

Chapter 2

The Background of the Novel and the Film

Chuck Palahniuk's **Fight Club** (1996) is conspicuous for the self-identification process and activities of its narrator. The explicit content and unusual presentation of this novel struck David Fincher, the director of many famous films, so much that he turned it into a film based on this novel in 1999. Although the film received harsh criticism for its violent and nihilistic scenes, **Fight Club** has become a cult film admired by many viewers. To discuss its theme of identity crisis, a very important issue of the twentieth century American life, it is necessary to delineate a brief social and cultural background of the work, especially certain key philosophical and psychological concepts. To illuminate the unconventional presentation of the theme, relevant literary and cinematic trends in the previous century will also be investigated. Moreover, the author's and the director's biographies will be furnished as part of the background.

The Twentieth Century: Social and Cultural Context

In the twentieth century, Americans encountered several dramatic changes: political, social and cultural. The United States began the century with unprecedentedly widespread violence, World War I. About two decades later, another World War broke out. In the second half of the century, the country was engaged in at least three wars in foreign lands: Korean War, Vietnam War and Persian Gulf War. The wars brought vast impacts on American people. At the same time the economic growth, together with materialism, consumerism, and rebellious movements brought them confusion and alienation which led into their identity crisis. The loss of identity was, therefore, a very significant issue of the century. To achieve an overview of the

changes and alienation which led to their identity crisis, the loss of identity was, therefore, a very significant issue of the century. To achieve an overview of these changes regarded as major causes for identity crisis, four topics will be discussed in this section: World War I and the aftermath and, World War II and the postwar years.

1. World War I and the Aftermath

Although World War I (1914-1918) occurred outside America, it affected the American people. This war originated from Germany's hunger for a "global empire" (Downey et al, 1999 : 370) in order to be a power like Great Britain. Unfortunately, at that time, there were few foreign lands left to colonize. Germany, thus, decided to take over other countries' colonies (Eibling, 1965 : 517).

Even though World War II took place in Europe, it had considerable impacts on the United States. First of all, American economy rapidly grew. Since the Allies could not buy weapons within their own continents, they had to purchase them from the United States. Many American industries produced war products and sold to the Allies. The United States then gained a large sum of money from their business. This advantage gave most people good opportunities. They were employed and wage rates were increased. Women started to have a chance to work outside of their home such as in war industries. Black people started to realize their own rights after joining the army with the white because attending war gave them a chance to express their abilities. This made them think serious about equal rights. Secondly, a number of Americans went to Europe to attend the armed forces. A number of people felt disillusioned with World War II as well as related traditional values and ideas such as bravery, honor and patriotism. For them war brought either or both psychological and physical pains from violence and brutality. War experiences can be found in several American writers' works. Dos Passos depicted such disillusionment in **Three Soldier**

(1922), Ernest Hemingway in **A Farewell to Arms** (1929), and T.S. Eliot in **The Waste Land** (1922) (Bradbury and Temperley, 1998 : 200-201).

After the war, America entered the prosperous time in the twenties (Brink et al, 1979 : 483). The inventions of numerous kinds of machinery led to rapid growth of industries and of economy in this era (Brink et al, 1979 : 483). An obvious example is the introduction of the industrial system for car production. During this time, cars became one of the most important parts in the American's lives as they brought them convenience, freedom, and mobility (Buck et al, 1984 : 631; Ritchie, 1985 : 401). The key person in this industry was Henry Ford who made cars available nationwide. Although he was not a car inventor, his use of the assembly line began the mass production method for automobiles. Two outstanding characteristics of his cars which were called the "T Model" were "simple and inexpensive" (Ritchie, 1985 : 401). As a result, lots of Americans could afford them (Buck et al, 1984 : 631). Numerous industries related to car industries such as steel, lead, glass, rubber and oil industry also promptly increased (Brink et al, 1979 : 483). Other industries such as construction industry which produced luxury items and appliances also helped the growth of American economy (Brink et al, 1979 : 484). Many new appliances, for examples, electric irons, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, phonographs, refrigerators became common household gadgets.

The crucial factors that made those new appliances receive enormous demand were mass production process and advertising. With the introduction of the assembly lines, large-scale production was accomplished in the shortest time, resulting in mass production, particularly of appliances. At the same time, manufacturers and business people began to realize that advertising could give great impact on the public's buying habits. To do this, psychology was employed to lure people to believe that owning products gave them a desirable social status. Thus they were persuaded to pay for commodities which would make them "stylish" and belong to a certain social group

(Brink et al, 1979 : 485, Ritchie, 1985 : 402-403). They thought those items would give them a particular identity.

Besides affluence, violence was another important issue. Violence and rebellious events during this decade followed Prohibition, youth revolts, and women movement. In December 1917, the Eighteenth Amendment was passed. This Act made selling alcoholic beverages illegal. It led to bootlegging. This illicit liquor was either smuggled from abroad or unlawfully produced in the United States (Divine et al, 1999 : 793). While most people could not afford bootleg liquor, the middle class and the wealthy could enjoy it. Bootlegging could generate so much money and expanded into organized crime. Thus, gangsters took control of many businesses. They also threatened some businessmen to join their association otherwise they will be in danger. Their stores would be bombed, their workers would be beaten up, for example. The most notorious gangster leader was Al Capone. He owned so many illegal trades such as bootlegging, gambling and prostitution and earned high income from these business affairs. He committed so many crimes that he was finally sentenced for eleven years (Shi and Tindall, 1999 : 1171- 1173).

During the twenties, American way of life was also markedly unsettling. Rebellions could be found among the younger generation of the twenties who challenged the Victorian moral code. (Craven and Johnson, 1957 : 450, Ritchie, 1985 : 406-407). Significant impetus was Sigmund Freud's concept about human instincts, regarding sex as an inherent part of human nature. Free expression about sex, therefore, became more acceptable. Women started to live their lives against the Victorian moral codes (Bradbury and Temperley, 1998 : 213), which restricted women to "proper" clothes, and behavior such as refraining from alcohol and cigarettes. With more freedom, they violated the Victorian convention by wearing revealing clothes, drinking, smoking (Craven and Johnson, 1957 : 450). With more social opportunities, women worked at better jobs, mostly in white collar and clerical fields. They could also study in colleges. At this time, women won the right to vote for the first time. This seemed to

be a promising chance of success for women on their fight for equal rights (Ritchie, 1985 : 406-407).

2. World War II and Post-War Years

The thirties in the United States was the time of Depression. The hardship continued when the United States was involved in World War II (1939-1945) which affected everyone in the country. Most family related to war since one of their members were drafted to the army. About 300,000 were killed in the war while others were injured. American citizens had to live in shortage since most food and supplies had to be sent to the army abroad. They also had to buy war bonds and pay more income taxes. Despite all of this affliction, Americans still felt great pride because they viewed that victory over the Axis Power brought the triumph of democracy and justice (Buck et al, 1984 : 687).

Although the United States suffered from World War II, it also benefited in various ways: the boom of American industry, more opportunities of black Americans and women. American economy grew rapidly during the war because of the need for military equipment and products. Europe nations' demand of household goods further helped the nation to recover from the Depression. Blacks were allowed to work at this time. At the same time, as men left for war, women joined in several kinds of work including industry and business. Several of them also served in the armed forces. Many of them still stayed in workforce after the war ended since they had proved that they also had the ability like men did (Buck et al, 1984 : 684-686). As a result, the first half of the twentieth century saw American women with new images and increasing social roles. After the World War II ended, two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union expanded their power by invading Korea where Japan used to take over. The Korean War (1950-1953) broke out when the United States sent their army to

Korea. Even after the war, the confrontation between the two superpowers continued resulting in more than a decade of Cold War.

However, the fifties was the time of affluence again. People longed for material goods since their desires had been suppressed during the Depression and the war time. Fortunately, the highly personal savings increased after the war ended stimulated their purchase. Various kinds of household appliances especially refrigerators, washing machines and dishwashers were manufactured (Divine et al, 907-908), and consumerism became a part of American life again. However, the youth in the fifties were unhappy about the growing materialism, consumerism and violence in and outside their country. To find a better life, there was a movement of the younger generation of the postwar period formed a movement called “the Beat”. Those who joined this movement attempted to get away from old ways of life. The Beats were classified into two groups: Hot Beats and Cool Beats. The first were afraid of the future. Their fear might have been rooted in the cruelty in the society. They enjoyed life at the moment, taking drug, having sex and traveling around the country. On the other hand, Cool Beats were interested in eastern religions such as Zen.

In the sixties, there were several turbulences such as Vietnam War (1961-1975), the hippies movement, antiwar protests, the students’ revolts as well as development of the Civil Rights. Americans confronted war again when the United States joined in Vietnam War. Most American citizens disagreed with their nation’s involvement for two reasons: they thought the purposes were vague and they could now see the war from television which shocked them as they could see the ugliness of the war. The opposition to Vietnam War came in two different ways: protesting marches and draft resistance movement (Brink et al, 1979 : 638-640). More and more, the youth in this decade were confused and unhappy with the social norms and looked for a new identity. Members of the young generation called “Hippies” usually wore old or exotic clothes and had long hair. Many did not work but lived on begging (Chantana Chaichit, 1987 : 426).

At the same time, the minorities, especially the black, also struggled for their place in society and joined the Civil Rights Movement which involved “cultural activism” aimed to solve racism existing in American society and institutions for so long (Faragher, 1998 : 160). The black themselves were the main protesters that moved from legal struggles in the courts to riots on streets. There were widespread violence during the protests in Birmingham, Alabama, and assassinations of key figures including the black leader Martin Luther King, Jr. Nevertheless the movement reached its goal, although the black still did not have complete equal rights (Faragher, 1998 : 162).

The students’ revolts and antiwar protests were significant movements in the sixties. As the post-war time was the years of the baby boom, a lot of young people attended university and joined in their opposing of conventional middle class values and reacted against materialism. They believed that “people [were] sensitive, searching, poetic, and capable of love” (Divine et al, 1999 : 956-958). These students established an organization called the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) intended to eliminate “poverty, racism and violence”.

While fewer radical movements occurred in the seventies because the youth of the sixties grew up and joined workforce, more and more women attempted to gain: “equal pay for equal work, and equal professional opportunities”. Women all over the nation joined to reach their goals. By the early 1970s, women had more opportunity to work in men’s field, for example, as FBI agents, police officers, carpenters, business executives. Congress also approved the Constitutional Amendment---the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). However, women did not have all the rights they were supposed to have. They felt that there was still so much to be done to really achieve equal rights (Brink et al, 1979 : 646-647).

American involvement in violence occurred again in Persian Gulf War (1991) and has continued their pressure in every possible circle. Persian Gulf War originated from Saddam Hussein’s desire to take control of Kuwait. American

disagreed with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. It tried several means to oppose it. Finally, desert storm in which the United States brought the military to stay in the desert to battle with the Iraqi Army. This combat lasted about forty-three days. This war was uplifting for many Americans after psychological and physical loss in Vietnam War because the United States quickly gained victory over Iraq with only a few casualties. On the contrary, Iraq severely suffered from this war: many died while others encountered several diseases such as cholera, typhoid, and enteritis (Bowles et al, 1992 : 958-959).

Changes and violent turbulences during the twentieth century made many Americans feel alienated. As a result, some attempted their own way to find their identity. Every group of people, especially women, whose potentialities have been limited by special fought to assert their real identity. As seen from the above, women have achieved increasing roles in the society. Their growing capabilities threatened men who became increasingly confused about their own selves.

Relevant Philosophical Thoughts

Though **Fight Club** is superficially full of violence, there were certain underlying philosophical thoughts which can be traced back to two European thinkers of the late nineteenth century: Frederic Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Sigmund Freud (1856- 1939). Both thinkers have great influence on people in the twentieth century as they challenged the old set of values and offered insights on human nature to modern people whose faith in God has been weakened.

Palahniuk's **Fight Club** is related to nihilism. This text is, therefore, unavoidably related to Nietzsche who is the father of nihilism, the denial of all the positive thoughts and values (Mauter, 2000 : 388). Blackburn (1996 : 263) defines nihilism as "a theory promoting the state of believing in nothing, or having no allegiances and no purpose". It is also based on scientific truth and correlated to

skepticism: denial of God's existence. Later on, nihilism often refers to violence: the use of destruction to achieve the aim. The outstanding nihilistic characteristics are radical and rebellious attitudes and behavior. Besides, nihilism is also associated with terroristic activities which mostly aim to destroy all the institutions. Moreover, nihilists act against moral codes and believed that nothing is true (Mauter, 2000 : 388).

In his discussion on human's unconsciousness, Nietzsche states that "the Will to Power is the basis of human nature" (Blackburn, 1996 : 262). For him, "the Will" refers to desire, longing or starving for something. On the other hand, it can be viewed as the freedom of choices of one's own actions. However, one has to be responsible for his/her actions. At the same time, power is the ability to "[direct one's] own actions without constraint" (Blackburn, 1996 : 262). Consequently, Nietzsche's Will to Power is the capability of acting freely according to his/her desire without any restrictions. Will to Power, thus, "defines what we become": it identifies one's self or characteristics. To Nietzsche, "in becoming what we are, therefore, we become will to power" (Ansell-Pearson, 1991 : 180). Will to Power was, according to this philosopher, "the innermost essence of all beings, the essence of Being itself" (Barrett, 1962 : 199).

Psychologically, the impulse to hold power exists among other impulses in humans (Barrett, 1962 : 199). Barrett remarks that nihilistic and destructive expression that lies beneath the Will to Power are crucial elements of the will to power. Nietzsche, however, does not recommend anyone to follow this "primitive energy", but proposes overcoming it and learning to transform it into higher, creative forms (Ansell-Pearson, 1991 : 176). Human power, according to this concept, is divided into two different kinds: power over oneself (self- mastery) and power over others. Nietzsche suggests that the latter is not the real power. In fact, it is the assertion of the weak person who wants to dominate others in order to conceal his/ her weakness (Ansell-Pearson, 1991 : 169).

Since power is a significant part of human nature that makes one become what one is, Nietzsche advises keeping one's power by disbelieving in

Christianity or God because God makes people believe that humans are not “master of the universe”. Christianity also insists that freedom, authority and knowledge that give people privileges are all against God. To him, Christianity denies all the science and truth. To have a genuine power, he thinks one has to disbelieve in Christianity (Stern, 1978 : 96-97). For Nietzsche, God no longer exists since he is already dead on the cross (Stern, 1978 : 99). God is, hence, just an illusion, and faith does not make any differences for one’s living because one has to live in the real world. As God is not real, so one has to find some other ways to find happiness in life (Stern, 1978 : 94).

Besides Nietzsche’s theories, Freud’s also pays attention to the inner self. His theory implies a godless world view and the failure of the old tradition (VanSpanckeren, 1994 : 61). Freud’s theories about instinct have influenced Americans so much that they were able to learn and accept “the ugly truth” about human nature (High, 1986 : 111). He points out that human psyche can be divided into three parts: id, ego and superego. The id is “the primary source of psychic energy and the seat of instincts” (Hall, 1954 : 22), the closest part to the body that does not connect to the external world. It is neither controlled by “laws of reason or logic” nor occupied by social values or moral codes. While the id listens to the instinct, the ego interacts with the internal (id) and the external (superego) world. Its crucial duty is to keep the balance between the id and the superego so that the harmony and adjustment will form in one’s personality (Hall, 1954 : 28). The superego is “the moral or judicial branch of personality” (Hall, 1954 : 33). It regulates one’s behavior under social values and tradition so that one’s impulses particularly sexual or aggressive ones, is repressed in order to keep social stability (Hall, 1954 : 33).

Freud classifies instincts into two groups: life and death instincts (Hall, 1954 : 60). The life instinct correlating to sexual drive is called libido or Eros (Hall, 1954 : 33 ; Jacobs, 2003 : 44). This instinct may not totally satisfy oneself because it is inhabited by the social values and tradition. However, it can be sublimated as creative activities (Bocock, 2002 : 74). The other important and controversial instinct

is the death instinct or Thanatos. It is considered “a source of negative, destructive energy”(Bocock, 2002 : 71). Associated with “aggressive, destructive and self-destructive action”, it drives humans “toward death throughout life” (Jacobs, 2003 : 45-46).

Another crucial Freudian concept is Oedipus Complex, Freud (quoted in Berger, 1995 : 108) remarked that Oedipus Complex can happen to everyone because it is natural. It does not relate to the surroundings one lives in. According to Freud, generally observable in childhood, the boy fears of being castrated by his father whereas the girl has a fantasy of having lost her penis. The boy has a desire for his mother. He is, thus, jealous of his mother. On the other hand, the girl is considered already castrated. Therefore, she is viewed as having a penis envy. However, since 1970’s western women have strongly challenged this theory. In **Fight Club**, Marla, the only female character, is characterized as a woman who is stronger than the male character and shows less serious identity problems than them.

These philosophical thoughts were basic knowledge relevant to **Fight Club**. As they relate to the novel, protagonist’s conflict and motivation in his search for self-identity in the postmodern world.

Literary and Artistic Background

1. Modern and Postmodern Literary Techniques

Social and political changes in the twentieth century inspired Americans to invent diverse modes in literary world. Critics generally classified literature during this century as modern and postmodern based on certain key literary techniques.

Modernism is the cultural movement in Europe and America after World War I. It is related to vast changes in the early century including the advance of science and high technology (VanSpanckeren, 1994: 61-62 ; 114). These changes brought

Americans, especially the writers, the feeling of alienation. Most artists felt that they did not belong to the modern world. Their reactions were to escape from where they lived and to find a more suitable place. Furthermore, they solved this problem by creating their own style of writing. It can be said that modern period was the time for literary experimentation and alienation (Lauter et al, 1990 : 1256). Notable modernist styles dealt with some new exploration including stream of consciousness, flashback, surrealism and absurdity.

Stream of consciousness is the writing technique that presents the character's thought at random. It describes "the free association or flow of thoughts and impressions in a person's mind at any given moment" (Wales, 1991 : 431). This method allows the reader to know whatever emerges from a character's mind. His/her thinking might be about his/her daily life or his/her recurring past. Such thought often includes what is called "interior monologue". This technique is prominently seen in James Joyce's **Ulysses**, Virginia Woolf's **To the Lighthouse**, or William Faulkner's **The Sound and the Fury**. It often comes with flashbacks which reveal what happen in the past. Occurring at any part of the story, a flashback allows the readers to exercise their imagination to relate various situations in the story together (**Literary Dictionary**, 2002 : 183).

Surrealism originated in France and is much used in literature and art . It "sought a reality above or within the surface reality" by allowing the subconscious, irrational impulses to freely show without logic or reason (Benet, 1987 : 947-948 ; Hussey, 1970 : 514). This technique is often found in plays and novels. The outstanding writers employing this method are Henry Miller and William Carlos Williams (Benet, 1987 : 948). Since surrealism deals with irrationality, it is associated with absurdity.

Absurdity is rooted in the existentialist philosophy which states that man lives in the irrational world and has to think and make his/her own choices in order to find identity. According to the existentialists, absurdity is unavoidable in human life. Absurdity in art is first found among early surrealist painters. In literature, writers send

the message of absurdity through “deliberate distortions and violations of conventional forms, to undermine ordinary expectations of continuity and rationality” (Benet, 1987 : 4-5). The most eminent writers for this technique are Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and Jean Genet (Benet, 1987 : 4-5).

An artistic movement during the second half of the twentieth century, especially the last decades, is called postmodern. This cultural movement began after World War II. Its core concept is to reject the “foundations of cultural and artistic form” (VanSpanckeren, 1994 : 115). Postmodernist writers create new styles of writing out of the old forms in “mix and match fashion” (Hilfer, 1992 : 99). Examples of techniques that make these works remarkable are pastiche, parody, fragmentation, black humor or black comedy and the use of the anti-hero.

The word “pastiche” comes from the Italian word “pasticcio”, meaning “a medley of various ingredients”. Pastiche is not unique because it borrows details from various styles already found in the modern period (Sim, 2000 : 125-126). It also often includes a parody which is the imitation of earlier works for “humorous or satirical purposes” (“Pastiche”, 2005 : 1 and Wales, 1991 : 339). An example of this method is “Dunyazadiad” by John Barth (Wales, 1989 : 339).

In using fragmentation, the writer denies conventional literary elements such as plot, character, setting and theme. Some postmodernist authors invent distinctively different plots from the previous one by offering multiple endings. Sometimes, they produce the inconclusive endings by “breaking up the text titles, numbers or symbols” (Sim, 2001 : 126- 127). This kind of fragmentation can be seen in Donald Barthelme’s short stories and novels. Some postmodernists also apply various kinds of media in their text to create fragmentation (Sim, 2001 : 126- 127).

Black humor is considered one of the crucial characteristics of postmodernist literature. The word “black” here does not relate to race but refers to the underlying tone of humor which is the way to protect one’s inner self from social constraints and free one from logic and reason (quoted in Rubin, Jr, 1974 : 388). It

laughs at serious matters such as death, violence, injustice and horror as if nothing important happened to create surprise and shock (Weber quoted in Rubin, Jr, 1974 : 391). Black humor is connected with the anti-hero as well because the protagonist of such work is totally opposite to those nice, gentle and kind, conventional heroes. In contrast, the anti-hero often commits mischief, crime or silly actions to break away from the tradition (Hilfer, 1992 : 102). Examples of black humor in literary works are Joseph Heller's **Catch-22**, Ken Kesey's **One Flew over the Cuckoo Nest**, Thomas Pynchon's **V.** and William Burrough's **The Naked Lunch**.

It is notable that the above literary techniques of both periods are utilized in **Fight Club**. Palahniuk integrates these techniques very well to form his novel.

2. Author's Biography

Chuck Palahniuk [Paul-ah-nik] ("The Cult", n.d. : 1) was born in 1962 in Pasco, Washington, but lived and studied in Oregon. After receiving a bachelor's degree in journalism from University of Oregon, he worked as a diesel truck service mechanic for thirteen years("The Cult", n.d. : 1). His thought of writing **Fight Club** came up from his view about his colleagues and his work environment. **Fight Club**, however, was not his first novel. He once gave his **Invisible Monsters** manuscript to many editors in New York. Although they personally liked it, they turned it down for fear that it would not be popular among the readers.("Chuck Palahniuk", n.d. :1 ; Farley, 2004 : 1).

Yet, Palahniuk continued to work on his second novel without caring about the market. He kept on developing his own style. The information he used for his novels mostly came from real experience especially from his friends and his research in particular topics. He revealed that almost the entire story in **Fight Club** was from his friends. He even put some of his friends' sayings in the novel that surprised them to see

themselves in written words of the fictional world. In 1995, **Fight Club** was eventually published by W.W. Norton and made into movie by David Fincher. Since then Palahniuk quit his job as and became a fulltime writer (Farley, 2004 : 1).

Palahniuk releases one book per year. He complains that he is a workaholic: his work is his life but he never regrets to live this way. Notably, his four novels are all about the theme of identity. As he puts it, “**Fight Club** is based on what [one is] not; **Invisible Monsters** was based on recreating [oneself] based on fashion and fantasy; **Survivor** was based on creating [oneself] in the face of immortality; and **Choke** was based on creating [oneself] out of something that [one stakes one] life on, that [one commits] to” (Farley, 2004 : 4-5). One of his fans complained about his dwelling on only this theme. However, this fan loved all Palahniuk’s books but suggested he writes on some new themes. Palahniuk admitted that he really concentrated on the theme of identity because “the invention of self” had long been “the central most American literary theme since Henry James’ “Bostonians”, and that “the self” was seen more in **The Great Gatsby** and **Breakfast at Tiffany’s** (Farley, 2004 : 4-5).

But Palahniuk’s theme of self is very much different from James’s. As seen in Palahniuk’s works, he makes the protagonists searching for their own identity by trying various ways. James’s protagonists, on the other hand, realize their real desire after making some mistakes or confronting some problems but they do not really attempt to search for their own identity.

Palahniuk claims that “the invention of the self” is an American genre :

It is such an American genre, this whole idea of reinventing
and creating [oneself] based on [one’s] dream, or how
[one perceives oneself] to be, or not to be, whatever.

And I have always seen that as the most American literary device
theme, so I really wanted to play with that. (Farley, 2004 : 4).

Palahniuk also explained that dealing with “self theme” just in one or two books was insufficient. He did not want to look at only the surface of identity but wanted to explore as much as possible and four books relating to the “self theme” were enough. He declared that his fifth novel **Lullaby** would concern with a new theme (Farley, 2004 : 4-5).

Palahniuk’s first aim in writing books was to persuade people especially men, to read more or return to reading. He has heard that the reason men seldom read fictions was because they were made for women : “I was told that eighty-five percent of all fiction [sold] to older middle-age women”, (“Interview with **Fight Club** Author Chuck Palahniuk”, 2003 : 4). Thus, he wanted to write novels that men could read and involve themselves in. He has tried to make his books attractive to distract people from “video games, music videos and professional wrestling and all the other things people can do with their time”. He is determined to bring them back to reading.

Noting that men want the plot that does not plod along (Farley,2004 : 1; “An Interview with **Fight Club** Author Chuck Palahniuk Palahniuk”, 2003 : 4). Palahniuk concerns mostly about the desirable plot rather than other elements: his plot is often full of twists and turn (Farley, 2004 : 1). He is annoyed by those novels with lots of details and slowly progress. As a result, his writing style comes from his reaction toward what he dislikes in books. He also says that what people want is a story with verbs instead of adjectives because the latter make the story proceed slowly. Because of this concern, he sometimes “[gets] too out of control and instead of a plot point every chapter [he wants] a plot point in every sentence (Farley, 2004 : 1; “An Interview with **Fight Club** Author Chuck Palahniuk”, 2003 : 4).

Palahniuk also imitates the novels that include food recipes similar to a cookbook such as **Heartburn** and **Like Water for Chocolate** by Nora Ephrom. To create a recipe for men, Palahniuk describes how to make napalm with frozen orange juice and gasoline (“An Interview with **Fight Club** Author Chuck Palahniuk”, 2003 :

4). Furthermore, he insists that humor is significant in his writing, and does not want his novels to be tragic since, as he says, “tragedy on top of tragedy is just overwhelming”. For him, the more interesting way to present sadness is to use light humor to “release tension, to bring people back up, to contrast with the sadness so it can occur again and again” (Farley, 2004 : 3-4).

Palahniuk declares that what he wants to convey in **Fight Club** and other novels is that people should face and accept reality: chaos and disaster in the world today so that they can solve and “redeem” what has happened to them : “We should welcome disaster, we should welcome things that we generally run away from. There is a redemption available in those things that is available nowhere else” (“An Interview with **Fight Club** Author Chuck Palahniuk”, 2003 : 4).

Palahniuk likes to read essays, and his writing style is, therefore, dominated by essays. At the same time, he is fascinated by short stories: how to make the plot interesting within a few pages. He also loves **American Psycho**. He thinks both this novel and its film adaptation are great. Some critics categorize **Fight Club** in the same kind of fiction like **American Psycho** (“An Interview with **Fight Club** Author Chuck Palahniuk”, 2003 : 4).

Palahniuk believes it is his right to write whatever he would like to without apologies to those offended by his writing. For example, single mothers were unhappy with the sentence “What you see in **Fight Club** is a generation of men raised by women”, and got even more angry with the part about Marla’s abortion. Palahniuk states that “[one has to give oneself] license to put things in that might be inflammatory, permission not to have to please everybody. If [one tries] to please everybody,[one] won’t please anyone” (“Interview with **Fight Club** Author Chuck Palahniuk”, 2003 : 4).

Besides novels, he also writes short stories for **Playboy** and **The Nye Beach Writers’ Series**. He received an Oregon Newspaper Editors Association Award for most comprehensive coverage of news events, an Oregon Book Award for best

novel, and the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award (“Nye Beach Writers’ Series”, n.d. :1).

3. Filmmaking Context

The knowledge of film history and film techniques is necessary before analyzing a film. In the following part will be a brief outline of the film history and film techniques respectively with an emphasis on points relevant to the film **Fight Club**.

3.1 Film History

Films were at first easily made and were silent. In the twenties, Warner Brothers’, the film company developed the sound system that was able to record “in synchronization with film images”. Love stories were another popular genre in the twenties. Very popular among female audience, they were also called “women’s pictures”. As a result, the romantic film “reached its peak in the twenties” (Ellis, 1995 : 106). Later on, the technicolor process was used in filmmaking (Bordwell and Thompson, 1997: 461-462). In this period, all kinds of major genres developed in the United States with the western the most outstanding, but it was the “Comedy’s Greatest Era”. (Ellis, 1995 : 106). With the arrival of sound in the late twenties, the popular genre in the thirties were the musical, the gangster, the horror film, the sound comedy and the animated (Ellis, 1995 : 106). In the next decade, film noir was introduced under the influence of German films. However, its style and techniques were not very popular for its realism dealt with social problems that was particularly the concern of the era. After this period, there was a lot more freedom in presenting sexual actions.

The development of film production and changes were obviously seen from the sixties to the present. The problem in the sixties was that there was less

audience than before as it changed from adults to the younger group with better education, the postwar generation. The film industry in the sixties faced a bad situation: high production cost. Influenced by the French and Italian New Waves who declared that working on a low budget could yield good profit, studios became “the willing distributors of the independent productions” after turning to television production for a long period (Bordwell and Thompson, 1997 : 919-920).

The young audience during this period grew up with television and had enough experience to understand the message in the film. They were more open-minded than the older generations : they were able to accept scenes of sex, violence and death. Meanwhile, censorship was no longer enforced. In November 1968, it was replaced by a rating system. A remarkable film in the sixties, Cook remarked (1981 : 922), was **Bonnie and Clyde** (1967) a film influenced by techniques of the French New Wave, which was “a sophisticated blend of comedy, violence, romance”.

This movie portrays violence in the sixties of American society, but is more than “gangster movie”. The protagonists, Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow choose violence as a means to escape and search for identities. They achieve their purpose of being somebody and recognized by others when their pictures appear in newspapers. As seen in this film, publicity can give people a false image. Like Vietnam War, what people see in television may be exaggerated (Smith quoted in Corrigan, 1981 : 142-144).

Violence in the film increased in the late seventies. War films especially, those about Vietnam War and **screwball-noir** were outstanding. (Ellis, 1995 : 106). **Screwball-noir** is the film combining between the comedy and the dark atmosphere. It is often associated with romantic relationship (“Word Spy”, 2001 : 1) the sub-genre of film noir were outstanding. Most scenes in **screwball-noir** happened at night. The protagonists were mostly young and often aware of the search of self-identity. The causes of searching for their identity were not clearly described. They might come from

“the person, the culture, or society”. Here, the differences between Vietnam War films and **screwball-noir** were shown. While the former revealed the reality of what happened in Vietnam War and its aftermath, the latter conveyed the metaphorical meaning (Ellis, 1995 : 106).

The seventies and the eighties were the great time for filmmaking because many young directors attended film schools, for example Francis Ford Coppola (b.1939) graduated from UCLA, George Lucas (b. 1944) from the University of Southern California (Cook, 1981 : 937-938). The horror film and film noir became popular in this era. Another important phenomenon of this period was that the independent filmmakers became stronger. Many small companies such as New Line Cinema, Miramax and Island Pictures produced many interesting films (Cook, 1981 : 943-945).

Filmmakers in the nineties concentrated on digital technology, especially computer generated imagery or CGI in order to create images the ordinary filmmaking devices cannot produce. Since then various films in the late twentieth century have been produced by computer assistance. Many scenes in **Fight Club** were made by computer because it helps to present surrealistic effects very well. The beginning sequences are the good examples of this technique.

3.2 Film Techniques

Film techniques are very crucial for film products because they make films more interesting or more realistic. Directors use film techniques to convey their messages to the viewers. There are four major parts of film techniques : mise-en-scene, the shots, editing, and sound.

3.2.1 Mise-En-Scene

The French term *mise-en-scene* (“staging an action” or “putting in the scene”) was first used for directing plays, then by film directors to refer to control over what appears in the film frame. To control the *mise-en-scene*, the director has to “stage the event for the camera”. Usually, *mise-en-scene* is planned before shooting the film. However, it is often flexible. Some unexpected events may happen during the shooting that may make the film more effective or interesting. These events come from either the director or the actors. For example, the actors may add some lines or action in their acting that may have the incredible outcome (Bordwell and Thompson, 1997 : 169 and Doughlas and Harden, 1996 : 119).

In using *mise-en-scene* in the film, realism is often problematic because it makes the film look less realistic. But sometimes *mise-en-scene* is crucial in filmmaking since it can create or elaborate a character’s thoughts and make fantasy more vivid or extend the director’s imagination. *Mise-en-scene* consists of four main aspects : setting, costume and make-up, lighting and figure expression, and movement (Bordwell and Thompson, 1997 : 169 and Doughlas and Harden, 1996 : 119).

3.2.2 The Shots

To understand films, it is necessary to know the divergent types of shots, the importance of each, and how it works in a certain scene. Four major kinds of shots utilized in video, and films are image size, camera angle, camera (or lens) movement, and shot duration (Kindem and Musburger, 2001 : 106).

For the image size, the camera can be moved close or far from the subject. The main shots widely used in filmmaking are **extreme long shot (ELS)**, **long shot (LS)** or **full shot (FS)**, **medium shot (MS)**, **close-up shot (CU)** or **close shot (CS)** and **extreme close-up (ECU)** or **big close-up (BCU)** (Dick, 2002 : 64-55 and Samarn Ngamsanit et al,1997 : 138-142). In **Fight Club**, long shot and medium shot are often seen. A long shot allows the audience to see the whole body, sometimes including the background in order to reveal the relationship between the subject and the surrounding (Dick, 2002 : 55, Gross and Ward, 2000 : 92, and Samarn Ngamsanit et al, 1987 : 138).

For a **medium shot (MS)**, the camera is set neither near nor far from the subject or “something in between”, or the camera is placed to emphasize half of the body : from head to waist or to knees. Consequently, an **MS** allows the viewers to see the character’s expression and movement (Dick, 2002 : 55 and Samarn Ngamsanit et al, 1987 : 139-140).

Besides the image size, the camera angle is another film technique that conveys the film messages. The camera angle is the relationship between the camera’s height and the subject. Placing the camera in a distinctive height gives the viewers a different feeling. Camera angle can be classified according to its height : bird’s eye view, high angle, eye level, and low angle (Samarn Ngamsanit et al, 1987 :143).

Additionally, camera (or lens) movement makes films more colorful. Generally, there are two types of camera movements : horizontal and vertical movement. The first is moving from left to right or in reverse direction. Camera movement in this way is panning and dollying. The latter is moving up and down or down and up such as tilt and crane (Samarn Ngamsanit et al, 1987 : 151).

In producing a film, the length of the shot is important. The director has to determine the length of each shot. The dialogue and the actor’s or the actress’s movement within a scene often dictate the length or duration of a shot (Gross and

Ward, 2000 : 107). The duration of the shot helps the viewers to understand more about other film elements. “The viewers can absorb more during a shot of long duration or during one of shot duration” (Gross and Ward, 2000 : 107).

3.2.3 Editing

Editing is the relation between the shots. It is a norm to edit a film after shooting. To edit a film, several devices are needed to make it flow smoothly. (Dick, 2002 : 82). One of transitional techniques that is remarkable in **Fight Club** is the flashback. A flashback is very important in editing films. Here, the chronology of the story is interrupted by what has happened in the past. Flashbacks are presented in “a slow fade-out/fade-in, a dissolve, a wipe or a quick cut. They are often employed to provide the viewers with more information that none of the characters knows. They also explicates the bond between the past and the present. They can be either subjective or objective narration. The flashback is the favorite technique for the director who prefers to present his/her work from “the present to the past” (Abrams et al, 2001 : 143 and Dick, 2002 : 248-249).

3.2.4 Sound

Three kinds of sound used in the film are language or voice (dialogue and narration), sound effects, and music (Giannetti, 1976 : 183 and Pornsit Pathananusit et al, 1989 : 84)

Narration is used in **Fight Club** throughout the film. Generally, the narrator is heard without being seen. The narration will describe or narrate what is on the screen. It is often used in documentary films. Most documentary theorists assert that

the good narrator should tell the information that does not appear on the screen. Narration is used to show that the narrator knows everything in the film. (Giannetti, 1976 : 218-219 and Pornsit Pathananusit et al, 1989 : 84). Voice-over, another kind of narration, emphasizes that the narrator knows everything. It supplies “a personal interpretation of narrative events”. Usually, the viewers see and hear what is on the screen but voice-over helps the audience to understand what is not clearly explained in the film and to interpret the film (Abrams et al, 2001 : 140-141).

4. Film Director's Biography

David Fincher (b.1962) was the director who made **Fight Club** alive. (1962) Inspired by George Lucas' film **The Empire Strikes Back**, Fincher went to work with George Lucas at Lucas' Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) at the age of eighteen. During his four years at ILM, he had a chance to work on **Return of Jedi** (1983) and **Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom** (1984), but he had not directed his own movie yet. He started his career in the entertaining world as television commercial and music video director. (“Biography for david Fincher”, 2004 : 1; Slocum, 2004 : 1 ; 2000 : 1-2).

Fincher made his first appearance as a film director in **Alien 3** (1992). His first step as a director did not seem promising because it received bad criticism. Disappointed, he returned to work as a commercial and music video director again but did not give up his hope for being a director. Fortunately, his second film **Se7en** (1995) starring Brad Pitt and Morgan Freeman gave him a bright future in Celluloid world. In 1997, **The Game**, his third film, was released and gave him a big success. He suddenly became one of the most wanted directors for Hollywood Studios. Later on, **Fight Club** (1999) strongly highlighted his talent in filmmaking. Although a controversial film and not very lucrative in the box office, it was a “hit in overseas markets and was welcomed onto home video. (Slocum, 2000 : 1-2).

Fincher's style and techniques are often considered as those of film noir because he frequently used silhouettes, backlighting and smoky locations with flashlights. Fincher often makes his characters hide their faces in the shadow to create mystery. The use of silhouettes is obviously seen in **Se7en** and **Fight Club**. Furthermore, his film employs several single frames that flash on the screen in the middle of a scene. This technique is outstanding in **Fight Club** (Brandon, n.d.:1). Fincher also uses the montage and several close-up shots to make **Fight Club** striking (Sawyer, 2003 : 1). Now that he has his own production company, Indelible Pictures, he also works with New Line Cinema which means that he has to direct some films for them. Even though David Fincher has never been noticed from the Academy or the Golden Globes Award, he is admired by many viewers across the world (Slocum, 2004 : 2).

To sum up, there were so many chaotic and violent events: wars, women movement, the Beats Movement, the Hippies Movement, Civil Rights Movement, anti-war protests, the students' revolts, throughout the twentieth century. These events led American citizens to feel confused about what happened with their society and themselves. Some think that all the violence was absurd. Most people unconsciously suffer from it. Moreover, with the rapid growth of economy, and industry, consumerism is inevitable. Americans enjoyed buying commodities they do not need. They identified themselves with those materials in order to be accepted in the consumer culture. They are obsessed with those materials so much that they hardly examine their inner selves: they do not know their own needs and who they really are. Some of them are discontent with these problems which make them feel alienated and attempt to search for the better way to fulfill their spiritual emptiness.

In this period, Nietzsche and Freud, who attempted to explain human nature. Their theories are about the instinct which was opposed to God and Christianity. Their theories have prompted influence many Americans to pay more attention to their inner selves. Chuck Palahniuk realizes that identity confusion has been American's

main problem for a long time but it has become particularly critical since the second half of the twentieth century. He presents it in his well-known novel, **Fight Club** with different kinds of modern and postmodern literary techniques. Likewise Fincher uses different film techniques convey the novel's message in his film adaptation. Since early media requires its own techniques for effectiveness, the discussions are presented separately : Chapter 3 is devoted for the novel and Chapter 4 for the film.