

In addition, during the film we can see that the only solution he finds in order to sleep is to go to cancer meetings and there is where he finally is able to open up without even saying a word and cry. However, when he meets Mara he is unable to sleep again and he starts Fight Club. Nevertheless, although it seems like this is a solution to his problem, it is not and Tyler shows us that he is still not mentally stable when during one of the fights he brutally hits one of the members of the club almost to death. Tyler asks:

 F27 F28

"Where did you go, psycho boy?"

Afterwards, when he realises what he has done, that he has overstep his boundaries, Tyler disappears, he makes him disappear realising that he has become totally insane and that he is not in control of his own actions.

22

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Was I asleep?   Have I slept?

However, if insomnia was not enough to make clear that the main character of the story was unreliable; in the dialogue we can find different clues that show his insanity. One of the features that make him look more unstable is the use of his 'name' in third person. This is a very well-known sign of madness when a person starts talking about himself as if he were someone else.

Moreover, he uses it in a very particular way, by describing his emotions or feelings by comparing the to his body reactions:"I'm Jack's Medulla Oblongata […] I'm Jack's Nipples […] I'm Jack's Colon" (Fincher 1999). Moreover, all these sentences have a meaning because as he is incapable of communication, he uses this metaphorical language referring to his body condition in order to express his feelings.

"I'm Jack's Cold Sweat" he says it after receiving the call from the police officer informing him how his condo blew up. This symbolises is nervousness. "I'm Jack's Raging Bile Duct "After when Tyler Durden asks him whether is he interested in Marla or not? The bile duct implies vomit so in this case it expresses his disgust towards the woman. "I'm Jack's Smirking Revenge "After when his boss calls him "crazy little shit" and starts calling the security.

This narratological feature is used in a total of ten times and it emphasis his unstable state of mind and unreliability. In addition, although he calls himself Jack, this does not mean that it is his original name because he takes this idea form a magazine he is reading about men's health where found an article using different tames such as John. Whereas the name of Tyler Durden is one of the first worlds named in the film the name of Norton's character remains hidden form the spectator. When 'Jack' stars going to group therapy he uses in all five different names that can be heard or seen in the name tags: Cornelius, Travis, Lenny, Robert, Ruppert (in order of appearance).

Moreover, as we can see, language is one of the most important features that allow the audience to realise the main character's unreliability. In most of the dialogues, since the very beginning he includes Tyler in his own speech.

One of the most noticeable things is the main creation. As funder of the club, Jacks language is constantly referring to both of them, in a sequence of two seconds the main character says: "Tyler and I just make it visible. Tyler and I just gave it a name" "Every week Tyler gave the rules that Tyler and I decided" "This was mine and Tyler's gift... our gift to the world" (Fincher 1999)

Additionally, there are important moments when the Jacks knowledge refers to Tyler Durden knowledge as if they were connected telepathically: "We have front row seats for this theatre of Mass Destruction. […] I know this because Tyler knows this" (Fincher 1999). "I already knew the story before he told me"

Moreover, they have access to each other's mind, but also they speak for each other. There is a very significant scene where they go to the doctor after one of the fights.

"Sometimes Tyler spoke for me"

[Tyler] "You fell down some stairs"

[Jack] "I fell down some stairs"

In addition, the confusion between charades takes place all along the movie, he even connect his insomnia with Tyler "Have I slept? I'm not sure if Tyler's my bad dream or I'm Tyler's" So as we can see they become the same person. Moreover, regarding his insomnia Tyler works at night whereas Jack works in the daytime, having time therefore for one person to carry both actions.

What is more, Tyler has its first appearance before Jack meets him at the plain. In this scene the dialog and the image of Tyler at the airport have bear a strong significance.

F33

F34

[voice-over] "If you wake up, at a different time, in a different place"

"Could you wake up as a different person?"

Thus, since the very begging of the film, knowing the character's incapability of sleep, how he is not in control of his life, and therefore, how can he be in control of the main narration of the story.

Nevertheless, in a first watch of the film, these details might not seem important for the development of the movie and the spectator follows the indications of the main character. Consequently, if we follow the simple lineal narrative and trust him as a narrator, almost at the very end is when he finds out the truth about everything he has been undergoing during this past few months. At the end, as he is aware of the problem he struggles to kill his alter ego Tyler Durden who has never existed all along the movie. By shooting himself, Tyler finally disappears from the scene and Marla, he apologises and while they held hands, they watch how the Project Mayhem destroys the Twin Towers.

At this very final moment of the film, it looks like his own sentence "only when we lost everything we are truly free" (Fincher 1999) makes sense and gives the movie a sense of closure as he has overcome his difficulties and make his alter ego disappear and finally finish with the woman he likes pointing out to a new beginning for the couple.

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Afterwards, with the ending of the movie, the final credits appear and place Eduard Norton as the main and only narrator of the film.

CAST (In order of appearance):
Narrator EDWARD NORTON
Tyler Durden BRAD PITT
Robert Paulsen MEAT LOAF ADAY
Richard Chesler (Regional Manager) ZACH GRENIER
Intern at Hospital RICHMOND ARQUETTE
Thomas at Remaining Men Together DAVID ANDREWS
Group Leader – Remaining Men Together GEORGE MAGUIRE
Weeping Woman – Onward and Upward EUGENIE BONDURANT
Leader – Partners In Positivity CHRISTINA CABOT

F37

Nevertheless, a single action which is 'symbolically' by shooting himself making his alter ego disappear doesn't make an unreliable narrator reliable again and in a second viewing of the movie is where we can see the editing process and control of the camera that contradicts him as a character-narrator and shows how he is not the only narrator of the movie and how he is being all the time controlled by a bigger entity, the heterodiegetic narrator or cinematic narrator. However, that narrator remains hidden and wants to disappear from the film emphasise the importance of the main character as narrator although he is not.

3.3 Cinematic narrator

Having defined the place of the homodiegtic narrator, I will move on now to discuss the role of the heterodiegetic or cinematic narrator and his unrealiability. As has been analysed, in a first view of the movie, the character-narrator is portrayed as to have the control of the main narration of *Fight Club,* however, this character is dependent of a bigger entity which is the cinematic narrator.

In most of the cases, the role of the cinematic narrator is to support the main character by portraying what he is saying; therefore the camera shows Tyler Durden as a separate character from Jack. Nevertheless, although it misreports most of the events, and hence, covers the unreliability of the narrator, the main function of the camera is to show events or clues that clash with the main narration of the character and therefore undercover his unreliability by giving signs to the spectator.

Consequently, the camera gives the viewer a second version of the story, as it is claimed by Warren Buckland:

> *Fight Club's* narrator is not the privileged individual that we might normally associate with the main protagonists of a feature film. Rather, the narrator is simply another piece of undifferentiated space through which the "camera" can pass as easily although "empty" space (2009: 75).

Thus, the "camera" or cinematic narrator has the ultimate power of narration and therefore, in the film there is a constant "struggle between two narrators at two different levels: the always diegetic personal narrator and the always extra diegetic impersonal narrator" (2009: 264)

To begin with, there are slight details that show the connection and similarities of both characters that the camera perfectly portrays. For instance, in figure 38 and 39 the characters have adopted the same positions and all along the movie they also share the same habits, as we can see smoking or fighting. Jack starts doing everything that Tyler sais and, as it is claimed by Stephen Hunter:

> This makes him [Tyler] irresistibly glamorous, and soon Jack has become Tyler's best friend and gofer. This is a classic pattern, familiar from at least as long ago as "Brideshead Revisited," where the flashy boy liberates the dull boy. It's been done

a thousand times in a variety of genres, but here it's almost myth-pure. (Hunter: 1999).

The difference between this film and other is that the companion in this case is not a real human being, but an alter-ego which means that is him pretending to be an idyllic male character.

Thus Tyler becomes a person to worship and imitate because he bears all the qualities that Jack lacks of. What is more, his features are not human-like and that makes more clearly the idea of him being an alter-ego rather than a real human being. As it is the case of Woody Allen's movie *Play it Sam,* the main character purposely creates an alter ego Humphrey Bogart in order to become more confident and less dull as it is the case of Jack in *Fight Club.*

Moreover, regarding the visual aspect of the movie, there are not only shots where the characters are having a conversation when we see both of them as vertical lines, as the "Twin Towers", but also symbols that matches both character that shows them as equals, a division of his mind, Tyler always in the left side and Jack in the right side.
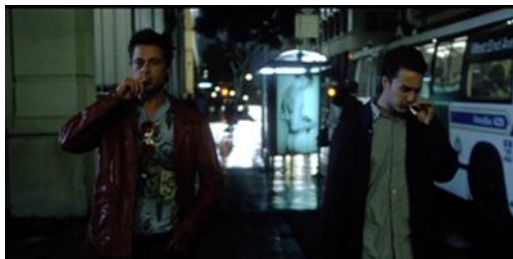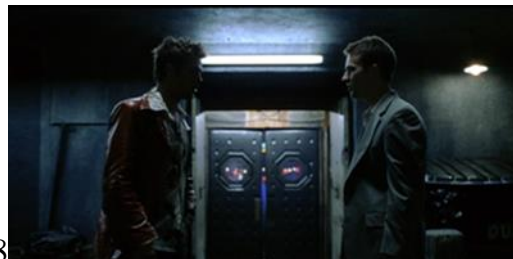
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Eventually, the symbol of the Twins is destroyed at the end of the movie and the "twin" will be substituted by Marla Singer. When the character finally vanishes Tyler from his life, is when there is an image of the Twin Towers being destroyed and therefore, supporting this idea. Afterwards, Jack takes the left position and decides to divide his mind, this time with Marla, in the same position as he is with Tyler but holding hands, a sign of harmony. Therefore, getting rid of Tyler Durden and becoming a 'whole' human being allows the protagonist to share his new life with a woman.
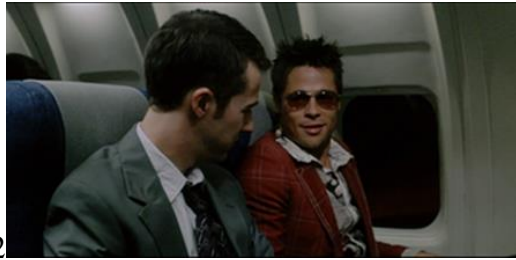
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F41

Moreover, there are other different elements that connect Tyler and Jack and make them be parallel character. For instance, the first time they meet they both carry the same briefcase. In addition, in one scene when they are cooking soap, Tyler Durden burns Jack's hand in order to make him feel pain; afterwards their chemical scars perfectly match.

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"We have the exact same briefcase"

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As discussed in the previous section, the movie is divided into five different flashbacks and it is one in particular that the camera uses to contradict the continuity of the narration of the story. In Flashback E, when Tyler rescues Marla, the story is narrated by Jack, however, in this particular case he is narrating the memories of a different person, Tyler who goes to Marla's apartment. Thus, how can he narrate a flashback he hasn't lived? Consequently, Jack appears as a mere spectator of the new narration that is conducted by Tyler: "I already knew the story before he told me" (Fincher 1999)

Additionally, when Tyler appears in her apartment, she does not seem to be surprised by the arrival of a stranger Tyler Durden whom she has never met before.

Thus, this slight detail, that might be taken for granted and their relationship, is really significant considering the unreliability of the narrator.

Moreover, previous to that, there is a series of blurred images that shows clearly the character of Marla having sex, along with some noises. This sequence of images might call the attention of the spectator because, although his dreams and hallucinations are portrayed all along the movie, they never appear as blurred or disjoined as this one. Thus, the camera once more is misreporting by not showing him or even Tyler having sex with Marla.

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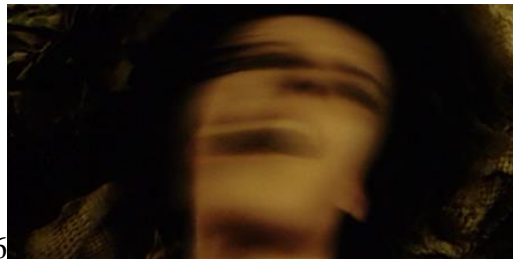
F47

In addition, the character of Marla becomes really important in terms of narration and the relationship she has with the characters. Whenever she appears, a perfect choreography is displayed where neither of the characters Tyler and Marla appear in the same room except from the intimate scenes or groans that are mentioned previously, however, they never appear visually together. Moreover, although they talked several times about Marla Tyler makes Jack promise to never talked about them, obviously in a second viewing go the film Marla's reactions towards Jack's dialogue shows pretty clearly how she does not understand his double identity because she has just 'meet' Tyler in a sexual context.

Another significant aspect is the appearance of Brad Pitt before the main character meets him at the plane. As discussed earlier, while Jack is narrating his constant travels, Tyler Durden appears in the airport. Additionally, in that line of narration there is another moment when he is seen, inside a TV commercial as a waiter of a restaurant.

F48

Nevertheless, these are not the most significant appearances of Tyler Durden in the movie because all along the first narration, when Jack talks about his problem with insomnia, the editing process of the film takes an important role on the development of the movie and includes images of Brand Pitt. This brief intrusions of Tyler last less than one second and they are included in significant moments of the narration in order to satirise the unreliability of Jack and his mental trouble. In those crucial moments, when Jack is openly expressing his pain and difficulties keeping on with his life, Tyler appears smiling at the camera with a daring posture. What is more, in these shots, he appears with specific glasses that are recommended for insomniac people with special red lenses that protects them from the light.

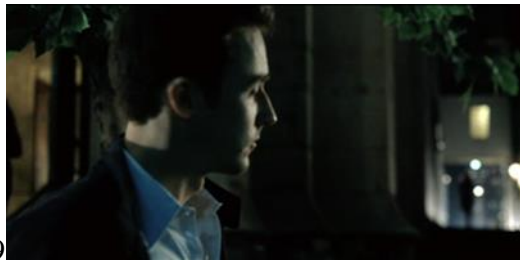F49

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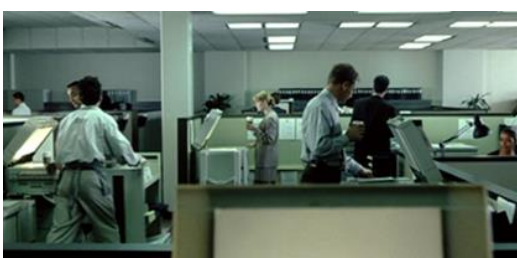
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Moreover, this is not the only moment when the editing process has a great importance because at the very end of the film there is an important intrusion of a shot, a pornographic image of a man. Additionally, in the DVD version of the movie, at the very begging, before the DVD menu, there is an image of a text warning the viewers of the film and it is signed by Tyler himself, afterwards a smiley appears and the countdown of the old cinema rolls, burned in the second 2 and therefore showing the second zero and the DVD menu starts. What is more, during this moment the hysterical laugh of Tyler can be heard. That laugh belongs to one of the moments of the movie when he is fighting the owner of the club where they held the meetings in the minute 1:13:10.
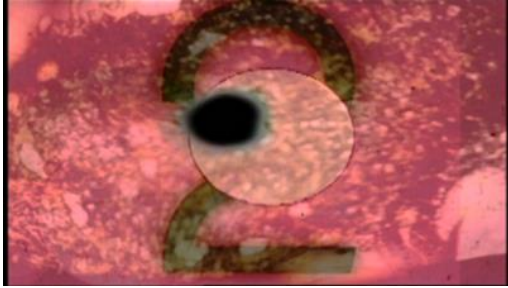

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Moreover, the green smiley face appears in the movie as a symbol of the Project Mayhem and it is clearly shown how Tyler Durden himself painted it in the façade of an important building.

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This editing process, the intrusion of the image of a penis at the very end and the countdown of seconds before the menu stars and the burn of the filmic roll all points out to one of the most important moments of the movie where Tyler Durden jobs are explained. In this sequence, the very first image shows the exactly same shot of the penis that it has been mentioned before. Meanwhile Jack explains Tyler's work as a projectionist, he introduces single shots of pornographic moments in movies in order to remind the spectator that what they are watching is a piece of fiction and that it has been manipulated for him, for an external 'editor'. Moreover, he also explains what a cigarette burn is:

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"[Tyler] In the industry we call them cigarette burns"

In this moment Tyler is not taking part in the narration of the story. Whereas Jack talks to the camera, Tyler just talks to Jack but never participates, however he looks defiant to the camera, knowing that it is there. Afterwards, Jack explains "that's the clue for a changeover, the movie keeps right on going and nobody in the audience has any idea" (Fincher 1999) Thus, this is a sign of a change of rolls in the film. Following this idea, as Tyler is smoking most of the time of the film, it highlight the changeover of both of them as they are the same person.

"This is Tyler's contribution to the film, […] even a hummingbird couldn't catch Tyler's job" (Fincher 1999) Consequently, the job that Tyler has in the movies is clearly portrayed, he is in charge the editing process and with a witty and daring manner he introduces himself all along the movie, as we have seen in different shots. Thus, although at the end it seems like Jack is in control of his life, the image of the penis along with the Pixie's song *Where is my mind?*, contributes to the realization that, once again he is unreliable because his state of mind is unpredictable. What is more, as we have seen Jacks believes and shows how he is in control of the narration of the movie, however, as it is clearly developed in this previous ideas, Tyler is eventually manipulating the film by including himself.

As a consequence, despite the fact that they are the same person, if we considered them as separate characters in the movie, this points out that who is claimed to be the main narrator, Jack, is just another trick of his alter ego Tyler Durden in order to go unnoticed and moreover to add another trait of unreliability to the film. In this sense, as

we can see is the character of Tyler Durden who eventually takes over the narration of the film. Whereas Jack is a character that belongs to the diegesis, Tyler belongs to both, the diegesis and to the real world, meaning that he can be in both places and therefore control the main narration of the film. Thus, Tyler Durden is the hidden and main narrator of the film, the pseudo-diegetic narration who seems to control the cinematic narration by using the camera and showing what he desires, portraying Jack as the main character narrator of the movie who seems to be in control, however giving enough clues to the spectator to make them realise how unreliable this character is. Afterwards, he takes over the narration and final montage of the film and satirises all aspects of life, including the cinematic process and the minds of the spectator by tricking them. Thus, the character of Jack is no longer a narrator but a focalizer. As Manfred Jahn claims: "one of the main effects of internal focalization is to attract attention to the mind of the reflector-character and away from the narrator and the process of narratorial mediation" (Jhan 2005: 54). Therefore, the main aim by focalising the attention of Jack is to focus the viewer's attention on the story rather than on how the story is told and developed.

Thus, all along the movie Tyler appears really present inside the diegesis of the movie; he is the first character and first name to appear whereas the main character remains unnamed. This is a technique used in order to make very clear that Tyler is just a mere fiction of the movie because he is always in the distant, referred to in third person and dependent of the narrator. However, this is what makes him more important in order to trick the spectator and not noticing that he is the main narrator of the whole film. Therefore, there is no longer a constant struggle between the homodiegetic narrator and the heterodiegetic narrator because a third level of narration is created and has the control over both of them, this is the pseudo-diegetic narrator.

4. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the main aim of this dissertation has been to analyse one of the most controversial movies of David Fincher and moreover to provide with a detailed analysis of the different functions and importance of the narration in *Fight Club.*

Additionally, it is shown how the device of the unreliable narrator can play a crucial role in the movie genre, as well as it does in literature. Moreover, this dissertation analyses three different kinds of narrators that can be found in the film, homodiegetic, heterodiegetic and pseudo-diegetic. What is more it, it analyses how the heterodiegetic narration creates another level of narration, a character who belongs to the outside and inside of the diegesis that takes over the whole control of them movie and therefore makes the hetoriedegitc or 'auteur' disappear.

Thus, this analysis shows the importance of how a movie is narrated and how the unreliability is a device used by the director that allows him to fool or trick the spectator and make the movie more appealing and complex. Moreover, *Fight Club* is a movie that challenges all the social rules of our postmodern life. The film also criticises the industry of the cinema by creating a narrator that breaks the fourth wall and talks directly to the spectator but also a movie that is totally manipulated in the later editing process that eventually satirises the unreliability of their characters and events because what Tyler Durden, the pseudo-diegetic narrator is doing, is mocking at the spectator who is given the necessary clues to revel the truth. In order to emphasise this idea, Fincher includes flashback humour in order to satirise the common naratological techniques. Therefore, this is the magic of cinema, when the importance of the story itself hides the process of creation and telling of the movie and makes the director, and the camera, disappear form the film. Consequently, the three levels of narration that can be found in the film are unreliable as they are displaying a detailed choreography of showing the truth and misreporting events.

To finish, the role of the cinematic narrator, which I consider the camera movement, can be further explored in terms of view point and focalisation as the camera plays a crucial role in the unfolding of the film and it displays impossible shots that are sometimes impracticable for a camera itself and it also hides and shows different elements of the movie that can be analysed in more detail.

Thus, *Fight Club* is a movie that gives the possibility to be studied following different methods suchas the psychological point of view of the characters, in terms of philosophy, religion, gender, etc. but also in technical terms of narration and new

postmodern techniques. Therefore, it is a movie that provides different ways of interpretation and analysis where a second of the film might be crucial for the understanding of the main film. Moreover, although there are several films mentioned that have used similar narratologial techniques, Fincher's movie goes beyond them and creates a movie targeted to film-makers.

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